

***Exploring a Christian conception of
economic life from within Karl Barth's
doctrine of creation***

PhD Thesis

Andrew Callander

University of Otago Dunedin New Zealand

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Introduction

Introductory overview

As a Christian who has taught introductory tertiary level economics for over 20 years I have often wrestled with how to think Christianly about economics. I knew I should try to be generous with my wealth and honest in my dealings – yet I had no idea how to develop an overarching theological conception of economic life. My first serious engagement with an attempt to do so was theologian Kathryn Tanner's *Economy of Grace*.¹ Yet, while appealing on many levels, it left me dissatisfied. It was the comment of her reviewer, economist Julie A. Nelson, that elucidated and summarised my frustration and provided the seminal idea that inspired this thesis. She said, "Where [Tanner] takes a wrong turn, in my opinion, is in assuming that economies are defined by "principles" rather than by actual relations."² I, and many other Christians it seems, had been trying to extract *principles* from Christian resources. For example economist Donald Hay identifies eight principles revolving around the two key themes of work and stewardship;³ minister and economist Andrew Hartropp identifies four principles of economic justice that point to the appropriate treatment of others according to the norms commanded by God;⁴ New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg gives prominence to the principle of distributional equity with respect to possessions;⁵ and the Oxford Conference on

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). Andrew Callander *Coming to Life from within the Belly of the Beast: A Critical Evaluation of Kathryn Tanner's Economy of Grace*, unpublished Bachelor of Theology Honours essay (Dunedin: University of Otago, 2008).

² Julie A. Nelson, "Economy of Grace," Review of *Economy of Grace*, by Kathryn Tanner, *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 74 no. 3 (S 2006), 783.

³ Hay's principles are (1) man must use the resources of creation to provide for his existence, but he must not waste or destroy the created order, (2) every person has a calling to exercise stewardship of resources and talents, (3) stewardship implies responsibility to determine the disposition of resources – each person being accountable to God for his stewardship, (4) man has a right and an obligation to work, (5) work is the means of exercising stewardship – in his work man should have access to resources and control over them, (6) work is a social activity in which men cooperate as stewards of their individual talents, and as joint stewards of resources, (7) every person has a right to share in God's provision for mankind and for their basic needs to food, clothing and shelter – these needs are to be met primarily by productive work and (8) personal stewardship of resources does not imply the right to consume the entire product of those resources – the rich have an obligation to help the poor who cannot provide for themselves by work. Donald Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 72-76.

⁴ Such treatment includes, in particular, providing justice to the needy, ensuring the quality of relationships, and ensuring that all people may participate in the blessings of God. Andrew Hartropp, *What is Economic Justice?* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 102.

⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 243ff.

Christian Faith and Economics urges “... all people, and especially Christians, to adopt stewardship and justice as the guiding principles for all aspects of economic life ...”⁶ In Tanner’s case she proposes three principles drawn from intra-trinitarian relations as undergirding a Christian conception of economic life – unconditional giving, universal giving, and non-competition in a community of mutual benefit.⁷

My difficulty with this approach is not so much the proposals that flow from this methodology, but the methodology itself. In my view it risks becoming arbitrary, abstract, and prone to subversion. Arbitrary, in that different thinkers often generate or emphasise very diverse principles from the biblical witness thus making one suspicious concerning the stability of this approach; abstract, in that the principles often tend to be divorced from the actual and specific historical particularity of the biblical witness;⁸ and prone to subversion, in that the principles sometimes tend to be idealised such that their actual content risks coming from alien sources thus serving foreign agendas.⁹ Furthermore one is struck by how unhelpful these principles sometimes become when they are forced to confront market capitalism on its own ground.¹⁰ Above all this methodology risks implying that God engages with his creation on the basis of the application of *principles*. It was Nelson’s comment that made me realise that what I needed was a theological way of conceiving economic life based on a *relationship* rather than a principle– and as I found in Karl Barth’s theology – God’s *covenantal* relationship with humanity in particular.

⁶ “Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economics,” in *Christianity and Economics in the Post-Cold War Era: The Oxford Declaration and Beyond*, ed. Herbert Schlossberg, Vinay Samuel, and Ronald J. Sider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 30.

⁷ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 63-85.

⁸ This is especially the case with Tanner whose economic principles she derives from intra-trinitarian relations are translated to the earthly realm with virtually no discussion concerning the concrete specificity of the economic life of Israel, Jesus, or the church.

⁹ This is also the case with Tanner where her insistence that intra-trinitarian relations and the incarnation be construed so as to demonstrate that gift-giving should not come at the expense of the giver are clearly driven by her feminist concern that orthodoxy has often been used to legitimatise the abuse and subjugation of women. See Kathryn Tanner, “Incarnation, Cross and Sacrifice” *Anglican Theological Review*, 86/1 (Winter, 2004), 35-56.

¹⁰ For example, Hay, with his eight principles, ends up being unable to decide whether capitalism or socialism is more or less favourable to a biblical conception of work and stewardship. Hay, *Economics Today*, 218-19. A very noticeable feature in Tanner is the way her theological vision appears to slide away when she begins to speak of economics. For the most part, her actual programme for a radical alternative to the present system is largely indistinguishable from what many mildly left-leaning Keynesian economists are advocating on non-theological grounds. Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 87-142. Tanner’s account in particular, in my view, confirms the thesis of D. Stephen Long that theologians cannot meet economists on their own methodological terms without sacrificing the specific content of theology, that is, that the *telos* of life is friendship with God. When the specificity of theology is conceded in this endeavour, theology is de-historicised, de-particularised and “... consigned to the margins of political and economic discourse.” D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2-3.

For this reason I wish to explore a Christian conception of economic life using Karl Barth's doctrine of creation as a theological resource. This project sits within the bigger framework of Christian ethics. Christian ethics attempts to answer the question, "In light of the gospel of Jesus Christ – how then must we understand our existence and thus our behaviour in relation to the totality of our lives as members of the Christian community that seeks to bear faithful witness to the truth of God in the world?" My project seeks to answer this with particular regard to the specifically *economic* dimensions of this question. Because of the nearly all-pervading global reach and spread of contemporary market capitalism I seek to answer this question in the context of this particular economic system.

A *Christian* conception of economic life is a question that must be addressed on the basis of Christianity's own peculiar logic. Therefore this task is properly a matter of church dogmatics – the theological exploration of Christian teaching, faith, and practice with respect to the logic of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore I can only commend my findings to the Christian community and to interested others on this basis. My primary concern is to explore how Christians, both as individuals and corporately as the church, may understand the place of contemporary market capitalism within the purposes of God for creation and how we may enact a form of life that bears faithful witness to the truth of God in relation to economic life. But because, as public theologian Max L. Stackhouse puts it, God is a global God "... and that is why theology must be public and interested in global issues",¹¹ this means that a Christian conception of economic life must seek to speak to all humanity. Because Christians believe that God is the God of *all* creation and wills that which is truly good for *all* humankind I also invite non-Christians to consider my Christian conception of economic life – particularly those who seek a moral basis for changing human behaviour in the midst of contemporary capitalism.

Karl Barth as a theological resource

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is an evangelical theologian in the best sense of the description. His thinking is rooted solidly in the Christian tradition in which Jesus

¹¹ Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Political Economy in a Globalizing Era," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, 179-194 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 179.

Christ is understood to be God's true, merciful, and loving Word of judgement, reconciliation, and redemption to and for a humanity that has lost its way – a humanity that has become alienated from its true source and purpose in God, alienated from itself, both individually and collectively, and alienated from the purpose of its work in the created environment in which it is placed. Barth brings this conviction to bear upon the human condition, in all its diversity, in extraordinarily imaginative and innovative ways such that a whole range of comfortable assumptions of life are examined and critiqued in a manner that is genuinely radical. Although rooted in an orthodox confession of Christian faith, Barth is a child of modernity. He remains indelibly shaped by modernity and how this movement transformed theology from the eighteenth century onward. Nevertheless he is acutely aware of and critical of the shortcomings of the theological liberalism that modernity gave rise to. Moreover, Barth was politically very active in Europe during the horrors of the two world wars, the rise of National Socialism in Germany and Soviet Communism in Russia, the Great Depression, the aftermath of the Holocaust, and the beginnings of the Cold War. Consequently his theology is attuned to these realities and the ethics that flow out of his theology has a decisive bearing on these things while also transcending them.

For Barth everything Christian faith confesses concerning God's revelation about himself, humanity, and the created order has ethical significance. Therefore Barth is very interested in the questions theology might pose for myriads of possibilities in everyday life, including, of course, economic life. It is often the case that Barth's thinking strikes one as being counter-intuitive and thus it is sometimes prone to being too quickly dismissed. Yet over and over again it is apparent that Barth seeks to align his thinking with the inner logic of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As this logic is creatively extrapolated into ethics the results are often, provocative, compelling, and surprising. However, many of these implications, as yet, remain unexplored. The scholarly interpretation of his ethics is in its relative infancy. John Webster, one of the foremost contemporary Barth scholars, says of Barth that he is

[T]he most important Protestant theologian since Schleiermacher, and the extraordinary descriptive depth of his depiction of the Christian faith puts him in the company of a handful of thinkers in the classical Christian tradition. Yet firsthand, well-informed engagement with Barth's work remains – with some notable recent exceptions – quite rare in English

speaking theological culture. ... Barth's contribution to Christian theology is in many respects still only now beginning to be received.¹²

Therefore this is a relatively new area that is richly suggestive in its possibilities. It is in light of this that I seek to explore the implications of Barth's theology for a Christian conception of economic life.

It has often been claimed that the "red pastor of Safenwil" was a radical socialist. George Hunsinger, another leading Barth scholar, has examined the debate concerning just how strongly Barth's political interests influenced his theology and cautions that

Barth never conceived socialism as an "ideology" or a system of ideas. For him socialism was, rather, a series of concrete goals with strong affinities to the Kingdom of God. ... [S]ocialism commended itself to theology to the extent that socialist goals conformed to those of God for the world.¹³

Thus Barth is very willing to critique socialism as an ideology and in terms of its specific practices even while recognising, in many respects, its "strong affinities to the Kingdom of God". Unsurprisingly however, he is also very critical of capitalism. As Hunsinger summarises Barth's view, capitalism "fosters unwholesome collective relationships of exploitation and dependency" and "exacerbates the worst aspects of human nature, debases human culture, and, not least, obscures its own injustices."¹⁴ However my thesis is not interested in revisiting the question of capitalism versus socialism in light of Christian theology. My concern in this thesis is to use Barth's theology to explore how Christians may think and act within contemporary market capitalism so as to bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

Webster regards Barth's *Church Dogmatics* as a "classic text" and cautions that

Good reading of classic texts is not atavism, but a matter of putting oneself in a place where one's conventions can be quite seriously undermined or relativised, and where as a consequence one can begin to think afresh. Good texts ought not to be used, rummaged through for 'insights' to shore up some proposal or other, but studied in such a way that they provoke by subverting.

¹² John Webster, "Introducing Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

¹³ George Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 8.

¹⁴ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 46.

Approached in this manner, they form one of the indispensable prerequisites to creative thought. But they can only offer this to us as we are willing to suspend our own concerns and not press too quickly towards a judgement on what we read.¹⁵

In using his doctrine of creation as my primary resource I hope to be a “good reader” of Barth. It has certainly been the case that I have been “provoked” and “subverted”. When I began this project I imagined I would conceive and develop a series of proposals that might be put to Government that would help to make the economic system more just in relation to the poor, less of a burden in relation to the ecosystem, and that might enable the economy to generate more compassionate outcomes that stood in closer approximation to the kingdom of God. In other words what I had in mind was to try to change the behaviour of the wider world of economics that it might be rendered more amenable to Christian preferences. However, having been provoked and subverted through my reading of Barth I am now of the view this ought to be a secondary task. The logic of his theology in his doctrine of creation has relentlessly prodded me against these initial instincts, and often against my natural preferences, to take a different direction. As a consequence the Christian conception of economic life I envisage does not seek to change the behaviour of the wider world of economics that it might be rendered more amenable to Christian preferences – rather it seeks to change the way Christians behave as economic agents *in* the world that *we* may be rendered more amenable to the preferences of God. Nor does it seek to establish a form of economic communal life as a sectarian Christian-only venture isolated from the rest of the world that avoids the tension and complicity of being *in* the world but not *of* the world – rather it seeks to enact a Christian form of economic life *in* the world that bears faithful witness to the one who is lord *of* the world. In short my Christian conception of economic life is not primarily concerned to change the system we live within but to change how Christians behave as economic agents within the system.

In articulating this Christian conception of economic life I neither feel compelled to deal exhaustively with all Barth includes in his doctrine of creation nor am I constrained from taking up themes Barth does not. Moreover I am not primarily concerned to articulate a conception of economic life that I believe Barth would

¹⁵ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

necessarily approve of. Rather the conception I articulate is my own. Nevertheless I am committed to taking Barth's doctrine of creation as my primary theological resource, as a "good reader" allowing it to provoke and subvert my thought, and exploring the implications of this for economic life in contemporary culture in ways that I believe are consistent with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian conception of economic life I articulate has three related goals. It seeks first to provide a coherent basis in theological ethics that provides illuminating *light* by which the place of human economic agency and contemporary market capitalism may be seen and understood within the economy of God; second to explore how Christians, both individually and corporately, may act as preserving *salt* in the world so as to resist and oppose the degenerating tendencies that economic life in the culture of contemporary market capitalism expose people to; and third to explore how Christians may utilise the potent possibilities within market capitalism to enact specifically Christian forms of economic life in the midst of contemporary culture that, like permeating *yeast*, hold out the possibility of subverting and transforming that culture from within.

Thesis outline

Coherent thought concerning *economic* life can only take place within an overarching framework that accounts for the *whole* of life. Therefore this thesis consists of two parts. In part I, *A Christian conception of creaturely reality – the covenant as the internal basis of creation*, I explore an overarching theological understanding concerning the whole of life; in particular knowledge of God and God's creation, knowledge of true human being, and knowledge of what constitutes good human action in the world. My controlling thought is that it is God's action in fulfilling his covenantal *purpose* in creating all that exists that provides the basis for a Christian conception of the nature, meaning, and purpose of human life. In part II, *A Christian conception of economic life – creation as the external basis of the covenant*, I seek to develop a Christian conception of economic life by locating it within the framework of creaturely reality I establish in part I. My controlling thought is that God's providential governance of the world for the sake of the covenant ensures that the economic functions of creaturely reality bear witness to

our *telos* and that it is within these functions in the midst of contemporary culture that God calls the Christian community to participate in his mission in the world.

Part I consists of three chapters. In chapter 1, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation – The God who Creates*, I focus on the question “Who is the God who creates and what does this tell us about the purpose of creation?” This raises methodological and epistemological questions concerning how we may have knowledge of these things. Barth’s key methodological move is that *what is believed* determines *what may be known* and not the other way round as presupposed by modernity. The noetic and ontological basis of a Christian knowledge of creation is founded upon faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian doctrine of creation is Christological in that Christian faith affirms that *all things* are created in, through, and for Jesus Christ and in him *all things* are sustained, summed up, and hold together. Christian knowledge of creation relates to other sources of knowledge, but while other sources of knowledge may be able to describe the outer form of something, they can never speak of its inner basis and reason. However, what a *Christian* knowledge of creation enables us to know is that all creation arises out of the freedom and love of God to be the God of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This means the creation is the place prepared for grace and human beings are the creatures of God who are equipped for grace. It is on this basis the creation is “good” in the sense that it is serviceable for God’s purposes to reconcile and redeem humankind by grace through Jesus Christ. The key point I make in this chapter is that the Genesis creation accounts show that every created thing directs us to recognise the reality of our *telos* – either positively by bearing witness to the security and nurturing God’s good creation affords (the light side of God’s good creation), or negatively by bearing witness to the jeopardy and menace God’s good creation represents outside of the grace of God (the shadow side of God’s good creation). I conclude this chapter by giving emphasis to two key concepts in Barth – God’s *freedom* and God’s *love* – that enable us to speak of the identity of the God of the covenant of grace. It is on this basis that a Christian knowledge of creation allows us to speak of both the *identity* of the God who creates and the *purpose* of creation.

In chapter 2, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation – The Human Being who is Created*, I address the question, “Who is the human being created by the God of the covenant of grace?” This question also raises methodological and epistemological

issues and this chapter explores Barth's key methodological conviction that a true knowledge of human being can only be derived from Jesus Christ, not our own independent conceptions of humanity derived from other sources. This is because human beings, as we currently exist, do so in the contradiction of our sin and not in the fullness of our true humanity as the creatures God has created for covenantal relationship. But human beings existing in the contradiction of their sin do not constitute a new creation, merely an aberration. Thus the knowledge of who we truly are in the covenantal purposes of God cannot be discerned from anthropology, for even at best anthropology can only disclose to us our self-perception of our current existence, not our true humanity in the covenantal purposes of God. Moreover, knowledge of true human being cannot be gained *directly* from Jesus, for although Jesus as man is fully like us, as God he is utterly unlike us. Our true humanity, Barth argues, may only be deduced *indirectly* from the fact that the man Jesus exists in his humanity only in relation to the saving activity of God. From this we deduce that *our* true humanity is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by action that corresponds to the saving action of God in Jesus Christ. The true humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is *for* God and *for* us and that he is *for* us *because* he is for God. Thus deriving our humanity from the humanity of Jesus means true human being can only be understood as being in relation to God and being in relation to fellow-humanity. Therefore true humanity cannot be Godless or neighbourless. The human nature of Jesus consists of an ordered unity of body and soul – the ruling soul of a serving body enlivened and sustained by the Spirit of God. Our human nature corresponds to the human nature of Jesus for it is by the Spirit of God that we have life and breath and by whom we are enabled to *know* as the souls of our bodies and to *act* in the world as the bodies of our souls. We may understand we are rational beings only because God has created us in order that we may *know* him and *act* responsibly before him in the world.

In chapter 3, *The ethics that flow out of the Christian doctrine of creation*, I enquire about the nature and basis of Christian ethics and begin to explore how this relates to economic life. At the living centre of Christian ethics is the knowledge of who God is and the reason he has created us (chapter 1) and the knowledge of who the human being is that God has created and what is the purpose for our being (chapter 2). *All* Christian ethics flow out of these two things and it is these two things that point us to the purpose of our lives and work. In chapter 3 I explore Barth's conviction that

Christian ethics is special ethics (the specific command of God that comes to specific individuals in time and space) that derives from general ethics (the goodness of God as this is revealed in his saving activity in history). On this basis Christian ethics can neither be elevated to abstract universals that hover above us as general or timeless principles, nor can it be casuistically reduced to a comprehensive code that specifies for all times and circumstances what constitutes good and evil. Rather, the command of God comes to us specifically, concretely, and individually in the density of our historical existence as it so pleases God and therefore takes many different and specific forms. But the command of God really only aims at one thing and desires one outcome – the affirmation and sanctification of our creaturely being, our freedom, our life, and our good through the fulfilment of God’s covenantal purposes for us and in us. This is because the God who commands us is the same God who graciously creates, reconciles, and redeems us in Jesus Christ. Christian ethics flows out of this, points to this, and seeks to cultivate attitudes and dispositions that encourage faithfulness to this. This chapter begins to develop the economic implications of the one command of God with respect to the three key relationships in which human beings stand – toward God, toward fellow-humanity, and toward our functioning in the created order. I conclude chapter 3 by elaborating upon Barth’s understanding that the work of God is an ordered unity and as such the covenantal centre of the work of God must govern and direct the created circumference yet centre and circumference must be held together in indissoluble oneness. On this basis I develop a standard by which I believe we may discern the *character* God’s specific command will take in relation to our activity as economic agents. Because the creation exists for the sake of the covenant and not the reverse the providential activity of God ensures the creation is sustained and upheld in order that it may serve this central covenantal purpose. Corresponding to this work of God, *our* lives also have a centre and a circumference. At the centre of our lives is the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ in whom our true humanity, purpose, and *telos* are constituted. At the circumference of this centre is our economic activity that corresponds to the providential activity of God that sustains and upholds the created environment. If human action in the world is to correspond to the action of God in the world then economic activity can never be made to lie at the centre of human activity and aspiration. Nevertheless economic activity does have its proper dignity and legitimate place as participating in the serving circumference of God’s ruling centre. Chapter 3 concludes part I.

Beginning part II in chapter 4, *Economic life and the covenantal purposes of God*, I emphasise that God's providential governance of creation ensures the creation continues to be "good" for the enactment of the history of the covenant and that any economic system is a human construct that God may graciously ordain to serve his purposes for creation. On this basis I argue that the light and shadow side of creation point to creation's serviceability as the external basis for the fulfilment of the covenantal purposes of God and this is reflected in the functioning and outcomes of the economic dimension of life. I argue that contemporary market capitalism actually does an extraordinarily good job of channelling self-interest to serve the benefit of others; producing and distributing goods and services that meet genuine need for the well-being of large segments of humankind; providing the prosperity whereby people may take responsibility for their lives, and thus enabling individuals to pursue lives of obedience to the one command of God. But there is a shadow side to the economic system as well. Industries go into decline with changing technology and demand patterns resulting in unemployment and shattered vocational dreams and life aspirations; changing market conditions generate loss and poverty for many; the unintended consequences of economic production, policies, and institutions often bring forth pollution, waste, loss, and broken dreams; and the inherent instabilities within the structures of capitalism frequently lead to gross inequalities in relation to the distribution of wealth. But these aspects of capitalism may be understood as being serviceable to God's covenantal purposes for creation that prepare and equip us to be saved by grace. They bear witness to our *telos* – that we have not been created by material processes to find ultimate fulfilment in the material outcomes generated by economic activity but that we have been created by the God of the covenant to participate in his redeeming purposes for humanity through Jesus Christ. But the economic system stands, as does all created reality, in precarious proximity to the disorder and menace of the chaos that God has rejected and passed over at creation, that is, the evil of nothingness. In relation to economic life, I argue the threat of nothingness achieving actuality in creaturely life is realised when human beings as economic agents will and act so as to reverse the order or break the unity between covenant and creation. This means we either allow economic function to *rule* at the centre of our lives by prioritising economic advantage above all other considerations – everything else serving this *central* ambition. Alternatively we allow economic function to constitute the *totality* of our

lives as we devote ourselves to materialistic pursuit as our singular consideration – nothing else existing outside this *sole* obsession. I argue the risk of economic function becoming the primary or only reality ruling or constituting our lives is especially prone to being actualised within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism because of the potentialities capitalism possesses. This is due to the one central vulnerability that all economic systems are threatened by, but which contemporary market capitalism is especially prone to actualising in economic agents – self-interest degenerating into greed! Within the structures of capitalism this potent possibility spawns a family of related degenerating tendencies –entrepreneurial activity degenerating into depraved entrepreneurial business practices, consumption degenerating into materialistic consumerism, and economic production degenerating into plunder, pillage, exploitation, and expropriation.

The first four chapters are intended primarily as illuminating *light* – resources that may enable Christians to see and understand the place of human economic agency in the economy of God. In chapter 5, *Economic life in relation to the one command of God*, I seek to provide resources that, like preserving *salt*, may enable Christians to resist the degenerating tendencies within capitalism that expose them to the perilous possibility of actualising the threat of nothingness through reversing the order or severing the unity of ruling covenantal centre and serving created circumference. I make use of the noteworthy fact that Barth begins his exploration of the ethics of the doctrine of creation under the heading “freedom” with the Sabbath. Moreover he intended to write his ethics of the doctrine of reconciliation under the heading “invocation” beginning with Baptism and concluding with the Lord’s Supper. It is on this basis I argue that the resources I seek may be found through making explicit the economic implications contained in these three integrating rituals of Christian life and worship that orientates the community of faith to its inner work of sustaining itself. As these implications are witnessed to in the life of the Christian community, the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ may be attested in the lives of individual Christians as economic agents in obedient human action that corresponds to the activity of God. The Sabbath rest implicitly commands the *relativisation* of all human work and all human constructs and thus forbids the absolutisation of economic function. Thus for Christians, economic function must stand under the lordship of God. The Lord’s Supper implicitly commands the *humanisation* of all human work and all human constructs and thus

forbids the dehumanisation of economic agency. Thus for Christians, economic agency must serve human fellowship. Baptism implicitly commands the *limitation* and *redirection* of all human work and all human constructs and thus forbids the limitless pursuit of economic desire heedless of the will of God. Thus for Christians, economic priority and purpose must be transformed by the life-changing Spirit of God.

Finally in chapter 6, *A Christian conception of economic life realised in the praxis of the Christian community*, I seek to provide resources that, like permeating yeast, may enable the Christian community to actualise concrete expressions of economic *praxis* in the specificity of historical existence in the midst of contemporary culture that bear witness to the kingdom of God. The negative side of this is explored in chapter 5 in which the main focus is on the community maintaining itself through its inner life of worship so as to *resist* the degenerating and subverting tendencies people are exposed to as economic agents within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism. But the only legitimate reason the community of faith maintains itself is for the sake of its outer life of service to the world in obedience to the command of God. Therefore the focus in this chapter shifts to the positive side in which the community seeks to operate *proactively* in the world. I argue the resources I seek may be found through the community of faith reflecting deeply upon the reality of our behaviour as economic agents and by making explicit the economic implications contained in God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ that orientates the community of faith to its outer work of service in the midst of contemporary culture. God's one command is that by the grace of God we actively affirm the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ that accomplishes the sanctification of our creaturely being that we may become and be the true and good human creatures God has created and ordained for fellowship with God and fellow-humanity. And God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ requires the community of faith to bear witness to this truth in the midst of contemporary culture through practical expressions of love that seek the genuine freedom of others for the sake of service. In seeking to obey this command and participate in this mission, the God who has created us *in* freedom and love *for* freedom and love grants us considerable relative freedom in terms of how we may set about obeying God's one command as we hold ourselves in readiness to hear and obey his specific command as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God. In this way the Christian

community has the freedom to initiate projects that hold out the hope of pointing to the light side of God's good creation through holding in proper order and unity God's ruling covenantal centre and serving created circumference. Therefore the economic possibilities that flow out of this free obedience to the command of God will be characterised by wondrous diversity as the various geographic communities of faith utilise the gifting God has granted them, as they respond to the specific contingencies they confront in the communities they live within, and as the specific command of God may direct them.

In my conclusion I evaluate Barth's doctrine of creation as a theological resource for informing my Christian conception of economic life. I give emphasis to the one central theological insight from Barth that drives my thesis throughout – the covenant is the inner basis and reason for creation and the creation is the external basis and possibility for the enactment of the covenant. This central insight contains three related corollaries: (1) covenant and creation exist in an irreversible order and in an unbreakable unity; (2) the goodness of creation consists in its serviceability as the theatre for the enactment of God's covenantal purposes, and (3) good human action is action that corresponds to the goodness of God as witnessed by God's fulfilment of the covenant in creation through Jesus Christ.

Part I: A Christian conception of creaturely reality – the covenant as the internal basis of creation

In the first part of this thesis I take as my controlling thought Barth's central insight that the covenant is the internal basis of creation. I explore this idea as the means by which we may have knowledge of God, knowledge of true human being, and knowledge of what constitutes good human action in the world. As this key thought of Barth's is extrapolated in relation to these three questions, the overarching point I seek to make is that God's covenantal *purpose* in creating all that exists provides the basis for a Christian conception of the meaning and purpose of human life. It is only on the basis of an overarching theological conception of human life in its entirety that we may understand the purpose and place of economic life. On this basis in chapter 1 I explore how we may have knowledge of the God who creates, the nature and purpose of the reality that has been created, and the identity and character of this creating God. In chapter 2 I investigate how we may have knowledge of the human being who is created, the nature and purpose of God's human creature, and our creaturely form as a psychosomatic being. Finally in this first part, in chapter 3 I consider the interaction between this creating God and this human creature as an ethical event and explore the command of God as it orientates us toward God, toward others, and, in light of these two orientations, how the command of God orientates us toward the created environment in terms of our economic function, agency, and purpose.

Chapter 1: The Christian Doctrine of Creation: The God who Creates

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen. 1:1-5)

In this chapter I focus on the question, “Who is the God who creates and what does this tell us about the purpose of creation?” This raises methodological and epistemological questions concerning how we may have knowledge of these things. In the first section – *Methodology: Our knowledge of God* – I outline the general approach I seek to take in this thesis and explore Barth’s key methodological move that *what is believed* determines *what may be known* and not the reverse as presupposed by modernity. For Barth the noetic and ontological basis of a Christian knowledge of creation is founded upon faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian doctrine of creation is Christological in that Christian faith affirms that *all things* are created in, through, and for Jesus Christ and in him *all things* are sustained, summed up, and hold together. Christian knowledge of creation relates to other sources of knowledge but while other sources of knowledge may be able to describe the outer form of something, they can never speak of its inner basis and reason. However, what a *Christian* knowledge of creation does enable us to know is that all creation arises out of the electing will of God who in freedom and love determines to be the God of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In the second section – *The covenant as the internal basis of creation* – I expand on this theme using Barth’s understanding of the light and shadow side of creation and the evil of nothingness. The creation is “good” in that, in both its light and shadow sides, God renders it serviceable for God’s covenantal purposes to reconcile and redeem humankind by grace through Jesus Christ. The key point I make is that in God’s good world every created thing directs God’s human creatures to recognise the reality of their *telos* – either positively by bearing witness to the security and nurturing that God’s good

creation affords them, or negatively by bearing witness to the jeopardy and menace that God's good creation represents to human beings outside of the loving protection of God. In the final section – *The being of the God who creates as the one who loves in freedom* – I conclude the chapter by giving emphasis to God's *freedom* and God's *love* – two key concepts that for Barth enable us to speak of the identity and character of the God of the covenant and thus the purpose of creation.

1.1 Methodology: Our knowledge of God

There is a palpable strangeness about the theology of Karl Barth. As George Hunsinger notes, "It can seem to be too familiar to be interesting, or paradoxically, too strange to be relevant."¹ Consequently, in Hunsinger's view, Barth is often more honoured than read.² He notes that his "perplexing modes of thought" have both frustrated and defeated many of his admirers and critics alike.³ Moreover many have sought, unsuccessfully Hunsinger argues,⁴ some overarching unifying conception to unlock the whole. At one level, as Hunsinger suggests, this might be welcome given that

Barth is so deeply traditional and so strikingly innovative, so rigorous in argument and so daring in conception, so simple in essence and so complex in development, so narrowly focused and so wide-ranging in scope, so passionate in commitment and so relentless in criticism, so exasperating in disagreement and so inspiring in devotion ...⁵

Nevertheless Hunsinger is convinced that once one's eyes "get used to the light" the theology of Barth is like a soaring Cathedral – "an awesome and many-splendored structure".⁶ Therefore it is well worth pausing at the beginning to orientate oneself to the peculiar light that much of this thesis has set itself the task of walking by.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt a comprehensive survey of the various motifs or methodological principles that Barth employs in the totality of his

¹ George Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991), 27.

² Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, 27. However, in my experience Barth often tends to be *both* dishonoured *and* unread.

³ Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, vii.

⁴ Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, 3-23.

⁵ Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, 3.

⁶ Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, 27.

theology. This chapter is primarily concerned with noetics – the question of how Christian theology can have knowledge of the God who creates, the basis of this knowledge, the specific nature and content of this knowledge, and how this knowledge relates to other sources of knowledge about creation. Therefore it is with this specific aim in mind I provide a brief orientation to Barth's theological method. Barth, in the preface to the second edition of his commentary on Romans, *Der Römerbrief*, says,

... if I have a [methodological] system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.'⁷

For Barth, the first thing the infinite qualitative distinction between creation and creator means is the utter impossibility of knowledge of God outside of God's willingness to make himself known.⁸ Knowledge of God, therefore, rests on the gracious decision of God to reveal himself and not on the exertions of human conjecture or discovery.

Eberhard Busch, Barth's personal assistant from 1965 to 1968 and renowned expert on Barth's theology, has helpfully suggested three basic principles that guide Barth's theology of revelation. First: *reality* has absolute precedence over *possibility*.⁹

Modernity typically asks about the conditions that have to be satisfied in order to render a thing possible before being willing to accept that any claim is in fact real or actual. Theologies that accept the presuppositions of modernity therefore typically begin with extensive prolegomena that carefully lay out the conditions of possibility concerning how talk concerning the reality of God can legitimately proceed.

Contrary to modernity Barth begins with the *reality* that God has acted and spoken in Jesus Christ. Prolegomena for Barth are therefore not that which make speech about God possible, but rather that which theology must say first.¹⁰ For Barth what theology must say first and continually return to is that "God is."¹¹ As John Webster observes, Barth utterly rejects the modern epistemological notion that to obtain the

⁷ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the 6th edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 10.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. II/1, *The Doctrine of God*, translated by T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 179ff.

⁹ Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 68. Hunsinger uses the term *actualism* to communicate this idea. Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth*, 30-32.

¹⁰ Busch, *The Great Passion*, 42.

¹¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 257.

knowledge of God we must somehow negotiate our way “from known natural realities to the reality of God”.¹² For Barth it is only possible to know the reality of the world *as a consequence* of faith in the reality of God.¹³ And therefore “If we do not recognise that [the world] has been created by God, we do not recognise that it is.”¹⁴ This means, as Paul D. Matheny interprets Barth’s conception of reality, that ... all that is real has its reality in consequence of God’s grace and decision to create and become a partner with the human in covenant-relationship. ... Understood in this relationship, the world of our experience is *enhypostatically* real. It [only] has its existence in relation to and within the concrete reality of the history of God. ... Therefore the world as we experience it is an anhypostatic abstraction. We experience it outside of its true relationship to God.¹⁵

The second methodological principle Busch identifies is that Barth gives unconditional priority to the *specific* over the *general*.¹⁶ Modernity is concerned to discover universal truths that are accessible to reason or sentiment and accessible to all people at all times, then applies them to the specificity of our circumstances as we find ourselves in them. The tension between these two approaches and the judgement of modernity upon them is famously stated by G. E. Lessing (1729-1781) – the “... accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.”¹⁷ This dictum of Lessing’s strikes a blow at the root of Christian claims that God in his Revelation – in the specificity, contingency, and particularity of Jesus Christ – has revealed truth to humanity that is otherwise unknowable. It was in response to this challenge that liberal theology accepted Lessing’s terms and sought to ground its claims in *general* “truths”. But this has the effect, amongst other things, of either regarding the specific God of Christian faith as simply one object alongside other objects in the general class of “divinity” or theology attempting to identify the general metaphysical category of “God” as the God of Christian faith. For Barth both of these options are disastrous. God is not simply

¹² John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 59.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*, translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 6.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 6.

¹⁵ Paul D. Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics: The Theological Realism and Ethics of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang GmbH, 1990), 71-72.

¹⁶ Busch, *The Great Passion*, 69.

¹⁷ G. E. Lessing, “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power” in *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A. & C. Black, 1956), 53.

one object that lines up alongside others to be reviewed and critiqued by humans nor is God the “god” that is dreamed up by philosophical speculation.¹⁸ For Barth, God is the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth and raised him from the dead; and the God whose ways and works are attested in Holy Scripture.

It is this that leads into the third methodological principle Busch identifies, that *being follows work*.¹⁹ That is, the God of Christian faith is known *by* his works and *only* by his works. As Barth expresses it, “God is who He is in His works.”²⁰ Although Barth is careful to clarify that God is not determined or bound by his works, nevertheless “... in Himself He is not another than He is in His works.”²¹ Therefore it is in the specificity and historical contingency of the acts of God, supremely in Jesus Christ, that God reveals himself in his essential being and by which we are permitted to know him. God *is* the being who is merciful to us in Jesus Christ. But, it must be noted, we may only say that “being follows work” from the point of view of *our knowledge* of the being of God. God does not *realise* himself in his actions nor does God *discover* who he is by observing and interpreting his actions. God *does* what he does because God *is* who he is, not the reverse. Barth argues that it is not for us to speculate what God might be other than in his works.²² He closes this door saying;

In the light of what He is in His works it is no longer an open question what He is in Himself. In Himself He cannot, perhaps, be someone or something quite other, or perhaps nothing at all. But in His works He is Himself revealed as the One He is. ... [E]ven if we could understand Him elsewhere, we should understand Him only as the One He is in His works, because He is this One and no other.²³

¹⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 300.

¹⁹ Busch, *The Great Passion*, 69.

²⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 260.

²¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 260.

²² In my view Paul. T. Nimmo goes too far when he says “In this actualistic ontology, then, the action of God in electing to be God for humanity in Jesus Christ is *not* the act of an already existing agent. Rather it is an act in the course of which God determines the very being of God.” Paul T. Nimmo *Being in Action: the Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 8. While acknowledging that this is a highly contested issue in Barth studies, it is my view that we must emphasise, by holding in dialectical tension, *both* that God is not other than he is in Jesus Christ so therefore we may know truly that God is who he is in Jesus Christ *and* that God in his freedom and aseity is not bound by some necessity to be this or any God for us.

²³ Barth, *CD* II/1, 260.

We may perhaps sum up these three principles by saying that for Barth Christian knowledge is a methodology of faith seeking understanding or that “I believe in order that I might understand”.²⁴ Both the methodology and the content of this chapter are really just an elaboration of these three principles in relation to the Christian doctrine of creation. The foundational presupposition of Christian theology that Barth whole-heartedly affirms is the conviction that God speaks and acts as attested in Holy Scripture and that God has graciously sanctified human language, for all its brokenness and imperfection, to bear witness to his revelation in Jesus Christ.²⁵ Therefore for Barth, theology must not ask, “How is this *possible* and what are the conditions, if any, that render this reasonable to the presuppositions of modernity?” But rather, theology must obediently and thankfully, accept this *reality* and humbly seek the gracious enabling of God that it may consider well that which God has revealed. This is no less true in relation to the knowledge of creation as it is in relation to the knowledge of all the ways and works of God. The only source of knowledge available to us, if it is a *Christian* knowledge of creation that we seek, is Holy Scripture. What we find in Holy Scripture are not universal or *general* truths that might otherwise have been discovered by our own resources on other grounds, but rather the *specific*, contingent, and historically grounded claim that

[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1: 15-20)²⁶

This passage of scripture speaks of the purpose and activity of God – creation and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. For Christian faith, the being and identity of

²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 29. *Credo ut intelligam* is the famous maxim of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) of whom Barth made a special study between his false start in publishing *Christian Dogmatics* in 1927 and his new beginning in *Church Dogmatics* in 1932.

²⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd ed., translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 49.

²⁶ Holy Bible, *The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989). Unless stated otherwise all biblical quotations are from this version

God is the God who does this work. Therefore all speech about God can only be speech about *this* God. “God” is the being who *does* these things. As already noted, for Barth, “God is who He is in His works.”²⁷

What is the basis of Christian knowledge of the world? We can broaden this question and ask, what is the basis of *any* kind of knowledge of the world? We really only have two alternatives: knowledge that derives from within ourselves in relation to our powers of observation, intuition, and rational thought or knowledge that comes to us from the outside that is somehow revealed to us. The first option is the option that was championed by the Enlightenment and is the basis of the scientific method. The second option is the Christian option that Enlightenment thought has repudiated. But no knowledge claim, whether scientific or religious, can ever be self-evident, certain, or indisputable in and of itself; for every knowledge claim presupposes a framework of thought, paradigm, or plausibility structure within which it resides. Barth does not seek to denigrate or deny scientific knowledge of the world. However he argues that, even at its best, scientific knowledge of the world can only describe the outward form of a thing and never its inner purpose and reason for being.²⁸ Moreover Barth argues, if science remains true to its proper role it can indeed provide “precise information and relevant data” and as such “cannot be the enemy of the Christian confession.”²⁹ But, for Barth, it ceases to be exact science when it slides off into speculative ideology and “... dogmatizes on the basis of its formulae and hypotheses, becoming the exponent of a philosophy and worldview ...”³⁰ If we seek knowledge concerning the inner reason and purpose of the world, exact science cannot give us this and we must choose between a speculative theory of the world that arises in the “arid” and “unspiritual” place “between myth ... and philosophy”,³¹ or the revelation of God. Barth of course opts for the latter. But the content of this knowledge is not self-evident, obvious to our senses, or indisputable. As Barth observes, it is

²⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 260.

²⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/2, *The Doctrine of Creation*, translated by Harold Knight, G. W. Bromiley, J. K. S. Reid and R. H. Fuller (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 24.

²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 24.

³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 24.

³¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 22.

... a knowledge which no man has procured for himself or ever will; which is neither native to him nor accessible by way of logical thinking; for which he has no organ and no ability; which he can in fact achieve only in faith ...³²

Thus for Barth, Christian knowledge of creation derives from faith in Jesus Christ. He declares, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son our Lord, in order to perceive and to understand that God the Almighty, the Father, is the creator of heaven and earth."³³ Because Christian faith holds Jesus to be the incarnate Word of God in whose very being Creator and creation are united, therefore, Barth argues, it is the *being* of Jesus that provides the basis for the *knowledge* of creation. As he expresses it,

... where there is a genuine noetic connexion, we can always count on the fact that it has an ontic basis. This is the case here. Jesus Christ is the Word by which the knowledge of creation is mediated to us because He is the Word by which God has fulfilled creation and continually maintains and rules it.³⁴

The question, "Is Jesus the incarnate Word of God and thus the source of the certain knowledge of all things?" is of course disputable. Debate rages and different conclusions are reached according to the different grounds upon which people stand. However, if *by faith* one is convinced that this is true, then one may, *on this basis*, have knowledge of the inner reason and purpose of creation that other sources of knowledge have no access to. Modern science on the other hand proceeds on the basis of alternative convictions, namely, that empirical observation and rational analysis gives rise to a true knowledge of the world. But this knowledge must of necessity exclude the knowledge that God is its creator and has revealed to us his purpose in doing so in Jesus Christ. Both theology and the fields of knowledge that derive from Enlightenment presuppositions wish to speak of the world. What distinguishes the two is not that one is more logical or rational than the other or that one is blinded by dogma while the other is enlightened by reason, but rather, the *presuppositions* that each make with respect to noetics. On the one hand, theology maintains that human speech and knowledge about the inner reason and purpose of the world is only possible on the basis of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ

³² Barth, *CD* III/1, 3.

³³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 29.

³⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 28.

as this is attested in Holy Scripture. On the other hand, the fields of knowledge that derive from Enlightenment presuppositions maintain that knowledge of the world is accessible directly through autonomous rational investigation. The thing that unites these two epistemological methodologies is the recognition, whether explicit in its affirmation or implicit in its silence or denial, that faith really does precede understanding. Faith seeking understanding is in fact a *universal* epistemology – *what is believed* determines *what may be known*. This is as true for non-theological knowledge as it is for theological knowledge. A plethora of possible understandings of the world are possible depending upon the underlying presuppositional beliefs that are brought to this question. The assumptions (faith) of modernity determine what may and may not be known about the external world (understanding). These assumptions explicitly exclude the possibility of knowing that God the Father Almighty created heaven and earth.

Is it possible for us to have knowledge of God? Can God be known and can human perception and rationality gain access to this knowledge in such a way that we may be certain of the veracity of its content? Beginning with the question of what is *possible* always generates some kind of anxious neurosis. This is because it immediately makes the issue of *human* capacity or sufficiency decisive to the whole project – are we capable of the achievement of this end and is the path we have chosen the right one? But Barth's method eliminates this neurosis from the outset. For Barth, we have no natural capacity to know God. Outside of the good pleasure of God to reveal himself there can be no true knowledge of God, or indeed, no true knowledge of the world. For Barth, the Christian knowledge of God begins in the *reality* of God's revelation, not its *possibility*. The knowledge of God begins in God's will to be known to us and this is a gift of his grace. Barth is adamant the revelation of God is God's affair and not our independent accomplishment and therefore we must recognise that "God is known only by God."³⁵ God's knowledge of himself is complete, exhaustive, and perfect. But it is not God's self-knowledge that is at issue here, rather it is the *human* knowledge of God, and thus our participation in the event of the revelation of God, that God graciously enables.³⁶ Because the human knowledge of God has its beginning, end, and enabling in God, therefore from start to finish, as Barth puts it, "... we have to do with God Himself

³⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1, 179.

³⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1, 181.

by God Himself, in unsurpassable and incontestable certainty, and that therefore it is a real knowledge of God.”³⁷ But because we have to do with *God*, Barth emphasises that from the outset, our knowledge of God begins with “... the knowledge of the hiddenness of God.”³⁸ But the hiddenness of God is not a philosophical concept concerning the unknowability or incomprehensibility of God – a property that human rationality attributes to God.³⁹ Rather it is recognition of the judgement of God upon human attempts to speak of God outside of the gracious enabling of God.⁴⁰ The hiddenness of God acknowledges our sinful tendency to ascribe to ourselves the capacity to know God by our own resources and to treat God’s revelation as something that stands at *our* disposal, rather than at God’s disposal to give or to remove.⁴¹ Indeed, for Barth, the hiddenness of God affirms that it is *we* who stand at God’s disposal and that it is *God* who appropriates us, and by grace commands and enables us to appropriate him!⁴²

We are in the habit of thinking that *we* are the masters and possessors of that which we apprehend and thus comprehend. But the revelation of God’s hiddenness says “no” to this. The revelation of God’s hiddenness is the confession of faith that acknowledges that the knowledge of God begins and ends in the enabling of God and that in and of ourselves we have no natural capacity to know God and thus we are to be both grateful and humble.⁴³ By grace God gives us something that utterly transcends our natural capacity – to recognise, as Barth puts it, that “God has in fact revealed Himself and manifest by Himself – in His Son, the fact that He became man, and by the Holy Spirit, His outpouring on all flesh.”⁴⁴ God reveals himself therefore, not by dissolving his hiddenness, but by dissolving his inapprehensibility – the Word became flesh and thus the human is graciously enabled to represent God.⁴⁵ For Barth, despite all the limitations of human language, the knowledge of God that is enabled by God is a *true* human knowing. But it will never be perfect, exhaustive, or complete knowledge of God, and thus will always be an approximation. Nevertheless, for all this it will be no less true, and so we have no mandate to negate or depreciate the human word about God that God has graciously sanctified and

³⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 180.

³⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 183.

³⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 188.

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 191.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 184.

⁴² Barth, *CD* II/1, 188.

⁴³ Barth, *CD* II/1, 192.

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* II/1, 197.

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1, 199.

enabled to bear faithful witness concerning God.⁴⁶ Therefore, Barth argues, in our gratitude, humility, and awe, we must not over-emphasise an apophatic approach to speaking about God for God compels and enables true knowledge about himself despite the impotence of our thought, language, and speech.⁴⁷

It is the Christian epistemological claim that God reveals God and on this basis God enables the true knowledge of God. But this reasoning is clearly circular and, on the basis of the *human* logic championed by the Enlightenment, fatal to our whole project. But theology has no alternative means by which it can establish the truth that God may graciously enable human words to nevertheless be true words about God. There is no way out of this circularity whereby theology may remain faithful to its calling. Theology cannot say it can rationally accept that God reveals God on account of some “stupendous reason x” external to God – a reason that we have concocted and constructed by our own powers. Any “stupendous reason x” that is anything other than God himself can only be an idolatrous human projection within the boundaries of which we endeavour to compass and contain “God”. There is indeed no way out of this circularity. But there is a way in – *faith in the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ!* Therefore we have no safe harbour in which to anchor our epistemological apparatus other than in God himself. This is the great risk that faith compels us to affirm. *God* is the reason we may have faith that God reveals himself in Jesus Christ and if this faith is false then our project is utterly futile, *but if true*, we have a certain path upon which to travel. It is Barth’s confession of faith that “... our action and line of thought can only be originally and properly true in Jesus Christ and can only become and be true in Him in consequence of the fact that Jesus Christ is also really our Judge and Saviour.”⁴⁸

If we refuse to follow Barth in this first crucial step, what alternatives do we have? One option would be natural theology in which it is believed that knowledge of God and his purposes for creation are derivable from that which God has created. This method Barth roundly rejects for it inevitably follows that it is always *human* conceptions that in the end determine what nature may reveal to us about God and his purposes and thus can only ever amount to idolatry in which human beings seek

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1, 202-03.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 221-22.

⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 252.

to possess and control the knowledge of God.⁴⁹ A second option would be to abandon theology altogether and simply adopt the methodology of modernity and examine the world directly. This indeed may give us “precise information and relevant data”, but even at best it will only be in relation to the outward form of the world, never its inner basis and reason. And the moment that science moves from its legitimate role of investigation and description and begins to speak of origins and purposes it becomes a worldview, thus an ideology or belief system that determines what may be knowable and thus known. A third (and I think final) option would be to adopt an existing mythology or generate a new one within which these questions may be addressed, that is, to adopt or create a rival theology that is not genuinely Christian. Thus this first move that Barth makes is, in my view, essential for a genuinely *Christian* knowledge of creation.

The task I have set myself in this thesis is to take this first crucial step with Barth and to extrapolate the logic of Christian confession using his doctrine of creation as my primary resource to explore, as a “good reader”, what this means for economic life. But this can never be the logic of a mathematical or mechanical system over which we think we have mastery and control. It is the peculiar logic of the *relationship* that God has established with his creation in the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is the logic of the *Logos* of God that frequently confounds and overturns our own logic and our own natural ways of thinking and proceeding. It is a logic that requires that we be suspicious of our own logic. For by the logic of God we are compelled to recognise that what we call *our* logic is often the vehicle by which we secretly or openly seek to justify and rationalise the fervent desires and aspirations of our own hearts. Thus human rationality frequently finds itself in the *irrational* role of being the servant and advocate of our most cherished convictions while masquerading as an impartial discerner of objective truth.

What then does a Christian knowledge of creation consist of? Barth identifies three introductory things about creation that can *only* be known on the basis of faith in the revelation of God. The first is that neither God nor the world is alone.⁵⁰ That which God has created is not some emanation of God or part of God, nor is God contained within some world-process of ongoing evolution or realisation. God is distinct from

⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 141-42.

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 5-6.

the world and the world is distinct from God and thus both God and the world have their own reality and integrity. For Barth the reality and existence of God is not problematic; what is problematic, however, is to try and posit some independent existence for the world since on the basis of Christian faith a Godless world is simply impossible. But it is only faith in the revelation of God that enables us to know that God elects in love and freedom to not be alone for the sake of the creation. The second thing that a Christian knowledge of the world enables is that created reality is willed and established by God.⁵¹ The world is not self-generated or the result of some accident or naturalistic evolutionary process. It is planned and willed in the loving good pleasure of God for a purpose and a consummation that God has determined to fulfil. Because the world is willed and established by God the world has no power over its own existence and form, it does not belong to itself, and cannot control itself – God is its Lord. Consequently, the world is dependent upon the gracious provision of God for its continuation and being. Third, all the key concepts that we use to speak of the world are to be understood in light of the scriptural witness.⁵² God is not some philosophical construct or deistic prime mover, but the Father of Jesus Christ. Creation represents the beginning of a history that God has purposed and willed and God is active within the world in the specificity of this history and not as some timeless truth or universal principle that may be known through human reason or self-initiated experience. This history of God's activity in the world is the history of the covenant and can only be known on the basis of the witness of the Bible. We may only understand the reality of creation from out of the centre of the biblical witness in its entirety and its unity. For Barth, Jesus Christ is the one who constitutes the Bible's entirety and unity and the one of whom it constantly speaks. As Barth expresses it, "The whole Bible speaks figuratively and prophetically of Him, of Jesus Christ, when it speaks of creation, the Creator and the creature."⁵³ Therefore Jesus Christ: (1) supplies the content of the knowledge of the identity of God – that God is Father, Son, and Spirit; (2) provides the meaning and the purpose of the creation – that all things are reconciled to God in Christ; and (3) maintains the unity of covenant and creation – that heaven and earth are united in the incarnate Word of God.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 7-10.

⁵² Barth, *CD* III/1, 11-13.

⁵³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 23.

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 27-28.

1.2 The covenant as the internal basis of creation

The covenant is God's plan and promise to create, reconcile, and redeem God's human creatures in Jesus Christ. The creation is the location and environment within which the covenant is enacted and fulfilled. For Barth, "The aim of creation is history."⁵⁵ From God's side, history means the patience of God in which God creates and gives *time* to created reality, and in particular to human beings, to acquire content through the events that constitute the history of the covenant as God "... concludes and executes this covenant with man, carrying it to its goal, and thus validating in the sphere of the creature that which from all eternity He has determined in Himself ..."⁵⁶ The world is the reality that God has specifically and deliberately created to be the sphere in which he reveals to humanity his purpose to reconcile the world through Jesus Christ. Thus Barth argues the world is specifically created to be the realm of grace and human beings the recipients of grace – "They are this originally and from the outset. ... They have no natural existence behind them in which they might have been ordained and prepared for something other than the grace of God."⁵⁷ Therefore from God's side creation begins a history in which human beings are given time for the grace of God.

From the human side, creation allows *us* to participate in the history of the covenant in which we are given time for the grace of God. But for Barth, our time and God's time are quite different. God does not exist in a timeless realm, but in eternity. Eternity is not timelessness but a temporality that embraces and transcends all time. Thus "... as the Eternal [One, God] is simultaneously before time, above time, and after time."⁵⁸ This means that eternity contains but also transcends created time. Creation is the beginning of creaturely time and happens in creaturely time. It is the time in which human beings may have their existence and their history and is the time that "... in contradistinction to eternity, [is characterised by a] one-way sequence and therefore the succession and division of past, present and future ..."⁵⁹ Therefore to be human means to be on a journey through created time from a beginning to an end. Whereas God exists in absolute time (eternity) humans exist in relative time (temporality). But as Barth argues, our time is a time of alienation

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD* III/1, 59.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 59.

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 67.

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 67.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 67-68.

from God, but crucially, it is a time of God's grace on our behalf.⁶⁰ It is only by the condescension of God who determines to reveal himself to humans in relative time (history) that God may have intercourse with us.⁶¹

The covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the inner reason and purpose of creation. The created universe, and in particular the world in which we live, arises out of the specific will of God. God willed to create the world for a purpose and wills to uphold and sustain it so that its purpose is fulfilled. The cosmos is not self-generated or self-sustaining, nor is it self-fulfilling or the basis for its own meaning. As Barth puts it,

The [human] creature is no more its own goal and purpose than it is its own ground and beginning. There is no inherent reason for the creature's existence and nature [and] no independent teleology of the creature [is] introduced with its creation and made its own.⁶²

Because the creation arises from the will of God and has no reason independent of God, the purpose of creation cannot be found *within* creation itself – it must be disclosed to us by the revelation of God. This is perhaps most succinctly expressed in Ephesians 1:4-5,

...[God] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will ...

This passage makes clear that God's purpose for creation includes a relationship of holiness and love with human beings and that this purpose originates in the will of God prior to "the foundation of the world". The passage therefore implies that the reason the world was created was in order for the purpose of God to be given concrete expression in time and space. This is very much Barth's understanding and is the basis upon which he structures his whole doctrine of creation. As Barth expresses this central idea,

All the things distinct from God begin with [creation]. If the eternal and determinate will of God is the source of their inner beginning, creation is the source of their external beginning. And herein lies the peculiar dignity of the creation, that as the external beginning of all things it stands in certain respects in direct confrontation with its inner beginning, its eternal source in

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 73.

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 68-69.

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/1, 94.

God's decision and plan. It has no external presupposition; it follows immediately the eternal will of God.⁶³

By this Barth means that the inner reason and indispensable presupposition for creation is that God wills the existence of human creatures that he may reconcile and redeem by grace through Jesus Christ for fellowship and love. Because this is God's purpose, God therefore creates a location and environment that enables this purpose to be actualised in historical reality. Thus for Barth, "Creation sets the stage for the story of the covenant of grace. The story requires a stage corresponding to it; the existence of man and his whole world. Creation provides this."⁶⁴ As Barth summarises this pivotal idea:

The creation of God, and therefore His positing of a reality distinct from Himself, is the external basis and possibility of the covenant. And the covenant itself is the internal basis and possibility of creation and therefore of the existence of a reality distinct from God.⁶⁵

Because the covenant is the internal basis for creation and creation is the external basis for the covenant, this means that covenant and creation exist in an irreversible order and an indissoluble unity. The covenant is not the creation and the creation is not the covenant, yet Barth is adamant that covenant and creation must not become disconnected from one another or disordered in relation to one another.⁶⁶ The theological basis for maintaining the unity and order of covenant and creation is that the God who in loving freedom *creates* us through and for Jesus Christ is the same God who in loving freedom also *reconciles and redeems* us through and for Jesus Christ. Moreover it is in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, that God both unites and reconciles heaven and earth. As Barth expresses it,

The decisive anchorage of the recognition that creation and covenant belong to each other is the recognition that God the Creator is the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ... By proving itself as its presupposition and backbone, it will also prevent the isolation [of covenant and creation] and therefore the enervation of the idea of reconciliation. ... The recognition of the unity of the divine being and its particularity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit will prove effective ... for the recognition not only of the

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 43.

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 44.

⁶⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 204.

⁶⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 43ff.

interconnexions but also of the variations in the relation between creation and covenant.⁶⁷

When the *unity* of covenant and creation is severed, covenant and creation can only be conceived of as existing in irreconcilable dualistic opposition. On the one hand human life will be conceived solely in materialistic terms unrelated to God's covenantal purposes or conceived solely in spiritualistic terms unrelated to creaturely material reality. On the other hand God's saving activity in the world will be conceived solely in spiritualistic terms unrelated to human creaturely functioning or conceived solely in materialistic terms unrelated to God's covenantal purposes for humanity. When the *order* of covenant and creation is reversed created things are no longer understood as existing to serve God's covenantal purpose to reconcile us by grace for loving fellowship. Instead an idolatrous self-serving form of life inevitably attempts to usurp the covenantal purposes of God to serve humanly devised ambitions that God is then called upon to sanctify and bless.

Central to Barth's doctrine of creation is that the cosmos is the place prepared for grace and human beings are God's creatures who are equipped for grace. To this end God does not create *any* world and *any* being, but a world and a being that are foreordained for the history of the covenant.⁶⁸ The biblical witness declares that "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Barth is adamant that we must not bring to the Bible our own predetermined conceptions derived from other sources and presuppositions and *then* evaluate the Bible on these grounds. The goodness *of* creation must be determined in relation to the purpose of God *for* creation, namely, that it is the external basis for the enactment of the covenant of grace. If we import conceptions of goodness from *our* preconceived prior understandings we risk misconstruing the true nature of the world in the purposes of God. When the Bible declares the world "good", we must not abstract this from its context. As Barth argues, God's justification of creation, by declaring it good, is made in light of God's purpose for creation.⁶⁹ Thus the goodness of creation consists in the fact that God makes the creation serviceable for the rule of his free grace in Jesus Christ.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 48-49.

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 231.

⁶⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 369.

⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, translated by G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 42.

Barth interprets the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 as underscoring this central theme.⁷¹ God has not created a “perfect” world that can sustain itself independently of God, but rather a world that requires the providential care and fatherly governance of God for its ongoing continuance. Nor has God created a world in which every possibility of harm and sorrow has been removed so that we may enjoy lives of uninterrupted bliss irrespective of how we stand in relation to God. Rather God has created a world that bears witness to the fact that God has created us to be the recipients of his grace and that outside of this human life is menaced and threatened with extinction and has no meaning, stability, or permanence. The Genesis creation accounts bear witness to this reality by portraying the cosmos created by God such that humanity is both secure yet in jeopardy.⁷² God’s good created world is well prepared to nourish and nurture these naked human creatures, yet their dwelling place is in close proximity to hostile regions and creatures that have the capacity to threaten, menace, and overwhelm them. Thus in God’s good world *every created thing directs the human creatures to recognise the reality of their telos* – either positively by bearing witness to the security and nurturing that God’s good creation affords them, or negatively by bearing witness to the jeopardy and menace that God’s good creation represents to them outside of the loving protection of God.

The Bible begins,

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. (Gen. 1:1-4)

Barth describes the formless void and darkness that covered the face of the deep, as “... a world-state over which the Word of God has not been uttered.”⁷³ Barth incorporates this into what R. Scott Rodin helpfully calls a “three-tiered system of

⁷¹ In his exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 in *CD III/1* §41, Barth interprets the first account from the point of view of creation as the external basis of the covenant and the second account from the point of view of the covenant as the internal basis of creation. For my purposes I do not seek to emphasise this distinction in this way. What I do wish to show from *both* creation accounts, within Barth’s theological framework of covenant and creation, is the way that every created thing in God’s good world directs the human creatures to recognise the reality of their *telos*.

⁷² Barth, *CD III/3*, 296.

⁷³ Barth, *CD III/1*, 108.

sorts”.⁷⁴ First there is God’s creation from his positive “right hand” – this is what Barth calls the “light” side of God’s creation. Second there is the creation from his negative “left hand”, yet still from God’s positive will – what Barth calls the “shadow” side of God’s creation. Barth contrasts these two aspects of the positive will of God as follows.

It is true that in creation there is not only a Yes but also a No; not only a height but also an abyss; not only clarity but also obscurity; not only progress and continuation, but also impediment and limitation; not only growth but also decay; not only opulence but indigence; not only beauty but also ashes; not only beginning but also end; not only value but also worthlessness. ... Bright and dark, success and failure, laughter and tears, youth and age, gain and loss, birth and sooner or later its inevitable corollary, death.⁷⁵

Barth insists that *both* aspects, the light *and* the shadow side of creation, reflect the goodness of God, for both of these things emerge from God’s positive will for creation and serve the covenantal purposes of God. We may understand the light side of creation as that which bears positive witness to and reminds us of the security and nurturing that God’s good creation affords human beings that we may be encouraged and resourced to know God, to love God, and to act responsibly before God. Likewise we may understand the shadow side as that which bears negative witness to and reminds us of the jeopardy and menace that God’s good creation represents to human beings outside of the grace of God that we may fear God, trust and obey God, seek his providential governance in human affairs, and recognise our need to know God and to act responsibly before God.⁷⁶

Barth does not discern the world in this way because he observes the world and *then* on this basis rationally determines that it must be constituted thus. Barth’s method is always to understand the world in light of Jesus Christ. Barth understands the world to be constituted in this twofold way because the world in its light and shadow sides

⁷⁴ R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Peter Lang: New York, 1997), 187.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296-97.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

... corresponds to the intention of God as revealed by Him in the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of the world with Himself effected in Him. For in Him God has made Himself the Subject of both aspects of creaturely existence. And having made it His own in Jesus Christ, He has affirmed it in its totality, reconciling its inner antithesis in His own person.⁷⁷

For Barth, it is the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ that attests to this twofold determination of creation since “We cannot ignore the fact that in Jesus Christ God has again and expressly claimed the whole of creation as His work, adopting and as it were taking it to heart in both its positive and negative aspects.”⁷⁸ This is because in Jesus Christ, God himself becomes both creator and creature and takes to himself this twofold determination – “... its greatness and wretchedness, its infinite dignity and infinite frailty, its hope and despair, [and] its rejoicing and its sorrow.”⁷⁹ Because *both* aspects of God’s good creation are united and reconciled in the person of Jesus Christ, Barth argues that Christian faith must therefore affirm that the cosmos is constituted in this way and as such is good and not evil. Moreover it is Barth’s Christological conviction that because “[Christ] himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) the *all things* that hold together in Jesus Christ must include the totality of God’s good creaturely reality – the positive light side *and* its corresponding negative shadow side. It is only on this basis, Barth emphasises, that Christians may hope that,

When Jesus Christ shall finally return as the Lord and Head of all that God has created, it will also be revealed that both in light and shadow, on the right hand and on the left, everything created was very good and supremely glorious.⁸⁰

But thirdly, within the covenantal will of God for creation there also lies the bewildering fact that God has allowed a specific reality to possess a peculiar existence that has the capacity to menace, threaten, and overwhelm God’s human creatures – what Barth calls *das Nichtige* translated “nothingness”.⁸¹ This is the product of the non-willing of God – his negative will – and is not good but entirely evil. Barth defines nothingness as

⁷⁷ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* III/3, 301.

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 377.

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

⁸¹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 367.

... the ancient menace, danger and destruction, the ancient non-being which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God but which is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ, in whose death it has received its deserts, being destroyed with this consummation of the positive will of God which is as such the end of His non-willing.⁸²

For Barth, the ontological reality of nothingness is grounded in the holy electing will of God who has determined to create an external world to be the theatre for the enactment of the covenant of grace in which God is both lord and saviour

Nothingness is grounded in God's electing will because

God is also holy, and this means that His being and activity take place in a definite opposition, in a real negation, both defensive and aggressive.

Nothingness is that from which God separates Himself and in face of which He asserts Himself and exerts His positive will. ... [In his holiness] God elects, and therefore rejects what He does not elect. God wills, and therefore opposes what He does not will. He says Yes, and therefore says No to that to which He has not said Yes. He works according to His purpose, and in so doing rejects and dismisses all that gainsays it.⁸³

Nothingness is not simply or only human sin. Nothingness is constituted in the evil structures of reality that are in fundamental hostile opposition to the covenantal will of God and which human beings, in their sin, may align themselves with. Thus nothingness transcends human sin while also being manifested in it. For Barth, human sin consists in the rejection of the goodness and grace of God.⁸⁴ What makes human sin so "real and inexcusable" is that it confronts God's loving electing will that God's human creature should live in the fullness of their true humanity in fellowship with God and fellow-humanity – *and then repudiates it!*⁸⁵ Instead of choosing and affirming the choice of God, God's human creatures elect to lust after and pursue a Godless and neighbourless existence that robs us of the freedom of our true humanity – an existence that God separated himself from, rejected, opposed, said "No" to, and dismissed in creation. Moreover, nothingness manifests an existence that is anathema to genuine human well-being and flourishing – an

⁸² Barth, *CD* III/3, 363.

⁸³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 351.

⁸⁴ Barth, *CD* III/3, 308.

⁸⁵ Barth, *CD* III/3, 308.

existence that God has confronted, mastered, defeated, and triumphed over in Jesus Christ in the humiliation and suffering of his passion and death and in the exaltation and glory of his resurrection and ascension.

Bath argues that one of the functions of the negative shadow side of God's good creation is to serve as a warning and reminder to human beings of the peril and jeopardy we expose ourselves to when we reject the grace of God and orientate ourselves toward and embrace the evil of nothingness – even in its fragmentary and defeated existence. Barth regards the shadow side as lying on the “frontier” of nothingness and human beings as having the capacity to cross this frontier.

On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness, for this ... is at once the expression and frontier of the positive will, election and activity of God. When the creature crosses the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world.⁸⁶

When the creature perversely and inexplicably chooses that which God has rejected ... the concrete form in which nothingness is active and revealed is the sin of man as his personal act and guilt, his aberration from the grace of God and its command, his refusal of the gratitude he owes to God and the concomitant freedom and obligation, his arrogant attempt to be his own master, provider and comforter, his unhallowed lust for what is not his own, the falsehood and pride in which he is enmeshed in relation to his neighbour, the stupidity to which he is self-condemned, and a life which follows the course thereby determined on the basis of the necessity thus imposed.⁸⁷

But nothingness confronts the creature only *secondarily* because it is *primarily* opposed to the positive will of God to be the God of the covenant. Thus God takes primary responsibility for the nothingness that corrupts and perverts the creature. Thus as Barth puts it “... [God] has made the controversy with it *His* affair ...”⁸⁸ As a result of God's victory in Jesus Christ nothingness no longer has any “objective existence”, nor does it have any continuance “except for our blinded eyes”.⁸⁹ Barth maintains an excruciating antithesis at this point that is all the more astonishing in

⁸⁶ Barth, *CD* III/3, 350.

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD* III/3, 305.

⁸⁸ Barth, *CD* III/3, 362. Emphasis Barth's.

⁸⁹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 363.

that he is writing this section in the very recent aftermath of the holocaust. He maintains that evil is destroyed in Christ and it is only our “blindness” and lack of faith in this reality that allows nothingness a “fragmentary existence”. Despite it being “... broken, judged, refuted and destroyed ...” it still has a “... standing and ... significance to the extent that the final revelation of its destruction has not yet taken place and all creation must still await and expect it.”⁹⁰ This antithesis being an excellent example of what Rodin calls Barth’s “noetic eschatology” – that the *eschaton* will be an unveiling of what is already an ontic reality in Jesus Christ.⁹¹ But although defeated and mastered, nothingness is still to be feared for God “... thinks it good that we should exist “as if” He had not yet mastered it for us ...”⁹² For, as Barth argues,

God still permits His kingdom not to be seen by us, and to that extent He still permits us to be a prey to nothingness. Until the hour strikes when its destruction in the victory of Jesus Christ will be finally revealed, He thus permits nothingness to retain its semblance of significance and still to manifest its already fragmentary existence.⁹³

Barth is attempting to hold two things together in tension here. He neither allows God to be the creator of evil nor allows it to exist independently of God – God is its lord and “... assign[s] it a place and give[s] it a role to play and a duty to perform.”⁹⁴ Moreover Barth does not want to absolve human beings of culpability in this matter by portraying us as passive victims in the face of evil. Barth clearly wants to acknowledge human agency and responsibility in relation to actualising the evil of nothingness in the creaturely realm.

Barth maintains that the light and shadow side of God’s good creation bears witness to the twofold determination under which God creates humankind. Positively, “God created man to lift him in His own Son into fellowship with Himself” and negatively “... this elevation presupposes a wretchedness of human and all existence which His own Son will share and bear.”⁹⁵ Therefore “... everything is created for Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection [and] from the outset must stand under this twofold

⁹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/3, 367.

⁹¹ Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 14.

⁹² Barth, *CD* III/3, 367.

⁹³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 367.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 127.

⁹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/1, 376.

and contradictory determination.”⁹⁶ Thus from all eternity the triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit has determined to be *this* God for us and with us – the God who creates, reconciles, and redeems a needy and wretched humanity through the incarnation, life, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The goodness of creation consists of it being serviceable to the glory of God in the work of his son. Because creation lies under *this* determination it is perfectly good. God’s justification of creation, Barth argues, relieves us of the need to form our own judgements, either condemning it with pessimists, or acquitting it with optimists, or even taking an indifferent stance of neutrality toward it.⁹⁷

God’s faithfulness to his covenant is that he will maintain the creation in the face of all opposition for the sake of the human beings God has created for grace.⁹⁸ This is reflected in the two creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 in that the creation contains visible signs that humanity is both secure and threatened and thus stands continually in need of the providential care of God to graciously preserve humanity and to protect it from these threats. Moreover, the creation accounts affirm the grace of God by which God *does* preserve and uphold creation for the sake of the covenant and at the same time provides signs that point to our essential being – that we are creatures prepared and equipped for grace. Everything necessary for the sustenance of human life is prepared *before* the creation of humankind on day six.

Day six sees the creation of the animals of the earth and in particular the creation of humankind that, uniquely, is created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27). For Barth, “Let us make humankind in our image ...” (Gen. 1:26) means that humans are created as beings which have their ground and possibility in the fact that in “... God’s own sphere and being there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded prototype to which this being can correspond ...”⁹⁹ With humankind a genuine counterpart to God is created that the other living creatures anticipate – a genuine “I” and “Thou” relationship is created. There is nothing else in all creation that the “I” of God can confront as a genuine “Thou” other than the human being he has created and only a human being out of all created reality can relate to another human

⁹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 376.

⁹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 370.

⁹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 118-19.

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 183.

being on a genuine “I” and “Thou” basis.¹⁰⁰ For Barth, the image of God is not to be found in human attributes – it does not consist in anything that humanity is or does. It consists as human beings subsist as the creature of God. God wills the existence of a human creature that can be his partner and counterpart capable of action and responsibility in relation to him to which his own divine form of life is not alien.¹⁰¹ Thus Barth argues, “In God’s own being and sphere there is a counterpart; a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free co-existence and co-operation; an open confrontation and reciprocity.”¹⁰² Therefore it follows that human beings are also the image of God in relation to our fellows – free encounter, co-existence, co-operation, open confrontation, and reciprocity are repeated in the relation of human to human.¹⁰³

Humankind is blessed by God, along with the other earthbound animals, fish, and birds to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”, but uniquely that it may “... subdue [the earth] and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

Humankind is given lordship over the animal kingdom, but it is not this, Barth argues, that constitutes the divine likeness. It is as a *consequence* of the divine likeness that humankind is distinguished from the beasts.¹⁰⁴ Humans can never be the lords of nature since they are not its creator, they can only carry out a commission.¹⁰⁵ Thus Barth argues the controlling thought in relation to the dominion of humankind must be *grace* since this dominion is a commission from God who is the lord of humankind. Furthermore to exercise their lordship human beings need a special blessing from God.¹⁰⁶ But Barth warns that in exercising dominion humankind engages in a God-like activity in which humanity “... assumes a dangerous proximity to God’s activity as Creator in which it may be both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover the account of the fall in Genesis 3 consists of humankind being deceived by a creature that they were to have dominion over.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 184.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 185.

¹⁰² Barth, *CD* III/1, 185.

¹⁰³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 185.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 187.

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 206.

Because this thesis is concerned with the economic implications involved in human activity that “subdues” the earth and exercises “dominion over” created life, Barth’s warning concerning human work that seeks this “dangerous proximity to God’s activity” and which risks being “both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective” will need to be given full consideration. So too will his reminders that human dominion over the earth is not absolute and that humankind’s original downfall consists in the failure to exercise proper God-given dominion. These themes are picked up in part II of this thesis.

The conclusion to the first creation account (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4) emphasises that “... on the seventh day God finished the work he had done and he rested ...” (Gen. 2:2). The seventh day confirms the conclusion of God’s work. The Sabbath rest that concludes the first account is related to the second account of creation. For Barth, the first account’s “very good” indicates God’s verdict that nothing further needs to be added, all that remains is for humankind to be confirmed and preserved under God’s rule, which is really the theme of the second account.¹⁰⁹ In his rest, as Barth so eloquently puts it, God does not retreat into “... the aseity of the inner glory of His being and existence before creation ...”¹¹⁰ but entered into relationship with the specific reality that God willed to create. Therefore Barth argues, the rest of God signals his limit in terms of what he wills for creation. God’s rest reveals the freedom of God. Neither God nor his creature is bound by the necessity of some relentless cosmic principle that imposes its will from the outside and drives forever onward.¹¹¹ Moreover God’s rest also reveals his love. A relentless drive onward is never satisfied. Love has a definite limited objective. Because God has found the object of his love, he ceases his creative activity for he has no need of further works.¹¹² And so, Barth argues, God’s freedom and love are the true criterion of his deity revealed in his rest.¹¹³ Here in the seventh day God is most truly himself and humankind most truly fulfilled in its purpose. In his rest God links himself in a temporal act with the being and purpose of humanity – this really is the aseity of his own glory, the glory of the incarnate Christ who is “God with us”.¹¹⁴ The meaning of the Sabbath rest is the revelation of the true nature of the deity of God, his

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 213.

¹¹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 214.

¹¹¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 215.

¹¹² Barth, *CD* III/1, 215.

¹¹³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 215.

¹¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 216-17.

freedom and love and in this freedom and love God reveals that he belongs to and binds himself to what he has created. Thus for Barth the history of the covenant is really established in the event of the seventh day – God in his true deity in direct relationship with humankind in our true humanity.¹¹⁵ He argues that everything that follows in the history of the covenant is the road back to this point. This is the purpose of creation and humankind – to rest with God in the goodness of created reality.¹¹⁶

In the second creation account humankind is created from the earth to be God's partner in bringing the earth to fruitful fullness.¹¹⁷ In Genesis 2:7 and 2:19, God forms both *adam* and the beasts from the dust of the ground (*adamah*). But it is the human being alone who becomes a living soul through God "... breath[ing] into his nostrils the breath of life ..." (Gen. 2:7). That human beings are formed from the earth and enlivened by the breath of God confirms humankind's humility, glory, and humanity and is the basis of our rightful awe of God.¹¹⁸ Therefore Barth emphasises that in creating humankind in this way, God gives us a special reason to put our confidence in God, for our being is precarious and threatened, yet preserved by God, but always at risk of returning to the earth from which it was formed.¹¹⁹ Being created in this way, humankind is revealed in all its frailty and in all its God-given glory. Humanity stands under both the mercy and judgement of God and, as Barth argues, holds in microcosm the whole history of Israel as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹²⁰ It is only by hope in the grace of God that humankind will not experience the fate of the beasts. This is our hope and threat as creatures that are utterly dependent upon God – the God who equips us to be saved by grace.¹²¹

The concluding theme in Genesis 2 is the completion of humankind in the creation of male and female. It is the duality of male and female that constitutes the wholeness and completion of humankind for "... it is not good that man should be alone ..." (Gen. 2:18). As Barth exegetes this passage, solitary "man" is "not good" because this does not correspond to the loving relationality that constitutes the being

¹¹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/1, 217.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 98.

¹¹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 235.

¹¹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 236.

¹¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 236-37. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:19.

¹²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 244.

¹²¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 247.

of the triune God. Solitary “man” would mean a creation that was not good since it would lack its internal basis – that God seeks to be in relationship with humankind as male and female.¹²² To be God’s partner, human beings also need a partner or helpmeet – “... a being like him and yet different from him, so that in it he will recognise himself but not only himself, since it is to him a Thou as truly as he is an I, and he is to it a Thou as truly as it is an I.”¹²³ It is in being given a partner and the consequential possibility of relational interaction that God helps prepare human beings for God’s grace. The first saying of *adam* is the joyful expression of recognition – the proclamation of a choice and decision.¹²⁴

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.” (Gen. 2:23).

For Barth, the whole story aims at this exclamation and in this proclamation creation reaches its goal.¹²⁵ It is only now that God’s creative purpose to prepare human beings for his grace reaches its climax. *Adam* chooses to accept this gift in an act of freedom following much seeking. The animals are only mentioned by way of contrast so as to highlight the significance of the partner. God brings the animals (whom God also has formed from the earth) to solitary *adam* and although *adam* has dominion over them they do not *belong* to him – he cannot relate to them as I and Thou. With the animals the “man” is solitary; he is not in the presence of one who is his equal in dignity and honour, yet distinct and differentiated as a genuine Thou.¹²⁶ In the absence of a genuinely human other, there is a gap or vacuum in creation. The “man’s” sovereignty over the animals, without the partnership that God provides for him in other human beings, particularly in the duality and partnership of male and female, serves only to reveal the lack of goodness in creation. It really is not good for the man to be alone! To genuinely choose, one must be free to seek and reject other possibilities. In his negative choice not to find a partner in the animals that God brought to him and in his positive choice to choose the partner that God created and brought to him, Barth argues that *adam* confirmed

¹²² Barth, CD III/1, 290.

¹²³ Barth, CD III/1, 290.

¹²⁴ Barth, CD III/1, 291.

¹²⁵ Barth, CD III/1, 291.

¹²⁶ Barth, CD III/1, 292.

himself as genuinely human – as the creature intended by God.¹²⁷ In choosing to be human, he is choosing to be dissatisfied with every other creature that God brings to him. He cannot recognise his counterpart and partner in any of them.

1.3 The being of the God who creates as the one who loves in freedom

What was and is the will of God in doing all this? Barth's answer to this question is "... that [God] does not will to be alone in His glory; that He desires something else beside Him. But this answer cannot mean that God either willed and did it for no purpose, or that He did it to satisfy a need."¹²⁸ Thus God did not create out of caprice or by mistake, nor did God create to fulfil some divine need or to realise himself. God's decision to create a reality distinct from himself arises out of the freedom and love of God. It is these two things, God's freedom and God's love that play a central and decisive role in Barth's theology and which are very much to the forefront in his doctrine of creation. God is under no compulsion or necessity to create – he creates out of freedom. In his essential being God suffers no lack that the creation of an external reality makes good nor does the existence of this reality confer a benefit upon God that was previously absent. God creates in freedom, yet in all his subsequent ways and works, God in his freedom, remains faithful to his first work. God creates because he wills to be in fellowship with the human creature he has created – he creates out of love. In his essential triunity of being God *is* love and seeks to share this love with his human creatures. The freedom and love of God are intrinsic to the very being of God. The loving relationality that constitutes the triune being of God is such that God is completely fulfilled within his own being.¹²⁹ It is the triune nature of God and the loving relationality within the triune being of God that provides the theological basis for knowing that God's eternal decision "before the foundation of the world" to choose to love the human creatures that he would subsequently create in time and space, is a decision that arises out of the freedom and love of God. This is the one act that, above all others, is utterly unique

¹²⁷ Barth, CD III/1, 293.

¹²⁸ Barth, CD III/1, 95.

¹²⁹ This is made clear in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks of the love that eternally exists between the Father and the Son "... before the foundation of the world." (Jn. 17:24), and the desire of Jesus to make known to his disciples "... the love with which you [Father] have loved me [that it] may be in them ..." (Jn. 17:26).

to God and which makes God God. As Barth expresses it, “God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us.”¹³⁰

Fundamental to all this is the establishment of a *relationship*. This relationship will involve mercy and love, wrath and judgement, longsuffering and faithfulness. From our perspective the whole venture may often appear doubtful. But by the revelation of God, God only wills one thing – to be in relationship with the human creatures that he has prepared for grace, for blessing, and for life.¹³¹ And it is in this that the genuine essence of God is revealed, for the inner being of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is loving relationality and freely given and received fellowship that desires to extend outwards to include created reality. As Barth expresses it,

We recognise and appreciate this blessing when we describe God’s being more specifically in the statement that He is the One who loves. That He is God – the Godhead of God – consists in the fact that He loves, and it is the expression of His loving that He seeks and creates fellowship with us.¹³²

“God is Love” (1 Jn. 4:8). But we have no mandate to fill in the content of this love from our own independent thinking. It is the story of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ that describes the *content* of the love that constitutes the being of God. God’s love consists in creating fellowship for its own sake. His blessing is not some *thing* that he desires to give us, but rather he gives us some *being* – he gives us himself in the fullness of the loving relationality that constitutes the triune being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹³³ The relationship that God desires with human beings is not something new to God, but is, Barth argues, “... an exact copy of the relationship in which [the Son] stands to the Father and the Father to Him.”¹³⁴ It is not the *same* relationship, but it incorporates human beings into the same *love* that exists within the triune being of God in the creaturely world. Thus the love with which God loves humankind *corresponds* to the love that is original to the being of God. God’s love and desire for fellowship does not depend upon some worth or merit on our part, nor is God’s love blind for God sees very clearly the object of his saving love. God does not love us on account of our loveliness,¹³⁵ but rather it is the love of God that

¹³⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 273.

¹³¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 274-75.

¹³² Barth, *CD* II/1, 275.

¹³³ Barth, *CD* II/1, 276.

¹³⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 220.

¹³⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1, 278.

promises to render us truly lovely. God's love does not seek any other end than the establishment and consummation of fellowship; it is not the instrument whereby God achieves some other goal. The love of God is the ultimate reason that explains who God is and what God does. As Barth expresses it, "... God loves because He loves; because this act is His being, His essence and His nature."¹³⁶

Because it is the love of God that constitutes the essential being of God it follows that only God can love as God loves, that all God does flows out of this love, and that all of our understanding about "...who and what God is must revolve around this mystery – the mystery of His loving".¹³⁷ Moreover, as Barth argues, it is this reality that enables us to understand true personhood and thus distinguishes an "I" from an "it" – a person from a thing. Knowledge of true personhood derives from God

For He alone is the One who loves without any other good, without any other ground, without any other aim, without any other blessedness than what He has in Himself, and who as He does so is Himself and as such can confront another, a Thou.¹³⁸

Genuine personhood is not a natural attribute of human beings. What we call "love" is frequently an instrument by which we seek other ends, a mask by which we attempt to disguise the fact that we encounter the other as an "it" rather than a "Thou", and an anaesthetic by which we seek to allay our inner dread that our own personhood and identity are insecurely grounded. True personhood resides only in the being of God and, as Barth argues, we are only enabled to *become* genuine persons "... on the basis that [we are] loved by God and can love God in return."¹³⁹ Genuine human personhood in all its fullness is found only in Jesus Christ for it is only the man Jesus who loves God with all his being and his neighbour as himself.¹⁴⁰ It is God's self-revelation in the genuine personhood of Jesus Christ that provides the theological basis for rejecting as non-Christian depictions of God in abstract terms. God is not an *it* or a concept; God is a *someone*, not a *something*.¹⁴¹ God is not a force, a ground of being, a prime mover, or whatever, but the one who freely loves us in Jesus Christ.

¹³⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1, 279.

¹³⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 283.

¹³⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 284.

¹³⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 284.

¹⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 286.

¹⁴¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 286.

However, as Barth argues, God is not simply the being who truly loves, but the being who truly loves in *freedom*. God is not conditioned or constrained by anything external to God, but is grounded in his own being and determined and moved by himself.¹⁴² This constitutes the lordship and transcendence of God. God is lord and rules the created cosmos in the plenitude of the power that is God's alone. "But His lordship is in all circumstances the lordship of his living and loving."¹⁴³ God's transcendence must not be conceived in abstract and absolute terms that simply magnify to the uttermost those characteristics we see, desire, or lack in ourselves. This is to conceive of God in relation to our own ambitions or limits and thus to both create an idol and to negate our own humanity.¹⁴⁴ As Barth emphasises, the transcendence of God is God's distinction from all createdness – the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity, between God and all that is distinct from God. But, as Barth argues, the Bible testifies to the unique freedom of God in that God "... without sacrificing His distinction and freedom, but in the exercise of them, He enters into and faithfully maintains communion with this reality other than Himself in His activity as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer."¹⁴⁵ The transcendence of God does not prevent God from being God with and for us in Jesus Christ. Indeed it is this very transcendence of God that enables him to overcome any obstacle to being the free and loving God of the covenant that he wills to be.

It is Barth's decisive insight that God's freedom means that he is free to be God for us and free to be immanent with us and within us to the uttermost depths of our being without detriment to us as human creatures or detriment to God as the being who has created us.¹⁴⁶ As Barth so eloquently asserts, God is free to be God for us in any way that he chooses and in as many different ways or occasions as he chooses. He is free to lift up and free to cast down, free to be exalted and free to be humiliated, free to bless and free to punish. God is free to elect in love to be the God of the covenant of grace in which he creates human creatures for loving fellowship and free to become human, to be crucified, and resurrected for our sins.¹⁴⁷ Yet for all this the freedom of God is not caprice. For all the multitude of

¹⁴² Barth, *CD* II/1, 301.

¹⁴³ Barth, *CD* II/1, 301.

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* II/1, 303-04.

¹⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1, 303.

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1, 313.

¹⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 313-15.

ways in which God may choose to be free, Barth emphasises, they "... have a very definite centre, that is, they have their basis and their consummation, their meaning, their norm and their law in Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁸ This is because "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). Thus for Christian faith, the knowledge of God is found in Jesus Christ alone and our understanding of God as the being who loves in freedom can only be on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. "Christology, therefore" Barth insists "must always constitute the basis and criterion for the apprehension and interpretation of the freedom of God in His immanence."¹⁴⁹

It is the triune nature of God and the loving relationality within the triune being of God that provides the theological basis for knowing that God's eternal decision "before the foundation of the world" to choose to love the human creatures that he would subsequently create in time and space, is a decision that arises out of the freedom and love of God. Not only does the freedom and love that constitutes the essential being of the triune God disclose the *basis* for creation, it also discloses its *purpose* and *goal*. In creating, God does not simply will the mere existence of an external world. He desires a world in which human beings have their own integrity, dignity, and reality. Therefore God desires human beings who have and exercise genuine freedom and genuine love. But the freedom that God wills for human beings is not an absolute freedom in the modern sense of the concept that stands at the moral crossroads as some existential Hercules choosing between good and evil with a view to independent self-realisation, but rather a relative freedom in which we are invited by God to choose to affirm the creaturely being that God has created us to be.¹⁵⁰ In other words, it is God's will that we use our freedom to affirm that God has created us for a relationship of love with God and for loving fellow-humanity. It is God's purpose in creating human beings that, in freedom, we affirm God's will for us to exist in loving relationality with God and others, and that, in love, we affirm God's will for us to exist in the integrity, dignity, and reality of genuine freedom in relation to God and to others. Furthermore, this is the *goal* toward which God's creative purpose is being guided in the providential governance of God. The goal of creation is the kingdom of God in which a reconciled and redeemed cosmos is set free from all that has contradicted and opposed the will of

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 316-17.

¹⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 320.

¹⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 265.

God to exist with God in genuine freedom and love, for the glory of God and the good of humanity. But as Webster is careful to point out, for Barth God's freedom and God's love are not two different themes, they are the same theme differently considered for "... God's freedom *is* his love."¹⁵¹

Thus the basis, purpose, and goal of creation derive from the triune being of God who is and acts, in and for, freedom and love. Moreover, and decisively for Christian ethics, this freedom and love not only constitutes the being of the triune God and discloses the purpose and goal of creation, but also shapes and determines *human* being, purpose, and *telos*. The freedom and love that derive from the being of God and out of which he creates both the cosmos and humanity provides us with the basis for understanding the good that human life ought to correspond to. In other words it is the freedom and love of God, especially as we see this given concrete historical expression in the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ, which provides the basis for Christian ethics. The good life and the ethical action that God calls us to is that which has its own appropriate creaturely counterpart in the freedom and love of God as this is expressed in Jesus Christ. God calls us to a form of life that bears witness to and corresponds to the freedom and love of God as this is fulfilled in the covenant of grace. Thus if our economic activity is to correspond to the work of God it will correspond to the work of God that has its basis, purpose, and goal in the freedom and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

¹⁵¹ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 45.

Chapter 2: The Christian Doctrine of Creation: The Human Being God has Created

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

(Gen. 1:26-27)

In this chapter I address the question, "Who is the human being created by the God of the covenant?" This question also raises methodological and epistemological issues. In the first section – *Methodology: Our knowledge of human being* – I explore Barth's key methodological conviction that a true knowledge of human being can only be derived from the man Jesus, not our own independent conceptions of humanity derived from other sources. But knowledge of human being cannot be gained *directly* from Jesus Christ, for although Jesus as man is fully like us, as God he is utterly unlike us. Therefore our true humanity may only be deduced *indirectly* from the fact that the man Jesus exists in his humanity only in relation to the saving activity of God. From this we deduce that our true humanity does not consist in terms of our capacities and potentialities independent of the covenantal purposes of God. Rather it is constituted in the humanity of Jesus and characterised by action that corresponds to the action of Jesus. In the second section – *The human creature God has created – our divine determination* – I explore Barth's theological anthropology from the perspective of what we are from the point of view of the covenant, from "above" as it were. The true humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is *for* God and *for* us and that he is for us *because* he is for God. Jesus is not for God and for us as aspects of an otherwise autonomous and independent life, rather this *is* who he is. Being for God and for us is his ontology. Thus deriving our humanity from the humanity of Jesus means that our true human being can only be understood as being in relation to God and being in relation to fellow-humanity. Thus true humanity cannot be Godless or neighbourless. In the third section – *The human creature God has created – our creaturely form* – I explore Barth's

theological anthropology from the perspective of what we are from the point of view of the creation, from “below” as it were. The human nature of Jesus consists of an ordered unity of body and soul – the ruling soul of a serving body enlivened and sustained by the Spirit of God. Our human nature corresponds to the human nature of Jesus for it is by the Spirit of God that we have life and breath and by which we are enabled to *know* as the souls of our bodies and to *act* in the world as the bodies of our souls. It is only because God has created us to know him and to act responsibly before him that we may understand that we are rational beings.

At the living centre of Christian ethics is the knowledge of who God is and the reason he has created (chapter 1) and the knowledge of who the human being is that God has created and the purpose of our being (this chapter). *All* Christian ethics flow out of these two things and it is these two things that point us to the purpose of our lives and thus our economic activity. Therefore this chapter builds on the material of chapter 1 to provide the basis for Christian ethics, which is the substance of chapter 3.

2.1 Methodology: Our knowledge of human being

Following Barth, my overarching thought in chapter 1 is that we may only know who God is in relation to the activity of God as this is revealed in the history of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ and attested in Holy Scripture. This chapter is concerned with how we may have knowledge of the human creature God has created for covenantal fellowship. But in answering this second question our methodology is the same as in answering the first. That is, just as we may only know *God* in terms of God’s activity in relation to us, we can only know *human being* in light of this same activity of God.¹

The Bible recognises the totality of the universe and speaks of the earth, sun, and stars. It also speaks of the oceans, sky, and land, and the living creatures that inhabit them. But the Bible is not concerned about these things for their own sake nor is it concerned about the totality of the universe as such. Because the cosmos is the external basis for the covenant between God and humankind, the cosmos *itself* can

¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 3.

never become the object of autonomous investigation, as though it could be understood independent of God's purpose for creation. It is Barth's fundamental theological method that we may only understand God, humanity, and the cosmos in relation to *God's activity in the history of the covenant*. It is *this* that the Bible speaks of – its concern is with the history of the covenant of grace and therefore with the specific relationship that God has with *humankind*. It is for this reason, Barth argues, that the Christian doctrine of creation is anthropocentric.² Thus a Christian doctrine of creation is in practice theological *anthropology*. Therefore *to this extent* theology acknowledges as true Alexander Pope's famous observation that, "... The proper study of Mankind is Man."³ And it is Barth's contention that "... directly or indirectly, openly or latently, explicitly or implicitly, the problem of man has always been acknowledged as the key-problem of all human reflection."⁴ At bottom all human knowledge, including theological knowledge, is either open or concealed anthropology that seeks to answer the question, "What is human being and what is our relation to the cosmos?" Thus anthropocentric concerns really motivate all knowledge. However, what distinguishes theological anthropology from non-theological anthropology is that it is *theological* anthropology. Unlike Pope's anthropology that "... presume[s] not God to scan ..." Christian theology recognises that we can only have true knowledge of ourselves in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the knowledge of God that enables us to know ourselves points us to the fact that genuine humanity can only be constituted in relation to God. Therefore we cannot take the route that presumes to use the knowledge of God as an instrument for self-knowledge that, once gained, can be dispensed with so as to establish an autonomous existence independent of God. A theological knowledge of human being can only understand true humanity in *relationship* to God. Thus for Barth, the truly godless person, if such a thing were possible, is in fact not truly human at all.⁵

Therefore theological anthropology takes as its epistemological foundation the Word of God, for the true knowledge of who we are in relation to God is knowledge that only God can reveal.⁶ This is the Christian epistemological presupposition upon

² Barth, *CD* III/2, 12.

³ Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man", in *Poetical Works*, ed. H. F. Cary (London: Routledge, 1870), 225-226.

⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 21.

⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 72.

⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 20.

which theology either stands or falls. This does not make theology infallible, for like all disciplines, theology is a human work and as such may fail to do justice to its calling and proper object of study.⁷ But as Barth humbly yet confidently recognises,

... this does not affect in the least the uniqueness, the height and depth, the richness of the material which [theological anthropology] tries to use for better or for worse. As it understands the creatureliness of man from the Word of God addressed to him and illuminating him as no other creature, it draws from the fountain of all truth, and it is enabled to see the depths of the being of man and summoned to utter the true and final word concerning him. This special origin and this special claim mark it off from all the very different attempts at self-knowledge which seem to be its competitors.⁸

This does not mean that a Christian doctrine of creation is unconcerned with the cosmos as a totality. But it does mean that if we begin with the Word of God then we must speak of what is revealed to us there. And what is revealed is the history of God's covenant with *humankind*. Thus, as Barth argues, the Christian doctrine of creation is not called upon to provide an ontology of the totality of the created order. Theology is not required to construct or defend some sort of "Christian cosmology" – some philosophy, ideology, or architecture of the totality of the universe.⁹ Thus to speak *christianly* about creation we must speak of God's covenantal purposes for creation. This means we must speak of human being in light of who God is, the activity of God, and what God has revealed to us in Holy Scripture about who and what we are.

Therefore we ask along with the Psalmist, "What is man?"¹⁰ But just as Barth is not concerned with just *any* knowledge of human being, neither is he interested in the knowledge of just *any* human being. Biblical anthropology, in general, has traditionally taken the methodological approach of trying to establish on various grounds what human nature consists of and *then* to understand human being and the humanity of Jesus in light of this.¹¹ The key problem with this approach for Barth is that, even if such knowledge were possible, it could only ever be the knowledge of

⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 20.

⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 20-21.

⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 6.

¹⁰ "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Psalm 8:3-4. King James Version.

¹¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 44.

human beings in their present condition of alienation from God.¹² The knowledge of human beings in their sin is something that Barth argues can only be properly understood in relation to the doctrine of reconciliation.¹³ But in relation to the doctrine of creation, his concern is to enquire about the human creatureliness presupposed in the covenantal relationship that God has established. In essence, the key question Barth asks is, “What kind of being is it that God has created for relationship with himself?”¹⁴ Thus Barth wants knowledge of the true human being God planned from all eternity and created godly and “very good” by the power of his Word to love, give freedom to, be in fellowship with, and accept praise and worship from. It is *this* human Barth wishes to speak of and only in light of this good and godly human will Barth then speak of the temporary aberration of sin. In taking this approach he does not seek to minimise sin, but he does want to speak of it in its proper context (under the heading of reconciliation) and not give it a distorted emphasis (by speaking of it in relation to creation). The fact of our sin is neither the first nor the last thing about us. For Barth, the threefold reality of human being is that we are: created for covenantal relationship with God; exist in the present contradiction of our sin; and are the recipients of divine grace.¹⁵ In this the covenant and grace are primary and human sin is secondary. In speaking of humanity we must not give sin a greater place than the covenant and the grace of God. In our sin, humans do not bring into existence a new being or a new humanity, nor do we unmake ourselves, escape from God, or from our true selves.¹⁶ We have the God-given freedom to disobey God and say “no” to the covenant, but we cannot annul the covenant, we cannot escape God’s loving judgment, God’s covenantal faithfulness, or God’s holy fire that ultimately will separate us from our sin.¹⁷ Thus for Barth, human beings cannot speak any word against the first word of God by which humankind was created that has any constitutive or ontological significance.¹⁸

Thus theological anthropology cannot begin with sinful humanity, as though some new order of being now exists, and make this the object of study. But how can we have knowledge of the true humanity God created? For when we search the Bible, as Barth notes, “... the revelation of God does not show us man as we wish to see

¹² Barth, *CD* III/2, 26.

¹³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 34.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 19.

¹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 32.

¹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 33.

¹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 33-34.

¹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 34.

him, in the wholeness of his created being, but in its perversion and corruption.”¹⁹ Moreover, Barth argues, if we think that humankind, as it presently is, is the true humanity that God created for covenantal fellowship then we fail to recognise that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ we see God’s verdict upon the sin of humankind.²⁰ But Barth is adamant, that from within ourselves we cannot possibly know these things. It is not self-evident that our true being is created for covenantal fellowship with God and that our present state is one of alienation from God in which we are hostile toward God and enemies of our own true humanity. Nor is it self-evident that despite our alienation from God we are nevertheless still God’s creatures and the objects of God’s loving faithfulness.²¹ As Barth puts it,

Naturally this is not an insight which man can either originate or achieve by his own resources or on his own authority. It springs solely from the fact that he is the object of divine grace. And this truth can only become clear to him by the Word of God in which it is grounded.²²

Thus humanity can only and ever be properly understood in the context of the grace of God.²³

When the Bible answers its own question, “What is man?” it answers it *relationally* in the Old Testament. The question is not rhetorical. The Psalmist is utterly amazed that human beings should be singled out from all other created beings to be the creature that God is “mindful of” and “visits”. Thus for Barth, in biblical thought “[Man] is the being of whom God is so mindful, when He so visits, that He makes Himself his Covenant-partner ...”²⁴ For this reason the Bible does not seek to speak of human beings in terms of abstract attributes or capacities as though we might understand ourselves independent of God and God’s purposes in creating us. Humans *are* the special creatures that God has singled out from all the creatures he has made for covenantal relationality. *This* is our ontology. Therefore human beings do not have some prior autonomous existence and then subsequently become a being that God decides to become mindful of and visit or an ontology that can have any significance, meaning, or genuine humanity independent of covenantal relationship with God.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 26.

²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 27.

²¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 30-31.

²² Barth, *CD* III/2, 31.

²³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 34.

²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 20.

When the question is asked again in the New Testament it is answered *Christologically*. In Hebrews 2:5-8 the writer quotes Psalm 8 saying, “Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
or mortals, that you care for them?

You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honor,
subjecting all things under their feet.”

And then adds the commentary,

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb. 2:8b-9)

Thus Barth argues the “man” of Psalm 8 is identified with Jesus.²⁵ The Hebrews writer’s logic being that when we look at human beings in general, as they are in their present alienation from God, we do not see the being under which God has subjected all things. But, by faith, we do see a specific human being, Jesus, in whom all the things that the Psalmist says about true human being are fulfilled to the uttermost.

The insight that Barth discerns from Hebrews, that the knowledge of true humanity is found in the man Jesus, is central and decisive for his whole theological anthropology. At this point he is acutely aware of how different his approach is to the standard approach that theology has traditionally taken to this question. Yet he is convinced that if it is true that “in [Jesus] all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) then the Christological epistemology that has been the basis of his whole theological project thus far must continue to be the basis for his theological anthropology. He writes in the preface to this section of *Church Dogmatics*

The reader will soon realise that at this point the exposition deviates even more widely from dogmatic tradition than in the doctrine of predestination in II, 2. None of the older or more recent fathers known to me was ready to

²⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 20.

take the way to a theological knowledge of man which I regard as the only possible one.²⁶

It is on this basis that Barth regards the recurring self-description of Jesus as the “son of man” and the statement of Pontius Pilate, “behold the man!” (Jn. 19:5)²⁷ as prophetic acknowledgments that in Jesus we see

... the true concept of man; the concept in face of which no other can stand independently or in superiority, but to which all others must be subordinated, and by which they must all be measured. Hence there arises irresistibly the demand that anthropology should be based on Christology and not the reverse. The innovation which we have to decide upon and confess at this point consists quite simply in yielding to this requirement. Hence in our exposition of the doctrine of man we must always look in the first instance at the nature of man as it confronts us in the person of Jesus, and only secondarily – asking and answering from this place of light – at the nature of man as that of every man and all other men.²⁸

Thus in seeking to answer the question of true humanity, this is Barth’s methodology – to look first at “the nature of man as it confronts us in the person of Jesus” and second, only in light of this, to understand “the nature of man”.

Although the Bible refers to Jesus as the “last Adam” or “second man” (1 Cor. 15:45 and 47), Barth emphasises that this is only true in relation to how the chronology *appears* to us. In terms of ontology, Jesus is originally and properly “first man”.²⁹

[True humanity] is actualised in Him as the original and in us only as the copy. Jesus is man as God willed and created him. What constitutes true human nature in us depends upon what it is in Him. The fact that natural humanity as God created it was subsequently concealed by our sinful corruption is a lesser mystery than the fact that humanity is originally hidden in Jesus, so that primarily it is His and not ours. What man is, is determined by God's immediate presence and action in this man, by His eternal election and the mighty work of His life and death and resurrection corresponding to this election. There in the eternity of the divine counsel which is the

²⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, ix.

²⁷ King James Version.

²⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 46.

²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 205.

meaning and basis of all creation, and in the work of His life accomplished at the heart of time, the decision was made who and what true man is.³⁰

It is upon this that basis Barth's Christological anthropology makes complete sense – our very beings are constituted in Jesus. This means there is only one place we can profitably search for the knowledge of what true humanity consists. The question now becomes, “How are we able to gain knowledge of the true humanity from the being of Jesus Christ?”

Barth acknowledges that it is problematic trying to deduce true humanity *directly* from the person of Jesus in that his nature is very different from our nature.³¹

Christian confession acknowledges Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God – the Word that “was God” and that “in the beginning was with God” and “became flesh and lived among us” (Jn. 1:1-2 and 14). The Chalcedon Confession speaks of Jesus as fully God and fully human

... at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, ... of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin ...³²

Therefore Barth reasons, as a human being Jesus is utterly like us, for of saving necessity he is made “... like his brothers and sisters in every respect ...” (Heb. 2:17), yet as God he is utterly unlike us.³³ Like us he is tempted in every way, yet unlike us he is “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). “In Him is human nature without human sin. ... For although He becomes what we are, He does not do what we do, and so He is not what we are.”³⁴ Like us he is the recipient of God's grace, yet unlike us he is also the one through whom the grace of God is made manifest.³⁵ Like us the man Jesus lives only on account of the Spirit of God, yet unlike us he is the one who has the Spirit without measure. Like us he is a human being with human flesh in which he suffers as we do. Therefore continues Barth,

The ultimate fact about our human nature ... is the self-contradiction of man, and the conscious or unconscious self-deception in which he refuses to recognise this truth. But the first thing which has to be said about human

³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 50.

³¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 47.

³² <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html> accessed 11 April 2011.

³³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 53.

³⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 48.

³⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 50.

nature in Jesus is that in Him an effective protest is lodged against our self-contradiction and all the self-deception in which we try to conceal it.³⁶

Indeed his human nature reveals to us our true condition and

... the hopelessness of our illusions by showing them to be the sin which in Him is no longer imputed to us but forgiven, being taken from us and removed and eliminated, like a vicious circle which is ended by Him ...³⁷

Unlike us Jesus is our merciful judge and saviour – “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk. 2:7). So although there is similarity there is also an infinite qualitative distinction between Jesus and the rest of humanity. This means that a direct approach to deriving true humanity from the person of Jesus is blocked to us.

Therefore Barth searches for an *indirect* method for he is convinced that if the Word of God discloses the problem then the Word of God must also disclose the solution.³⁸

Barth’s approach is to recognise that Jesus cannot be known as an independent person distinct from his office as saviour. He argues that in his humanity Jesus does not have some sort of private life in which he lives autonomously and out of which he subsequently elects to be saviour as an adjunct to some supposedly prior or more fundamental existence he possesses. In this Barth employs a Christology of the *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* of the human nature of Jesus Christ.³⁹ That is, the being of the humanity of Jesus has no independent existence other than as and in the Word of God incarnate. This establishes for Barth the absolute minimum requirement for understanding our true humanity – however we understand true human being, it cannot be as an autonomous being independent of God. Says Barth,

We can never acknowledge the genuinely godless man to be real man.

Otherwise between the man Jesus and ourselves there would be not merely a partial but a total dissimilarity. If in spite of all the dissimilarity there is also something in common, if He is not just man in a different way from ourselves but also a participant in the same human nature as ours, and if the constitutive feature of His humanity is that He is the Son of God and as such

³⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 47.

³⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 47.

³⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 29.

³⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 70.

man, then the essence of all the minimal requirements for a view and concept of real man is that man cannot be seen or understood apart from God.⁴⁰

Thus we must consider what it is about Jesus as the Word of God made human (a being utterly unlike us) and from this deduce what it is about the humanity of Jesus that stands in correspondence to true human being (and thus utterly like us in the determination of God for us in creation). Barth reasons, given that Jesus is for us, acts on our behalf, and in our place, therefore the divine determination of Jesus as Son of God cannot stand alienated from the determination of Jesus as Son of man – his humanity *must* correspond to ours.⁴¹ Given a Christology of Jesus as the *anhypostatic* and *enhypostatic* Word of God incarnate, Barth discerns six criteria by which he will judge all claims to anthropology and within which he will situate his theological anthropology. These criteria seek to provide a basis for understanding true humanity in the determination of God. They are, following Barth's methodology, posed firstly and directly in relation to the man Jesus and then secondarily and indirectly in relation to that of every person.

First, in the man Jesus we are confronted with “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).⁴² It follows therefore that in Jesus we are confronted by God, not abstractly, but by the concrete and specific being that God has appointed saviour and lord. In this way Jesus is the divine counterpart of every person.⁴³ Thus to be human, Barth reasons, is to be related to this one man, our true and absolute counterpart – to be human is therefore to belong to God and to be with God.⁴⁴ This constitutes the basic determination of being human. Thus a godless humanity is an ontological impossibility.⁴⁵ Second, Jesus is not simply “God with us” without any purpose. His relationship with us and for us is living and active so as to be the one who fulfils the covenant of grace and thus “save[s] his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).⁴⁶ Thus to be human is to stand in relation to the saving work of God.⁴⁷ On this basis to constitute human existence independent of the saving work of God is an ontological impossibility. Third, Barth reasons, “By expressing and declaring

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 72.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 62ff.

⁴² Barth, *CD* III/2, 68.

⁴³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 134.

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 135.

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 136.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 68-69.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 73.

Himself in [Jesus] as the One who wills and works that none should be lost to Him, but all saved for Him, He confirms Himself and triumphs as the Creator.”⁴⁸ It is not simply for *our* good and *our* honour alone that God acts to save the being he has created, but for his own honour and glory also. Because Jesus lives for the glory of God therefore true humanity can only be understood in relation to the glory of God as this is revealed in the covenant fulfilled in Jesus.⁴⁹ Fourth, in fulfilling the covenant, God acts as Lord. “[The man Jesus] exists as such in the enactment of this history, in the fulfilment of the divine act of lordship which takes place in it.”⁵⁰ It is not the human capacities of Jesus that determine his true humanity, rather his true humanity consists in the fact that he elects to use his capacities to live under the lordship of God. This means that the actions of “true man” will be actions that bear witness to the fact that God is his lord. Thus, as Barth puts it, “Whatever may be the meaning of [human] freedom, it cannot consist in freedom to escape the lordship of God.”⁵¹ Fifth, in being under the lordship of God, Barth reasons “There is no neutral humanity in Jesus, which might give Him the choice of not doing what He does, or of doing something different in its place”⁵² Thus for Jesus, being under the lordship of God is not simply a matter of obedient *action*, it is a matter of *ontology*. Thus human freedom is not an absolute open-ended freedom, rather “[Man’s] freedom will be his freedom to decide for God; for what God wills to do and be for him in this history.”⁵³ Sixth, Barth sums up by saying that it means that the man Jesus is *for* God in service to the work of God.⁵⁴ Thus to be truly human is to be orientated toward God, to live for God, and in active participation in *service* to the work of God.⁵⁵ It is on this basis that Barth derives true humanity from the being of Jesus Christ.

In contrast to Barth’s theological anthropology, non-theological anthropologies typically seek a point of distinctiveness in human beings in contrast to the rest of creation, for example, in human self-consciousness, creativity, volition, rationality, capacity to verbalise or make tools, personality, ethical awareness, God-consciousness, spirituality, or immortality of soul. Alternatively the idea of seeking

⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 69.

⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 73-74.

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 69.

⁵¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 74.

⁵² Barth, *CD* III/2, 56-57 and 70.

⁵³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 74.

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 71.

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 74.

a point of distinctiveness is abandoned altogether and human beings are simply understood as animals – nothing more! But Barth reasons that because “all things” have been created *through* Jesus Christ and *for* Jesus Christ and that *in* Jesus Christ “all things” hold together (Col. 1:16-17) therefore every created thing somehow has its counterpart in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ But in relation to all non-human created things Jesus is their counterpart in ways that are not revealed to us. Consequently we need neither to demarcate ourselves from our fellow creatures nor become one with them.⁵⁷ From the point of view of Barth’s theological anthropology, the decisive fact that marks human beings off from the rest of creation is that The Word of God became *human* flesh. Therefore the thing that distinguishes human beings from other creatures is not something *within* us – rather it is something that lies within the covenantal purposes of God and the form in which God has willed to reveal himself to the world. As Barth so eloquently puts it,

... the decisive and distinguishing thing is that the God who is also [the God of every created non-human being and thing] did not become like them. He was not made an animal, a plant, a stone, a star or an element of the invisible heavenly world. But He did become man. It was in this way that in His incomparable majesty He was made like the creature. It was in this *man* and not in any other creature that He saw the meaning and motive of His whole creative work. It is only in the human and not in any other creaturely sphere that the creaturely correspondence, image and representation of the uniqueness and transcendence of God has been actualised as an event.⁵⁸

One way or another, non-theological anthropologies seek to understand human being in terms of unique capacities and potentialities that we innately possess that we may or may not share with other creatures. But for Barth, to speak of *potentiality* is only to glimpse the shadow of true humanity. True humanity must be understood in terms of *actuality* – the specific *telos* for which these unique capacities and potentialities have been created and the fulfilment of this purpose in human beings.⁵⁹ In themselves, human attributes and capacities merely speak of human being in isolation from God, whereas the six criteria that Barth derives from Jesus Christ understand true humanity as constituted and safeguarded in him – that

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 137.

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 78.

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 137. Emphasis Barth’s.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 75ff.

we belong to God, stand in relation to the saving work of God, live for the glory of God, under the lordship of God, participate in the covenantal activity of God, and in service to God.

These six criteria by which we may discern the true humanity of the man Jesus means that his genuine humanity derives from God and is affirmed in his active obedience to the will of God in the specificity of his historical being as saviour and lord of the human creatures that God has made for covenantal relationality. If our true humanity is to be deduced from this it must be understood in this same light. Our true humanity must be understood as deriving from God and affirmed by our obedient participation in the covenantal purposes of God. God grants us the freedom and capacity to either affirm or deny our true humanity through our acceptance or rejection of the covenantal purposes of God. This means that our humanity cannot consist in some abstract concept of humanity that speaks of neutral capacities, potentialities, or characteristics that may be actualised one way or another. This is to posit some autonomous and prior concept of being human that exists independent of the fact that God has created us for grace and fellowship. Our true humanity derives from God and is constituted and secured in Jesus Christ. Although in the freedom God grants us we do have the capacity to affirm or deny that which God in his covenantal purposes has made us to be, we do not have the capacity to make or unmake our humanity or to make or unmake the covenantal purposes of God through the use or misuse of our potentialities.⁶⁰ To the extent we use our capacities to live in contradiction to the purposes of God we deny our genuine humanity. But our sin cannot destroy or obliterate our true humanity; it can only distort, obscure, and corrupt it. As Barth puts it;

Becoming a sinner, he has not vanished as a man, or changed into a different being, but still stands before God as the being as which he was created, and therefore as the being whose nature consists in that freedom.⁶¹

Neither can our sin destroy or obliterate the covenant; it can only mean that we live in contradiction to our true determination as human creatures in the covenantal purposes of God. It means we live as enemies of our true being and as a consequence experience all the existential dissonance and misery that such self-contradiction entails. In this way our sin is both a denial and an affirmation of our

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 206.

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 274-75.

true humanity. It is a denial in that it represents a refusal to acknowledge the judgement of God concerning who we truly are and a failure to actively affirm our true creaturely being. But our sin is also an affirmation of our true humanity in that it bears witness to the fact that we are made for grace. Though we may obscure it, run from it, and deny it, our true humanity cries out within us – it cries out for recognition. This is the secret message that lies behind everything that we do. In a myriad of ways our lives bear compelling, tragic, and eloquent testimony to this truth. So much of our activity is in fact broken attempts to find and secure our true humanity. We conform to the expectations of others because we long for approval and acceptance. We defy social conventions because we long for our individuality and uniqueness to be recognised and respected. We pursue wealth because we seek security and happiness; we argue and fight because we seek to be vindicated and justified; we are promiscuous because we seek intimacy, freedom, and affirmation; and we take drugs and binge-drink because we secretly hate what we have become and long to be something better. But our true security, justification, affirmation, and identity are found only in God. It is only *in* God and *by* God that our true humanity is established and secured. But none of these things is self-evident; this is knowledge that is only possible from an understanding of true humanity that derives from Jesus Christ through the Word of God.

2.2 The human creature God has created – our divine determination

In this section I draw out more specifically and in greater detail a theological conception of true humanity that is derived from the person of Jesus Christ that is consistent with the six criteria that Barth has established. This enables the development of two key concepts – that genuine humanity must be construed firstly in relation to God and secondly, flowing out of this, in relation to fellow-humanity. Barth's central thesis in relation to anthropology is that true humanity consists in being a "being in encounter".⁶² It is this that we see *originally* in Jesus as a being in encounter primarily in relation to God whom he loves with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and secondarily, consistent with this, in relation to his neighbour (that is every person) whom he loves as himself. This original that is in Jesus is the image that God calls us to conform to –

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/2, 203.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt. 22:36-40)

On this basis true humanity can be neither godless nor neighbourless.

As noted in chapter 1, for Barth, “Let us make humankind in our image” (Gen. 1:26) means being created as a being that has its ground and possibility in the fact that in “... God’s own sphere and being there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded prototype to which this being can correspond ...”⁶³ Therefore Barth’s understanding of the *imago Dei* is relational. However, in much of the Christian era, a relational understanding of the image has been submerged beneath either substantial accounts, which conceive the image in terms of such things as human rationality or an immortal soul; or functional accounts, which conceive the image in terms of things like dominion or creativity. In particular, a substantial understanding of the “image of God” in terms of human rationality is very problematic. As Colin Gunton notes, a substantial understanding presupposes that rationality is God’s primary characteristic; it risks creating a destructive dualism between the mind, (which is to be valued since it is here that we truly see God imaged) and the body, (and thus all creaturely activities and functions) that results in the body being devalued or denigrated; it risks relegating people who are less gifted intellectually or who are intellectually handicapped to a lower status of humanness or value; it easily leads to the arrogant presumption that human reason is uncorrupted by sin, thus rendering the call of the Gospel to repentance and redemption irrelevant or of secondary importance and elevating confidence in reason over the call to humbly attend to the revealed Word of God in Christ; it serves to undergird a Cartesian conception of humanness and personhood in individualistic terms thus negating relational conceptions of personhood; and too easily becomes a source of destructive control, domination, and exploitation of others and of the environment when, without an ethical basis, rationality is attached to technology, politics, and commerce.⁶⁴

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 183.

⁶⁴ Colin E. Gunton, “Creation and the New Creation: In the Image and Likeness of God” in *The Triune Creator* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 106-07, 194, and 208.

It is instructive to note that the Old Testament references to the image of God are relatively few.⁶⁵ However, for Christian theology, the concept can only be properly understood in light of the New Testament in which the use of image language is almost exclusively in relation to Jesus Christ.⁶⁶ Therefore to try and locate the significance of the “image of God” in something intrinsic to humankind is a tragic misunderstanding of the concept. Therefore Barth insists on interpreting the concept Christologically. For Barth it is the man Jesus who is originally and properly the image of God for it is the triune God of Father, Son, and Spirit who in freedom and love elects to be the missionary God of the covenant of grace for the sake of the human creature that God has created for reconciliation, redemption, and fellowship. Thus in being God with us and for us in this way, in the man Jesus is revealed

...an inner divine correspondence and similarity between the being of the man Jesus for God and His being for His fellows. This correspondence and similarity consists in the fact that the man Jesus in His being for man repeats and reflects the inner being or essence of God and this confirms His being for God. ... The humanity of Jesus is not merely the repetition and reflection of His divinity, or of God's controlling will; it is the repetition and reflection of God Himself, no more and no less. It is the image of God, the *imago Dei*.⁶⁷

Thus Jesus is originally and properly the image of God and it is only in relation to this original that we are called “... to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son” (Rom. 8:29).

For Barth the humanity of Jesus, and thus our humanity also, is grounded in the electing will of God to be the God of the covenant.⁶⁸ The triune God in God's inner fullness of freedom and love has elected in grace from all eternity to create human creatures with whom God wills to be in fellowship in freedom and love. Therefore

⁶⁵ Apart from the key verses in Genesis 1:26-7, 5:1 and 9:6, the Hebrew use of the terms “image” and “likeness” are “mostly concrete, and mostly negative” to represent a “god, animal or other thing that brings to mind, or stands in for, the thing it depicts or represents.” Phyllis A. Bird, “Theological Anthropology in the Hebrew Bible” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* ed. Leo G. Perdue (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 261.

⁶⁶ For example, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1: 15-17).

⁶⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 219.

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 146-47.

the true humanity of the man Jesus is revealed to us in that he is *for* God and *for* his fellows. Jesus is for God and for us because the triune God of Father, Son, and Spirit is for us. In doing this Jesus is not doing something new, rather it is the out-flowing into the external world of created reality of that which is original and native to the loving relationality of the inner being of Father, Son, and Spirit. As Barth notes, “God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence.”⁶⁹

The relationship that God wills to have with human beings *corresponds* to the relationship that God enjoys *ad intra*, but as Barth argues these can never be identical for,

Between God and God, the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father, there is unity of essence, the perfect satisfaction of self-grounded reality, and a blessedness eternally self-originated and self-renewed. But there can be no question of this between God and man, and it cannot therefore find expression in the humanity of Jesus, in His fellow-humanity as the image of God. In this case we have a complete disparity between the two aspects.

There is total sovereignty and grace on the part of God, but total dependence and need on that of man.⁷⁰

Nevertheless the relationship that God wills to enjoy with us, though never identical, does indeed *correspond* to the loving relationality that exists within the triune being of God. The love with which God loves us in Jesus *ad extra* is the same *quality* of love that reflects the loving relationality of the inner essence of the triune God *ad intra* for “[in the same way] As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (Jn. 15:9).⁷¹

As Jesus is revealed to us in the Word of God as true human, “for God” and “for us”, we see true humanity as human beings were created to be. Therefore his true humanity is not revealed in capacities or potentialities that he might be construed to possess independent of the fact that he is for God and for us, for as Barth has been at pains to argue Jesus has no independent ontology – he *is* who he is only as the one who is for God and for us.⁷² Therefore the true humanity of Jesus is found in the

⁶⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 218.

⁷⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 219.

⁷¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 221.

⁷² Barth, *CD* III/2, 70.

fact that he loves God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. Thus it is found in the fact that he trusts God utterly in all things and brings all his petitions to God in prayer. It is found in his utter confidence in God to meet his every need and so he is completely at peace. It is found in the fact that Jesus never seeks to justify himself in the eyes of others or to defend his actions; for in every way he is obedient to God, loved by God, and justified by God. It is found in the fact that he does not secretly try to cover his shame or guilt and hide his true self from the gaze of others for he has no shame or guilt to cover and his true self is open for all to see for he is known by God and rejoices in this knowledge.⁷³ Moreover the true humanity of Jesus is found in the fact that that he loves his neighbour as himself. Thus it is found in the fact that he relates to others with transparency, dignity, and compassion and can look his fellows squarely in the eye without arrogance or inferiority. It is found in the fact that he is supremely secure, supremely free, and supremely alive; for his security, freedom, and life are supremely grounded in God. In all these things Jesus is genuinely human as God intends human beings to be. In Jesus we recognise this true humanity in him because we recognise it as something that we yearn for in ourselves. There is something within us that recognises in Jesus what we were made for and long for. In the broken pieces of our own humanity we glimpse an echo and reflection of the full glory of true humanity and true personhood that we see in Jesus. As we gaze on the true humanity of Jesus it fills us with a kind of homesickness and longing for something that rightly belongs to us, something that we were made for, but something we have lost. Nevertheless as we gaze, in faith, on the true humanity of Jesus, it fills us with joy and hope for in the humanity of Jesus is the revelation of God that our true humanity has been secured in him for “... you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” (Col. 3:3-4).

More specifically, what then does *our* true humanity consist of as this is revealed in the man Jesus in relation to his being for God and for others? Firstly, in relation to God, Barth argues, our true humanity consists in our being summoned to responsibility before God because we are chosen by grace for covenantal fellowship with God.⁷⁴ This is not something incidental or secondary about us – it is *the* central

⁷³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 48.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 150.

and decisive fact that constitutes our ontology. Therefore true human being is the being created by God for fellowship, the being that is utterly dependent upon God for breath and bread, the being that is threatened by nothingness, yet centrally and decisively the being that is saved by grace through Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ Because this is our ontology Barth therefore argues,

Because grace assures this creature that it is not abandoned but received by God, and promises that it is the will of God to be its Helper and Saviour, this creature ... cannot be confined in the limits of its intrinsic possibility, it cannot remain alone, without realising the truth that these limits have been overcome by God, that God is already with it. This creature cannot exist without being in movement towards the source of its existence.⁷⁶

Therefore to be truly human is to “realise the truth” of what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do as God graciously seeks to draw us “towards the source of [our] existence”. This “realisation” will be a cognitive act of awareness that is made concrete in an active affirmation of life that seeks to live in faithful correspondence to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this awareness and concrete affirmation can never be an act of self-accomplishment; rather it can only be enabled by God. It is on this basis that Barth argues that the realisation of our human responsibility before the God of grace will have the character of the *knowledge* of God as one seeks to hear and receive the Word of God and move toward it.⁷⁷ It will have the character of *obedience* to God, for the knowledge of God can never be theoretical – it is an active decision for God.⁷⁸ It will have the character of an *invocation* of God, for we may only know and obey God as an act of grace on God’s part and as an act of humble petition on our part as God so acts and so grants.⁷⁹

For Barth the forgoing may be summarised by saying that our human responsibility before the God of grace has the character of the *freedom* that God imparts to us.⁸⁰ It is our responsibility to know, obey, and invoke God and as such is an act of human freedom. We are free in this way because God is first free in relation to us – the objective ground of all freedom and self-hood.⁸¹ But this freedom that comes from God can only be exercised in the context of the knowledge of God, in obedience to

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 163.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 165.

⁷⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 176.

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 179.

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 187.

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 192.

⁸¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 193.

God, and by way of invocation of God. Therefore this freedom must be realised in action as we decide for God.⁸² The person who is free before God can only affirm their true determination in the will of God to respond in gratitude and obedience to the grace of God. As Barth argues, the free person does not choose between two possibilities, but between their one possibility and the impossibility of non-being – it is not freedom to reject God for when we reject God we repudiate our freedom.⁸³ Therefore the responsibility before God that God calls us to is always an appeal to the freedom of the individual, the true freedom to affirm one's humanity in the creative determination of God. It is not freedom of choice in a modern sense – standing Hercules-like at the moral cross-roads thrust between good and evil and *choosing* in a decisive attempt to realise one's existential being.⁸⁴ The true freedom of human beings that affirms our genuine humanity consists in our acting in agreement with the will of God that is always good so as to actively affirm the creaturely being that God has created us to be. That we are free to act in this way is only by the grace of God who created us in the freedom and love that derives from the being of the triune God who exists in freedom and love and wills that we participate with God in freedom and love.

The relationship between human freedom (that corresponds to the freedom of God) and the freedom of God (in which human freedom is constituted) is that human freedom is a *relativised* freedom that in the *absolute* freedom of God is accorded its proper creaturely place and therefore is a genuine creaturely freedom. As Webster argues, Barth has no interest in an abstract concept of freedom, rather it is the freedom of the God of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ who from all eternity "... chooses to commit Himself to man. Thereby God is Lord as *man's* Lord" and therefore human freedom is the gift of this God "... wherein man appropriates God's election. Thereby man is God's creature, His partner, and His child as *God's* man."⁸⁵ As Webster notes, Barth does not attempt to ground this concept of human freedom in some theoretical framework that would allow us to rationally comprehend that this represents a genuine human freedom; rather he argues Barth simply provides a "description" rather than a "theoretical resolution".⁸⁶ This of course is infuriating to modernity that insists that human action can only be

⁸² Barth, *CD* III/2, 195.

⁸³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 197.

⁸⁴ Barth, *CD* III/1, 264.

⁸⁵ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 101.

⁸⁶ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 91.

properly ours if it is self-initiated and therefore cannot accept the idea that God's sovereign will is that our freedom of agency is grounded in Jesus Christ. Barth's response is that our difficulty at this point is not a question of theoretical resolution; rather it is a question of our belief in the goodness of the God who has in fact done these things.⁸⁷ In other words our problem is that we resist believing that in the sovereign power and gracious goodness of God that God creates a human creature who may be genuinely free, that our genuine freedom is constituted outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ, and that we are called to appropriate our God-given freedom by choosing the choice of God.

Webster highlights the problem modernity has in relation to Barth's conception of human freedom saying

This freedom [in a modern sense] is false above all because it is bound up with an image of the human person as transcending all particulars, as occupying a neutral space from which all things are surveyed, even God's history with us, which therefore becomes only one of a number of possibilities about which we are competent to make judgements.”⁸⁸

As Webster expresses it in a different context, Barth refuses to buy into the modern Cartesian idea that “... moral authenticity can only be attributed to a quasi-absolute [human] consciousness, to an indeterminate self, without constraints, characterised above all by an infinitely regressive interiority ...”⁸⁹ Insisting upon this modern construal of human being renders it impossible to accept that Barth's construal of human freedom can amount to genuine freedom of human agency – it can only seem as though the human agent is overwhelmed by the overarching agency of a God whose sovereign will is to see his purposes, gracious or otherwise, brought to pass within the creaturely realm. But as Webster is at pains to point out

We cannot begin to understand Barth's theological ethics until we see that he construes both the human agent and the sphere within which human agency occurs by reference to an entire vision of reality of which the centre is the manifestation of God's creative and regenerative purposes in the history of Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 147.

⁸⁸ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 111.

⁸⁹ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 55.

⁹⁰ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 20.

This means that rather than Barth offering a theoretical resolution satisfying to modernity of how genuine human freedom of agency is *possible* within a Christian construal of reality, instead he points to the *reality* that in the goodness of God's covenantal purposes fulfilled in Jesus Christ God has so acted in his sovereign freedom to safeguard and affirm the authenticity of genuine creaturely agency. The freedom God gives us in his sovereign purposes for humanity is a genuine though relative freedom that finds its fulfilment in our being invited to freely endorse the humanity God has elected for us in Jesus Christ.

On this basis Barth argues that to be truly human as a responsible free act in relation to God is to be a being in *gratitude* to God.

Gratitude is the precise creaturely counterpart to the grace of God. What is by the Word of the grace of God, must be in gratitude; and man's casting of his trust upon God is nothing other or less, but also nothing more, than the being of man as his act in gratitude.⁹¹

The realisation of our human responsibility in relation to God may be summed up in the words of Jesus that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Matt. 22:36-38).

Secondly, what does *our* true humanity consist of as this is revealed in the man Jesus in relation to his being for others? For Barth, the decisive characteristic that defines the humanity of Jesus is that he is *for* others. It is to this end that the Word of God becomes incarnate in the man Jesus who is "for us" in the most radical sense of the concept. He is moved to the uttermost compassion by our need, allows his life to be completely prescribed and determined by our plight, and gives himself completely to the task of our salvation such that

He finds it worth His while to live and work for His fellows and their salvation. He does not hold aloof from them. He does not refuse to be like them and with them and in that comprehensive sense for them. He gives Himself freely to them. He has only one goal: to maintain the cause of these men in death and the conquest of death; to offer up His life for them that they may live and be happy. He therefore serves them, without prospect of

⁹¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 166.

reward or repayment, without expecting to receive anything from them which He cannot have far better and more richly without them.⁹²

But we can never be for others the way Jesus is for us. As Barth expresses it

We are the victims of idealistic illusions if we deck out the humanity of man generally with features exclusive to that of the man Jesus. Man generally may mean and give a great deal to His fellows, but he cannot be their Deliverer or Saviour, not even in a single instance.⁹³

Nevertheless, for all the difference between Jesus and us, the thing that is constant in him that corresponds to a constant in us is that our humanity cannot consist in our being alone or separated or even neutral in relation to our fellows.⁹⁴ Barth is adamant,

Theological anthropology cannot enter the sphere where this man without his fellows is considered as a serious possibility. ... Every supposed humanity which is not radically and from the very first fellow-humanity is inhumanity. ... In this respect theological anthropology must be quite pitiless in its opposition to every attempt to seek real man outside the history of his responsibility to God.⁹⁵

Thus theological anthropology rejects from the outset an individualistic conception of humanity – the idea of a solitary self who, while entering into relationships with others, even with “God”, does so on the basis of the calculus of advantage or threat and which at bottom is only concerned to maintain, assert, and live in and from the self in isolation from others.⁹⁶ Thus true humanity is not found in loneliness or aloofness but in fellowship. It is in this that we find our correspondence as the covenant partners of God. Only Jesus can be rightly described in an absolute sense, as man *for* others. Our correspondence to this is to be *with* others – that is, our humanity consists in being *with* those that Jesus is *for*.⁹⁷ Barth explores this idea under the heading of encounter – that a person has his being in the determination of God in the same way that others do. Thus in all my activity I can either be human or inhuman – I can either recognise that “I am as Thou art” or I can attempt to exist as a solitary self.⁹⁸

⁹² Barth, *CD* III/2, 215.

⁹³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 222.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 227.

⁹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 228.

⁹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 230.

⁹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 243.

⁹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 249.

As Barth develops this idea, the first thing that it means to be genuinely human as a being in encounter with others is that we are to be visible and open to one another.⁹⁹ It is to recognise in the other that which corresponds to one's self all the while recognising that the being of the other is not my being. To seek to conceal one's self from others or to be disinterested in the other is to be inhuman. Here the specific takes priority over the general – we cannot know “humankind” in this way but only specific people. Second, being visible and open with others allows the possibility of mutual speech and hearing without which there is no real encounter.¹⁰⁰ This involves mutual reciprocity of expression and self-interpretation, mutual address and reception, in order that we may come to know the other. Third, recognising and communicating with others enables us to render mutual assistance to one another.¹⁰¹ It is in *this* way that our lives, in a relative sense, can correspond to the life of Jesus who absolutely was man *for* others. This is how we may be *for* one another within the context of our human limitations. Humans both have need and are capable of rendering assistance. To deny either our need for the assistance of others or our capacity to give assistance to others is to deny our humanity. In this, human beings may alleviate and comfort another, but as Barth insists, God alone can liberate and give victory.¹⁰² Moreover Barth argues that to presume self-sufficiency and needlessness, is to presume likeness to God and thus inhumanity.¹⁰³ Therefore it is constitutive of my own humanity that I both receive from and give assistance to my fellows. We are created and ordained by God for this – this is our humanity. It is this that is our natural posture, whereas the idea of the solitary individual is artificial. The reason that we are to be visible and known to one another is that we may assist one another. We are not to leave others alone to their own devices, but to stand by them, giving assistance. In this we are to support but not carry the other or make his life task my own for no individual can be as God for another since each individual bears his own responsibility before God.¹⁰⁴ Therefore the active affirmation of our true humanity in encounter with others consists in recognising and coming to know the other in order that we may render mutual assistance to one another. Barth underscores all this by emphasising that being in encounter consists in the fact that these three things are to be done on both sides with *gladness*. It is this inward

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 250-52.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 253-60.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 260-64.

¹⁰² Barth, *CD* III/2, 262.

¹⁰³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 263.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 262.

element that provides the dynamic substance to the outward three. For “In his essence, his innermost being, his heart, [a person] is only what he is gladly. If we do not speak primarily of what he is gladly, we do not speak of his essence, of himself.”¹⁰⁵ This gladness, that is rooted in the Creator, God the Father, is the indispensable foundational condition upon which our true humanity is based.¹⁰⁶

But in emphasising that true humanity consists in fellow-humanity, Barth stresses that two misunderstandings must be guarded against. First, humanity is not a losing of the self in the other. We are bound to our fellow human but we are not his or her property. If this were so, we could not genuinely look others in the eye, speak to and hear them nor give and receive assistance.¹⁰⁷ An excessive relationship in which one loses one’s self in the other is inhuman for it can be neither glad nor free. Second, genuine humanity is not the glad interaction of people so as to serve the ultimate goal of confirming and securing one’s own being. It is not the project of finding the self in the other or some sort of conquest over the other.¹⁰⁸ This is to violate and disrespect the humanity of the other. Thus the realisation of our human responsibility in relation to others may be summed up in the words of Jesus, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). This is “like” (it corresponds to) the greatest and first commandment. Loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind acknowledges that our very beings are constituted in and by God. But we are not constituted in this way by our neighbours. Love of neighbour is love of human by fellow-human that has its origin in the love of God for all human beings. Our love is first toward God and then second, toward “our neighbour as our selves”. This means that in loving others there must also be a healthy and proper self-love that upholds and affirms the true humanity of the one who loves while upholding and affirming the true humanity of the one who is loved. What constitutes true humanity is the freedom to be in coexistence with others and this derives from the fact that we are created by God for covenantal fellowship.¹⁰⁹

Although Barth’s theological anthropology can only be understood Christologically, this should not be taken to mean that it is only Christians who can recognise that

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 267.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 272.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 269.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 270.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 276.

which is genuinely human and act in authentic correspondence to this.¹¹⁰ In the context of creation, true humanity has nothing to do with being a Christian as such. One does not need to be specifically Christian to recognise that we do not derive from or exist for ourselves and that we are called to act responsibly in relation to others. It is frequently the case that non-Christians act with more genuine humanity in relation to others than do many Christians and Paul recognises that “Gentiles who do not possess the law [often] do instinctively what the law requires” (Rom 2:14). Barth is careful to point out that when speaking of love of God and love of neighbour in relation to what constitutes our true humanity he has not been speaking about *Christian* love as such.¹¹¹ He maintains that true humanity is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by the way that we use our freedom to act in the world and derives from an awareness that we do not originate from or exist for ourselves. It is, as Barth says,

...the free co-existence of man and man ... [in] natural exercise and actualisation of human nature – [is] something which formally is on the same level as the corresponding vital functions and natural determinations of other beings which are not men. The fact that a stone is a stone involves a definite nexus of chemical, physical and mathematical conditions and determinations. ... The fact that an animal is an animal involves a particular consciousness and spontaneity in this vital process. But the fact that a man is a man involves freedom in the co-existence of man and man in which the one may be, and will be, the companion, associate, comrade, fellow and helpmate of the other. This is human nature, humanity.¹¹²

Therefore Barth argues that there is nothing specifically Christian in this and thus we cannot speak of Christian love in the context of true humanity because Christian love is the grateful response to the mercy of God that saves us from our sin and thus not part of the original determination of humans created godly and “very good” as the covenant partners of God.¹¹³ Therefore our sin and the mercy of God that saves us from our sin are *not* part of our creaturely determination and our human nature as God created human being. Therefore when we speak of true humanity in this context we cannot speak of something that is exclusively Christian or of Christian

¹¹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 274ff.

¹¹¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 274.

¹¹² Barth, *CD* III/2, 275-76.

¹¹³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 276.

love as such. Affirming that our lives are constituted in Jesus Christ is an *ontological* statement and has nothing to do with one's faith or whether one is a Christian or not. As far as the constitution of our true humanity is concerned, being a Christian does not render a person more or less human than any another, it simply means that one is in a position to *recognise* the truth regarding the fact that God, in creating human beings, has elected to constitute true humanity in the true man Jesus Christ – it is to recognise the basis upon which God has elected to constitute true humanity.

2.3 The human creature God has created – our creaturely form

In seeking to understand true humanity Barth begins his theological anthropology with the human being as the being created to stand in relationship with God and in relationship with fellow humans. This understanding of human being is derived methodologically by a process that seeks to understand true humanity in light of the true man Jesus Christ who is *for* God and *for* fellow humanity. Thus far, however, Barth has said nothing in relation to what human beings are in terms of our creaturely form. This contrasts with traditional anthropologies that frequently begin with an intrinsic anthropology of human being in terms of body and soul (and with an almost universal tendency to emphasise the soul and depreciate the body).¹¹⁴ Nevertheless Barth *does* want to speak of human beings as a physical and spiritual whole in the language of body and soul.¹¹⁵ But only in the context of human being understood *firstly* Christologically in relation to God and fellow-humanity. In taking this approach Barth seeks to avoid an anthropology that finds true human being in some supposedly neutral human function or characteristic such as rationality, God-consciousness, or moral capacity. Barth certainly wants to speak of these things but it is not these *capacities* in and of themselves that constitute our humanity, rather, our humanity is constituted in Jesus Christ in the covenantal creative will of God.

¹¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 325.

¹¹⁵ “Of all other [possible word pairs, for example, “spirit and substantial organism”, “rational and sensuous,” “inner and outer,” “invisible and visible,” “inapprehensible and apprehensible,” “intelligible and empirical,” and even “heavenly and earthly”], we choose “soul and body” because they keep us closest to the language of the Bible, and because in their popular simplicity they indicate not only most unpretentiously but also, for all the problems which they involve, most unambiguously, concretely, and comprehensively the questions which are here to be asked and answered.” Barth, *CD* III/2, 326.

In order for the covenantal purposes of God to be actualised in history human beings are constituted as soul and body.¹¹⁶ But these terms, Barth insists, need to be understood biblically and always firstly in relation to Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷ He argues that the New Testament speaks of the saving work of Jesus as giving “himself” (Gal. 1:4), giving his “life” or “soul” (Matt.20:28), and giving his “body” (Lk. 22:19). In doing so, Barth argues, the New Testament uses the terms “himself”, “soul”, and “body” interchangeably in relation to Jesus and as such thinks of Jesus as one whole man.¹¹⁸ In using the terms “soul” and “body” the New Testament does not conceive of the humanity of Jesus being constituted by the union of two different substances – a higher and a lower, or an inner and outer. As Barth expresses it,

[Jesus] is one whole man, embodied soul and besouled body: the one in the other and never merely beside it; the one never without the other but only with it, and in it present, active and significant; the one with all its attributes always to be taken as seriously as the other.¹¹⁹

Thus at every point, Barth reasons, despite its apparent lack of anthropological sophistication the NT affirms the wholeness and unity of Jesus.¹²⁰ The NT description of Jesus therefore represents Jesus as genuinely human thus defeating any concept of Jesus as a docetic phantom who never genuinely shares authentic bodily being, as a living soul, with us.¹²¹ Moreover in emphasising the saving power of the body and soul of Jesus the NT never suggests that the soul is liberated from the body or that the soul is to be prized and the body denigrated. The NT hope is not the immortality of the soul but the resurrection of the body – a body which is the soul of an organic body.¹²²

Yet, Barth argues, the NT not only emphasises the *unity* and wholeness of Jesus as body and soul, but also the *order* and hierarchy in the relationship between the body and the soul of Jesus. His soul rules, governs, and directs his body and his body serves, obeys, and follows his soul – yet never in tyranny or hostility, but in perfect

¹¹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 325.

¹¹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 327.

¹¹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 328.

¹¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 327.

¹²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 331. Barth argues that the Bible is unconcerned with anthropology as such; rather it is concerned with the confrontation of God with man. Nevertheless in speaking of this confrontation it offers anthropological insights that are more fundamental and systematic than might appear at first sight. Barth, *CD* III/2, 433.

¹²¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 328.

¹²² Barth, *CD* III/2, 379.

unity, harmony, and dignity.¹²³ Whereas in *our* creaturely being there is conflict and disorder, in which our controlling will (the soul) exists in a relationship of conflict with our members (the body), in Jesus this is simply not the case. Barth argues that this is because in Jesus, the “Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14) by the power of the Spirit of God. In this way he is the unique being who has and thus “gives the Spirit without measure” (Jn. 3:34) and as a consequence the flesh of Jesus (his body and soul) are rightly ordered and in proper harmony.¹²⁴ In this way Barth argues that, as saviour, Jesus takes that which is disobedient and unprofitable (our fleshly existence) and by “suffering in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1)

The flesh, which in itself is disobedient, becomes obedient. The flesh, which in itself profits nothing, becomes a purposeful instrument. The flesh, which in itself is lost, attains a determination and a hope. The flesh, which in itself is illogical and irrational, becomes logical and rational. As the Logos becomes flesh and Jesus is flesh, it is shown that this man has and is spirit and life, and the flesh itself becomes quickening and living and meaningful. ... This is the triumph of the meaning of the human existence of Jesus.¹²⁵

In correspondence to the humanity of Jesus, *our* creaturely existence is also grounded, constituted, and maintained by the life-giving Spirit of God.¹²⁶ Because “The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [or spirit] of life; and the man became a living being [or soul]” (Gen. 2:7) humans are organic beings constituted from the materials of the earth and thus must have life if they are not to decay. Barth argues that the life of a human being is his soul and comes to us through the life-giving Spirit of God.¹²⁷ The Spirit of God gives life to human beings by granting us the breath or spirit of life and it is this that constitutes us body and soul. When God removes his life-giving Spirit, the human as an embodied soul and an ensouled body dies and decays. Barth insists that the distinction between body and soul represents a differentiation *within our creaturely being* – the soul is not the Spirit of God and the body the flesh of man.¹²⁸ The Spirit of God is the life-giving breath of the creator and the soul of a human

¹²³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 332.

¹²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 338.

¹²⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 336.

¹²⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 346.

¹²⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 359.

¹²⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 367.

being is the life-breath of the creature received from and utterly dependent upon the Spirit of God for its ongoing life.

Barth is adamant that body and soul cannot be separated. The body can have no independent existence in isolation from the soul and the soul can have no independent existence in isolation from a material and organic body whose soul it is.¹²⁹ The human soul can only be soul as the soul of the *body* of whose soul it is, and the human body can only be body as the body of the *soul* of whose body it is. Soul is the life of the body of whose soul it is – the independent life of corporeal being that has the capacity for action in the world.¹³⁰ Thus our self-awareness is awareness of ourselves as the ruling soul of our serving body.¹³¹ Therefore Barth insists that a genuinely biblical anthropology must reject a dualistic conception of human being that separates soul and body.¹³² This was a strong feature in the Greek philosophical milieu in which Christianity sought self-understanding in the early centuries of its existence. In this milieu Christian theology often succumbed to a dualistic understanding of human being in which it is the soul that is prized and thus to be saved, in contrast to the body that is often disregarded and thought of as merely temporal and dispensable. This tendency has been reinforced in modernity by a Cartesian mind/body dualism and the consequential prizing of human rationality in which the essence of a person is thought to subsist. But equally, Barth is careful to note, a genuinely biblical anthropology must also reject monistic reactions against this dualistic tendency.¹³³ Monistic spiritualism holds that the true essence of a person is that of a spirit-being and that a human being *has* Spirit and *is* Spirit and thus the bodily life of humans is an illusion.¹³⁴ On the other hand monistic materialism holds that human being consists of body only and is therefore soulless – an organic being in its *totality* and related *only* to the material cosmos.¹³⁵

Philosophical materialism has been a very strong feature of modernity arising out of Enlightenment presuppositions. This has led to the rejection of belief in an uncreated creating reality (God) that exists in distinction to the cosmos and instead posits that the totality of existence consists of a material reality that is self-

¹²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 376.

¹³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 374.

¹³¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 375.

¹³² Barth, *CD* III/2, 380.

¹³³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 382.

¹³⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 390ff.

¹³⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 382ff.

generating and sustaining (the cosmos) which can be perceived and known empirically through human rationality. But for Barth, monistic materialism simply cannot account for human self-consciousness and thus renders human beings subjectless – it simply cannot account for a genuine “I”.¹³⁶ Monistic materialism produces a crisis of identity for the individual and as a consequence monistic spiritualism is an understandable reaction. But in reducing human beings to that of spirit only monistic materialism produces its own crisis – humans become objectless because we no longer conceive of ourselves as existing as material physical beings. For Barth, the biblical view of human being is a concrete monism in which soul and body are understood as *two* moments in *one* indivisible human nature – the soul as that which quickens the body and the body as that which is quickened and lives.¹³⁷ But Barth acknowledges that this biblical view cannot be properly maintained by appealing to anything that lies within human being and accessible by human self-investigation. We may only have this knowledge of our humanity by reference to that which we are related to in the covenantal purposes of God attested in Holy Scripture. It is only this that provides the basis for grounding, constituting, and maintaining human being.¹³⁸ Thus to seek the knowledge of human being in abstraction from the life-giving Spirit of God of necessity results in either some form of dualism or monism in which it is no longer possible to understand human being as an ordered unity of body and soul.

Corresponding to the humanity of Jesus we are created as a psychosomatic ordered unity of a ruling soul governing and directing a serving body. We are created as such because it is God’s purpose to actualise the covenant in historical time/space creaturely reality. As a psychosomatic ordered unity of a ruling soul governing and directing a serving body we are beings that have been made capable of knowing God and of acting responsibly before him. Likewise we are beings that have been made capable of recognising our fellows and of acting in the world in service to them. Therefore we have been made capable of being a genuine *person* who may be God-conscious and responsible to God, self-conscious and responsible to ourselves, and neighbour-conscious and responsible to him and her.¹³⁹ In this, Barth insists, our human being is an ordered unity of body and soul. As the *souls* of our bodies we

¹³⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 383.

¹³⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 393.

¹³⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 393.

¹³⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 395.

give direction to our lives and as the *bodies* of our souls we give effect to this direction in the outer world.¹⁴⁰ It is as the *souls* of our bodies that God makes himself known to us and by which we perceive God in distinction from ourselves and as the *bodies* of our souls we act responsibly before God in the external created world. God has created us as he has specifically for this encounter. Because God seeks to address us, to be perceived and known by us, and to direct us he has created us in this way.¹⁴¹ The *whole* person, body and soul, is involved in this process of being encountered by God and perceiving and knowing God. But it is as the *body* of one's soul that God makes a person capable of acting in the world in correspondence with one's perception and knowledge of God. God not only summons us to perceive and to know him but to act responsibly before him. In this too the *whole* person, body and soul, is involved in this process. Yet in this process it is the ruling soul that takes primacy over the serving body as we seek to act responsibly before God in the world. In this way God addresses human beings as ordered psychosomatic wholes and relates to us primarily in relation to the soul and secondarily in relation to the body – but never one without the other.¹⁴² It is from the centre of our being (our soul) that we do this and put into effect that which we decide at the circumference (our body) as our soul animates itself in the material world in independent bodily action.¹⁴³

It is as a unified being that God equips for both *perception* and *action* that Barth understands human rationality. For Barth rationality is a comprehensive term describing human beings in our totality in relation to God, not simply one of our capacities such as the ability to think or to understand that might stand independent from God. As Barth expresses it,

We understand by [rationality] a “meaningful order,” so that when we say that man is a rational being, what we mean is that it is proper to his nature to be in rational order of the two moments of soul and body, and in this way to be a percipient and active being.¹⁴⁴

Human beings are so constituted in this way because God seeks to be known by us and calls us to active affirmation of our creaturely being in responsibility before God. Barth does not understand human beings to be rational and therefore as a

¹⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 398

¹⁴¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 422.

¹⁴² Barth, *CD* III/2, 365.

¹⁴³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 397.

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 419.

consequence of this pre-existing capacity, the creatures God seeks to be known by. Rather it is *because* God seeks to be known by us that he equips us with the rational capacity for perception and action. Of course in our freedom we may elect to use our rationality to pursue other ends. But we only have this capacity because God has equipped us for the *specific* purpose of perception and action in relation to God and in relation to others in order that we may participate in the history of the covenant.¹⁴⁵ Thus human rationality that seeks perception of, and activity in, the world divorced from the knowledge of God is a perversion of its purpose and is thus “darkened, false, and corrupt”.¹⁴⁶ We are rational precisely *because* God creates us to be addressed as such.¹⁴⁷

But none of this is self-evident. If our anthropological endeavours were limited to only what we could observe of ourselves from the point of view of the external world then we could not unambiguously know ourselves to be the ruling soul of our serving body. An unambiguous knowledge of ourselves as human beings is only possible with knowledge that has access to the inner reason and purpose for our existence in the covenantal will of God. Thus Barth recognises that “... this information is certain and convincing, and the proof that man is a rational being is final and conclusive, only when it is given theologically.”¹⁴⁸ It is only *because* God addresses us as rational beings that we can know ourselves to be such. It is only on this *dogmatic* basis that *theological* anthropology provides a coherent understanding of humans as rational beings constituted not only as the ruling souls of our serving bodies but also as single subjects and unified. But, as Barth insists, non-theological accounts of human being can never understand us in relation to God, thus can never understand the relationship between soul and body. Consequently they can find no secure link between the purely physical and the purely psychical and so logically can only end up in either spiritualism or materialism.¹⁴⁹

As ordered psychosomatic wholes, humans are visible and material beings and thus limited in time and space.¹⁵⁰ As such, we live precariously for we are “... mortal[s]

¹⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 403.

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 403.

¹⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 421.

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 421.

¹⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 430.

¹⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 349.

who [have] only breath in [our] nostrils ...” (Is. 2:22).¹⁵¹ Consequently we hang by the single thread of the life-giving mercy of the Spirit of God, for it is God alone, and not us, who has “life in himself” (Jn. 5:26) and “it is [God] alone who has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16). Yet it is in our precarious existence as body and soul that our human being points to the inner meaning of the whole of created reality – we are created by God for covenantal relationship and live under heaven and upon the earth.¹⁵² In creating human beings as the souls of our bodies God has created a being that God may encounter and address, save by grace and grace alone, and call to active creaturely responsibility upon the earth.

The story the Bible tells is the story of the God who in freedom and love creates the cosmos to be the location and environment for the enactment of the covenant. This covenant joins in indissoluble relationship the triune God of Father, Son, and Spirit, and the human creatures God has created and equipped for grace. God acts in faithfulness to his covenantal purposes as he providentially orders the unfolding of his loving will in history. And it is upon the basis of this activity of God, as this is attested in Holy Scripture, that God reveals himself to us and enables us to know him. This is also the basis upon which we are enabled to know ourselves – that we are the human creatures who have been created *in* freedom and love *for* freedom and love in fellowship with the God who has reconciled and redeemed us in Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is on the basis of God addressing us as rational beings to know and obey him that we are enabled to understand that God has constituted us as creaturely beings consisting of an ordered unity of a ruling soul and serving body. In covenantal faithfulness God calls us to know him and to act responsibly in the world before him in the active affirmation of our creaturely being. God calls us in freedom and love to live and to be the free and loving human creatures that he desires us to be in relationship with. This is the basis of our inconceivable honour. That God should create us in this way, for this purpose, and that he should enter our creaturely existence as one of us and at such cost to reconcile and redeem us in Christ in fulfilment of his purposes attributes inconceivable honour, dignity, and esteem to human beings. And it is this that is the basis for a Christian account of ethics – a description of human behaviour in the world that corresponds to the covenantal

¹⁵¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 362.

¹⁵² Barth, *CD* III/2, 353.

faithfulness of God. Thus the basis, content, and goal of Christian ethics derive from this account of the activity of God in the world.

Chapter 3: The ethics that flow out of the Christian doctrine of creation

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Gen. 3:15-17)

In this chapter I enquire about the basis and nature of Christian ethics and begin to investigate how this relates to economic life. In the first section – *Methodology: Our knowledge of the good* – I explore Barth’s claim that Christian ethics is special ethics (the specific command that comes to specific individuals in time and space) that derives from general ethics (the goodness of God as this is revealed in his saving activity in history). On this basis the command of God can neither be elevated to an abstract universal that hovers above us as a general or timeless axiom, nor can it be casuistically reduced to a comprehensive code that specifies for all times and circumstances the distinction between good and evil. Rather the command of God comes to us specifically, concretely, and individually in the density of our historical existence and may take many different and specific forms. Therefore Christian ethics is not primarily concerned with a knowledge of specific actions and abstentions that might be deemed “good” or “bad”, rather it is concerned to know the God who commands and to engage in preparation for the reception of God’s command as and when it may come to us. This knowledge of God and preparation seeks to cultivate attitudes and dispositions that ready us for a faithful hearing and obeying of the command of God and to embody a form of life in the concrete specificity of historical existence that is consistent with this readiness. In the second section – *Christian ethics as the one command of God* – I explore Christian ethics from the point of view of Barth’s contention that for all its specificity, the command of God really only consists of one thing, aims at one thing, and desires only one outcome – the affirmation of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ that accomplishes the sanctification of our creaturely being, which is our life, our freedom, and our good. This is because the God who commands us is the God of the covenant who graciously creates, reconciles, and redeems us in Jesus

Christ. Therefore, although we must acknowledge that the *content* of the specific command of God can never be predicted or anticipated, nevertheless there is constancy and continuity in the ethical encounter between God and human beings that enables us to discern the *character* the specific command of God can be expected to take. It is on this basis I argue that Christian ethics consists of embodying a form of life that seeks to bear tangible and concrete witness to the character of the one command of God as instructional preparation for the ethical event in which we are called to faithfully hear and obey the specific command of God as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God. I conclude part I with the third section of Chapter 3 – *Christian ethics as holding covenant and creation in proper order and unity* – by arguing that the character of God’s command insofar as it relates to economic life may be discerned through making use of Barth’s insight that the work of God has both a centre and a circumference. Rightly ordering and unifying centre and circumference is Barth’s key theme in his doctrine of creation. At the centre lies the covenant of grace that is the internal basis and reason for creation and at the circumference lies the created environment that is the external basis and possibility for the enactment of the covenant. Therefore the creation exists for the sake of the covenant and not the reverse. For the sake of the covenant, the providential activity of God ensures that the creation is sustained and upheld in order that it may serve this central purpose. Corresponding to this work of God, *our* lives also have a centre and a circumference. At the centre of our lives is the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ in whom our true humanity, purpose, and *telos* are constituted and at the circumference of this centre is our economic activity that corresponds to the providential activity of God that sustains and upholds the created environment that it may fulfil its covenantal purpose.

3.1 Methodology: Our knowledge of the good

In Chapter 1 I seek to answer the question, “Who is the God who creates?” This question is answered on the basis that the being, identity, and character of God is made known through the *activity* of God as this is revealed in history, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and attested in Holy Scripture. It is on this basis *alone* we are permitted to know that the God who creates is the triune God of Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit whose purpose is to reconcile and redeem us in Jesus Christ and that the cosmos is the theatre prepared for this gracious purpose and is therefore good. In Chapter 2 I seek to answer the question, “Who is the human being that is created by this God”? This question is answered on the basis that the being, identity, and nature of human beings can only be known through the same activity of this same God as this is revealed in this same history. It is on this basis *alone* we are permitted to know that God has purposed from all eternity to create human beings for participation in loving relationality with the triune God and with fellow-humanity. Moreover, it is only on this basis that we are enabled to know that God creates us as the ruling souls of our serving bodies in order that God may address us as rational beings and call us to active creaturely responsibility before him and in relation to others.

In this chapter I take the next logical step by affirming Barth’s contention that we cannot likewise coherently speak of what constitutes good human action separate from a theological account of the same activity of God in Jesus Christ.¹ For Barth, a theological account of what human being consists of is indissolubly linked to ethics – the *content* of our actions and abstentions in the world in relation to God, others, and the created environment. As he expresses it, “[Dogmatics] has ethics in view from the very first, and cannot legitimately lose sight of it.”² This *must* be so because the God who creates is the God of the *covenant*. That is, the God who creates is the God who creates for the sake of relationship with his human creatures and who in Jesus Christ determines, desires, and accomplishes their good. This is the basis upon which Barth asserts his famous identity, “Dogmatics itself is ethics; and ethics is also dogmatics.”³ Commenting on this Michael Banner says,

Barth asserts at one and the same time the essentially ethical significance of the subject matter of dogmatics, and the essentially dogmatic character of the presuppositions of a genuine ethics; he asserts, that is to say, that an account of the action of God is an account of an action to which certain human action

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/4, The Doctrine of Creation, translated by A. T. MacKay, T. H. L. Parker, Harold Knight, Henry A. Kennedy and John Marks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 3.

² Barth, *CD* III/4, 3.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. I/1I, The Doctrine of the Word of God, translated by G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 793. For further discussion of this point see Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics*, 2ff where Matheny argues that Barth’s presentation of ethics as dogmatics “... stands alone in the history of theological thought.” And that his purpose is “... directed at liberating dogmatics from its subordination to ethics in order to strengthen the theological claim for ethical responsibility.”

properly and necessarily corresponds and by which it is evinced; and, conversely, that an account of good human action properly and necessarily makes reference to the action of God by which it is both evoked and warranted.⁴

Therefore, because a theological account of creation enables us to speak of the inner reason and purpose of creation and because a theological account of human being enables us to speak of our divine determination, we are on this basis also enabled to speak of human ethical behaviour as that which coheres with and corresponds to our human being in the purposes of God for creation. Barth is emphatic, “True man and his good action can be viewed only from the standpoint of the true and active God and His goodness.”⁵ Because God in his goodness has created a material universe in order to realise a human relational and behavioural outcome this means that good human action can only be human action that corresponds to, affirms, and represents an appropriate answering creaturely “Amen” to the good action of God as this is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Christian ethics flow directly and consistently out of the doctrine of creation. In creation, God seeks to actualise in historical concrete reality covenantal fellowship with the human creatures he has created and to actualise the mutual fellowship of humanity that flows out of this primary fellowship with God. In actualising this reality God does not create us for one purpose and then command us to achieve another. God does not constitute us in one way and then command us to live in contradiction to the way he has constituted us. Our humanity is created and constituted in Jesus Christ in order that we may be equipped and prepared to be beings in encounter – with God and with fellow-humanity. Our good activity is therefore activity that flows out of and is consistent with the inner logic of the covenantal purpose of God. Christian ethics flow directly and consistently out of the Christian doctrine of creation – but only creation understood as the external basis of the covenant, which is its inner reason and purpose. Outside of this inner reason and purpose it is impossible to read ethics directly from the created world itself in a way that is not ambiguous or arbitrary. We cannot simply observe the world as it is and

⁴ Michael Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3. For further elaboration on this see Michael Banner, *Christian Ethics: A Brief History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 101ff.

⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 3.

from this determine what constitutes good human action.⁶ Only a dogmatic account of creation that understands the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the inner reason and basis for creation can supply the basis for a coherent *Christian* ethics.

In this present chapter I seek to draw the central insights of chapters 1 and 2 together to answer the question, “How do ethics arise out of the encounter between this creating God and this created human being?” Our concern is not simply with ethics in general, but *Christian* ethics specifically. The basis for our knowledge of God in Chapter 1 and our knowledge of human being in chapter 2 is specifically, explicitly, and unashamedly derived from a Christian dogmatic account of reality. Our presupposition has been, and continues to be, that we can only have access to a genuinely Christian knowledge of these things if we accept, as an article of faith, that “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn. 1:18) and that “in [Jesus] all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Therefore, if it is accepted as true that it is *Jesus* who makes God known and that in Jesus *all* things hold together, then we must accept that the ethics that flow out of the knowledge of who God is and who the human creature is must “hold together” in Jesus Christ. If we relinquish this presupposition, we begin a journey upon a path that can only ever affirm, no matter how cleverly constructed or well intentioned, opinions and assertions that are merely arbitrary. This methodology will be arbitrary because it can only ever amount to a humanly resourced project that surveys the cosmos according to our own powers of observation and wisdom in order to apprehend the knowledge of good and evil and on this *humanly constructed* basis select those ethical principles and axioms that seem good to us and which must inevitably be filled by us with the content of our own devising.⁷ As Barth expresses it,

When [Christian theologians] enter the field of ethical reflection and interpretation they must not be surprised at the contradiction of the so-called (but only so-called) original inhabitants of this land. They cannot regard them as an authority before which they have to exculpate themselves, and to whose arrangements they must in some way conform. The temptation to

⁶ For further discussion of this point see Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, 16ff.

⁷ For further discussion of this point see Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, 4ff and 13ff.

behave as if they were required or even permitted to do this ... might perhaps consist in the invitation or challenge to embark upon ... the attempt to establish and justify the theologico-ethical inquiry within the framework and on the foundation of the presuppositions and methods of non-theological, of wholly human thinking and language.⁸

As Nigel Biggar notes, for Barth, this approach is not merely arbitrary; it is first and foremost *sinful*.⁹ In relation to the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth provocatively states that the serpent in enticing the first humans to eat from the forbidden tree and promising them that in doing so "... your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5) conceals the invitation for "...man to become the master of his own destiny. What the serpent has in mind is the establishment of ethics."¹⁰ *The establishment of ethics!* By this Barth does not have in mind ethics that God himself establishes that correspond to the goodness of his own being and activity, and which God commands human beings, in the exercise of their freedom, to joyfully accept as the affirmation of their God-given and Christ-constituted humanity. Rather, as Biggar summarises Barth's thought at this point,

... [Barth] uses 'ethics' [in this context] to refer to the subjective idealist conception of the making of moral judgements as an autarkic process; that is, as a process in which the human subject is absolutely self-determinative.¹¹

Although outwardly (and superficially) the human pursuit of the knowledge of good and evil may be validated as a good and noble undertaking that purports to take human responsibility before God and before fellow-humanity with all seriousness – inwardly (and substantially) this approach in fact usurps the judicial function of God. As Barth puts it,

It is the judicial wisdom of God to know, and His judicial freedom and office to decide, what He wills and does on the one hand and does not will or do on

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/2, *The Doctrine of God*, translated by, G. W. Bromiley, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 520. Banner examines the relationship between Christian ethics and ethics based upon non-Christian presuppositions and makes the case that Christian ethics must, as Barth argues here, maintain its distinction, but also recognise its capacity to engage in fruitful dialogue with the "so-called original inhabitants of the land". Banner concludes saying, "There is no place *within* this world from which Christianity can speak; but because Christianity cannot speak from within this world, it does not follow that Christianity cannot speak *to* it." Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, 44 (emphasis added).

⁹ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 7-25.

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 448.

¹¹ Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*, 7-8.

the other, and therefore what is good and evil ... [and] It is as this Judge, on the basis of this judicial knowledge and sentence, that He confronts man as the Lord.¹²

Therefore in seeking this “ethical” knowledge for themselves, the first humans sought to usurp the lordship of God and replace it with their own.

For Barth, this is not only sinful, but *foolishly* sinful. For human beings to presume to be able to judge between “good and evil, right and wrong, order and disorder, that which is and that which is not” presumes a competence and authority that utterly transcends human capacity – a competence that resides with God, and God *alone*.¹³ Barth has in mind here the chaos and nothingness that God, in his judicial capacity as lord of the cosmos, chooses to judge, reject, and pass-over at creation. For human beings to imagine that we can usurp and wield this judicial function is to forfeit our freedom and invite annihilation. In doing so, Barth argues,

[The human creature] has already left the protective home of peace with God. He has already renounced his confidence in the righteousness of God's judgment. He has already lost the hold in the will of God which alone can give to his being as a creature any real possibility or dignity or rest or movement. He cannot abase himself worse than by desiring this knowledge and wanting to make himself judge.¹⁴

Furthermore, in seeking to usurp the judicial function of God, human beings not only attempt the impossible by appointing themselves their own judges, but by taking on the responsibility to confront the evil of nothingness on the basis of their own knowledge of good and evil they attempt the further impossibility of constituting themselves their own saviours.¹⁵ This not only ruptures our relationship with God who, for our good and for our salvation, requires that we acknowledge and trust him alone as our only judge and saviour, but it ruptures our relationship with ourselves and our relationship with our fellow humans. There begins, as Barth so evocatively puts it “the long misery of [our] moral existence”.¹⁶ In relation to our selves, by rejecting the judicial role of God and replacing it with our own inferior idolatrous imitation, our misery is compounded in that we are predisposed to

¹² Barth, *CD* III/1, 260.

¹³ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 449.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 450.

¹⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 451.

¹⁶ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 451.

condemn ourselves where God pardons us and to pardon ourselves where God judges us.¹⁷ In relation to our fellows, in the unshakable certainty of our own ethical competence, we take up moral battles against our neighbours both as friends and as enemies who we wrong in equal measure because our ethical judgements in relation to both can never be the true and merciful judgement of God.¹⁸ Thus in seeking to establish ethics on this autarkic basis we condemn ourselves to the long misery of a moral existence in which we become obsessively and compulsively predisposed to be forever making moral judgements – for and against God, for and against ourselves, and for and against others. In so doing we rupture these relationships and alienate ourselves from God, our neighbours, and our true selves. Moreover, in rejecting God’s true verdict concerning who God is and who we are and replacing it with our own, we condemn ourselves to a wretched subjectivism in which we may only possess verdicts that arise from within our own meagre capacities and which ultimately can only be arbitrary and uncertain.

Ethics must indeed be established – but *not* on this humanly devised absolutely self-determinative autarkic basis. So we ask again, “How do ethics arise out of the encounter between this creating God and this created human being?” For Barth, Christian ethics begins by recognising in all its radical fullness that “No one is good but God alone” (Mk. 10:18).¹⁹ This means that the being of God, as this is revealed in the activity of God in Jesus Christ, *is* good (ontologically) and that this, therefore, is our absolute datum and reference point for all Christian knowledge of what constitutes good (ethical) action. Therefore this closes off to us any alternative (and thus arbitrary) route to the knowledge of good and evil. Accepting that “no one is good but God alone” means that we must acknowledge we have no adequate ethical resource within us that allows us to render judgement upon God, others, or ourselves. It is to recognise that we are *not* good, that it is we who have gone morally astray and stand in need of repentance and moral renewal, and that we must always view our own moral competence with the greatest suspicion and humility. It renders impossible the human judgement that God is *not* good because this presupposes that we have access to a knowledge of goodness independent of God that we may judge God by. Furthermore it renders impossible the human judgement that God *is* good for precisely the same reason. The human acceptance of the

¹⁷ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 451.

¹⁸ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 451.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 4.

goodness of God can never be something that *we* arrive at on the basis of *our* knowledge of goodness and *our* judgement as though it falls within our competence and legitimate jurisdiction to scrutinise, evaluate, and pass judgement on God. The human acceptance that God is good, Barth argues, is based not on our judgement but on our hearing and obeying.²⁰ Moreover, accepting that “no one is good but God alone” marks the beginning of our relief from the long misery of our moral existence, for it removes the false basis upon which we believe we have the capacity and authority to be forever making moral judgements in relation to ourselves and others.

Christian ethics concerns the command of God of the covenant that comes to God’s human creatures who are created, reconciled, and redeemed by God for freedom and love. As Barth elucidates it, the command of God is: (1) God’s *claim* upon his human creatures that we freely and cheerfully accept God’s merciful action; (2) God’s *decision* concerning what constitutes right and wrong in relation to human action; and (3) God’s *judgement* upon his human creatures in Jesus Christ whereby we are sanctified and made free for eternal life.²¹ Christian ethics seeks to make explicit, in relation to human action and abstention, that which is already implicit in the being and activity of the God who commands us.²² Christian ethics therefore begins with the goodness of God and seeks to show that this is constitutive of the good life for human beings. It begins therefore with what Barth calls an “upward look” at the action of God that accomplishes our sanctification and then in light of that same action takes a “downward look” at the particular human beings who encounter the command of God in all its specificity in the density of their various experiences.²³ This is the link between what Barth calls “general ethics” (the understanding that good human action derives from the goodness of God) and “special ethics” (how the goodness of God is translated into specific human behaviour in the density and particularity of human experience and history).²⁴ Thus special ethics is the subjective appropriation at the individual creaturely level of the objective apprehension that good human activity is determined by and derived from

²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 4.

²¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 4-5.

²² Barth, *CD* III/4, 32.

²³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 4ff.

²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 4ff.

the goodness of God and as such is to be freely and joyfully accepted in faith and obedience.²⁵

But for Barth, Christian ethics can never stop at simply being general ethics for this would render the goodness of God an abstract universal that hovers above us as a general or timeless axiom for “The command of God does not hang ineffectively in the air above man.”²⁶ If the general ethics of the goodness of God is not made specific in the density and particularity of our individual lives as they unfold moment by moment in the historical progression of time, then it will always be human wisdom that ends up determining the specific *content* that fills the empty vessel of this abstract universal. This also is to go the way of arbitrary ethics because it must always remain the case that it is human beings who exercise the judicial function of determining good and evil. Stopping at general ethics therefore entrenches us in the long misery of our moral existence. Christian ethics therefore must be special ethics – the command of the good God who creates, reconciles, and redeems us in Jesus Christ made specific and concrete in the density of our creaturely existence in time/space history.

But Barth is adamant that special ethics can never be casuistry in which the Bible, Christian tradition and/or experience, or some supposed natural law are used as resources to construct an ethical code that specifies definitively for all time that which God considers good or evil in every conceivable situation thus reducing the command of God to a comprehensive set of laws.²⁷ But, for Barth, even though Christian practice has produced a long tradition of casuistry, to reduce ethics to casuistry is untenable.²⁸ Even if such an ambitious project were possible it would still be human beings who, ultimately, would be elevated to the role of moral arbiters. For ethics to become casuistry, Barth argues, the ethicist in fact must sit on God’s throne discerning good and evil.²⁹ Therefore, to try and solidify the

²⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 5.

²⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 5.

²⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 6ff.

²⁸ Barth argues that this approach developed in second-century Christianity as a general loss of confidence in the leading of the Spirit developed and as a consequence the Bible began to be read (with borrowings from Stoic moralists) as text of ethical law. This was further developed by the practice of penitential confession during the medieval period. The Reformation jettisoned this to some degree, but in many ways the Reformation strengthened casuistry and increasingly the emphasis was placed upon the purity of intent over and against external conduct. Barth, *CD* III/4, 7-8.

²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 9.

command of God into a rigid and set code for all time is to rob God of his sovereign freedom to be the lord of his creation.³⁰ Furthermore, casuistry presupposes that the central concern of ethics is to identify and enact the good action in every situation and thus God's central concern must consist in what we *do* rather than what we *are* – with our behaviour rather than our being. Moreover, Barth argues, casuistry robs us of *our* freedom.³¹ Casuistry involves a destruction of the freedom of the individual who is confronted by and called to respond to the command of God. For Barth, the command of God is always an appeal to the freedom of the individual – the true freedom to affirm one's humanity in the creative determination of God.³² Barth is insistent that human freedom consists in our acting in genuine agreement with the will of God that is always good, not in mere external conformity to a code. Therefore obedience to God is an offering of the self to God. On this basis, Barth reasons, casuistry in fact conceals that which is genuinely good in special ethics – the freedom to respond to the command of God in genuine gladness and joy.³³ Therefore casuistry risks becoming the humanly contrived vehicle by which the human subject secretly seeks to maintain mastery in the relationship between God and human and thus the tool by which humans may still “honour [God] with their lips” while their “hearts are far from [him]” and their “worship of [God] is [reduced to] a human commandment learned by rote” (Is. 29:13).

This aspect of Barth's ethics is emphasised by Paul T. Nimmo who explores what he calls Barth's “actualistic ontology” with respect to ethics.³⁴ Because God reveals himself (ontologically) in his actions this means that God's being cannot be abstracted from his actions as though God could be understood in isolation from his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. On this basis neither can our human being be abstracted from our actions. Therefore for Barth, ethics can never be reduced to the question of human action abstracted from human being as though our ethics are independent of our ontology.³⁵ In other words, ethics is not essentially a question of what we *do* – rather ethics is a question of what we *are*. Ethics is not primarily a question of right *action* as right *being*. Therefore Christian ethics is primarily a question of being rightly *related* to the one who secures our being in Jesus Christ.

³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 9.

³¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

³² Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

³³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

³⁴ Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 4ff.

³⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 746.

So if Christian ethics must be special ethics, but not the special ethics of casuistry, we ask yet again, “How do ethics arise out of the encounter between this creating God and this created human being?” For Barth the ethical encounter is an *event* that occurs in the density and specificity of historical experience in which the God who creates meets the human being who is created and calls this human creature to be responsible before him.³⁶ In this event God confronts particular individuals as the free and sovereign lord of the cosmos and commands them in ways that are specific, clear, and unambiguous. As Barth argues,

... [I]n Holy Scripture the command of God does not confront us in the guise of rules, principles, axioms and general moral truths, but purely in the form of concrete, historical, unique and singular orders, prohibitions and directions. ... [As such] It leaves nothing to human choice or preference. It thus requires no interpretation to come into force. To the last and smallest detail it is self-interpreted, and in this form it confronts man as a command already in force.”³⁷

But for Barth it is not the Bible *as such* that commands us, but the God to whom the Bible bears witness.

But if the meaning and substance of the biblical testimony is the revelation of the reality of God in His works, then we cannot avoid the conclusion that the Bible itself is this Word of command. The Bible itself does not only give instruction or formulate rules or furnish examples. It issues decrees. It effects decisions. It makes us responsible by continually commanding this or forbidding that. When we say the Bible, we do not mean, of course, the Bible *in abstracto*. We do not mean the biblical authors – Moses and the prophets, Matthew and Paul – in their own name, but the God to whom they all bear witness. But this God does not speak in this way without their witness.³⁸

In expressing it this way Barth wants to avoid the Bible itself being treated as an ethical text and thus another resource for casuistry under human control. He wishes to acknowledge the sovereign freedom of God to command as he wills, yet also to maintain that God’s sovereign freedom is never arbitrary, rather it is always

³⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 17.

³⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 12.

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/2, *The Doctrine of God*, translated by, G. W. Bromiley, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 705.

consistent with the covenant of grace as this is attested in Holy Scripture. As Nimmo expresses it, “Barth’s actualistic ontology therefore preserves the open possibility of a material identity of the command of God today with Scripture, but does not render it a necessity.”³⁹ As a consequence, by the gracious enabling of God, the Bible may become the means by which we are awakened to the true Word of God in Jesus Christ and thus, as Nimmo summarises Barth’s thought,

The ethical agent is called to hear afresh the command of God to freedom and obedience as it is given in the power of the Holy Spirit *through* the historically specific command of God in the narrative of the Bible.⁴⁰

For Barth, the purpose of the divine command, for all its situational diversity, is always to bind the person who hears it to Jesus Christ because in the fulfilment of the covenant of grace God sets us free and claims us for himself.⁴¹ Therefore, as Nimmo expresses it, “Theological ethics is a question of the participation of the ethical agent in the righteousness of Jesus Christ ...”⁴² Moreover, Barth insists, because it is the *living God* who seeks to bring us into a *dynamic relationship* of participation in the righteousness of Jesus Christ

... we do not have a static confrontation whose form and content is fixed for good and all. ... Since it is the free God and free man who encounter one another ... the question “What shall I or we do” can never become outdated. No ethics can anticipate [the command of God]. [Its] form and manner will always be the mystery of the commanding God and the obedient or disobedient man.⁴³

Because the divine command: (1) comes to specific individuals in the sovereign freedom of the living God; (2) seeks the participation of the ethical agent in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; (3) can never be anticipated regarding its specific content; and (4) “confronts man as a command already in force” – the decisive question is not how it is to be *interpreted* by the human agent, rather, it is whether the command of God will be met with glad human *obedience* or not.⁴⁴ Therefore for Barth, Christian ethics is not so much a matter of ethical knowledge as “...

³⁹ Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 37.

⁴⁰ Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 35.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* II/2, 630.

⁴² Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 43.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics vol. IV, part 4 Lecture Fragments*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 34.

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 12.

instructional preparation for the ethical event.”⁴⁵ Two key implications arise from this. Firstly, Christian ethics is primarily concerned to *know* the God who commands. For Barth, the God who commands is our creator – the God who has willed from all eternity in the covenant to be gracious to us in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ This grace consists of the actuality that God, in the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the freedom of his love, elects to create human creatures for fellowship, to reconcile these human creatures who have repudiated the covenant and in so doing have denied their true selves, and to redeem for eternal life these human creatures to whom he grants the status of beloved children.⁴⁷ It is *this* God who commands. The human creature that this God commands is understood only in correspondence to this activity of God. The human creature that this God commands is the human creature that God, from all eternity, has bound himself to in a solemn covenantal oath to create, reconcile, and redeem by grace for fellowship and loving relationality.⁴⁸ This means that although the command of this God is sovereign and free (for this God is the lord of the cosmos) nevertheless his command is never arbitrary. The God who commands us is the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ.⁴⁹ This means that there is constancy and continuity in the command of God that has its unifying reason, centre, and purpose in the inner logic of the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, although the command of God comes to us specifically, concretely, and individually in the density of our historical existence and as such takes many different and specific forms, it is always the command of his faithfulness to the covenant and so is never arbitrary and never contradictory.

Secondly, because Christian ethics is “instructional preparation for the ethical event”, this means that it is not primarily an intellectual exercise that consists in training in the *content* of ethical knowledge. Rather it is training in a form of life, or *habitus*, that seeks to cultivate attitudes and dispositions that prepare the human subject for a faithful and obedient hearing of the command of God as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God. It therefore consists in the formation of character and ways of living that embody the acknowledgement that the ethical event must involve the human subject living consistently with the inner

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 18.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 35.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 24-25.

⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 25-26.

⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 35.

logic of the covenant fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It consists in petitioning God to grant the human subject the obedient enabling that, by the Spirit of God, “Your will [may] be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). It consists in seeking to make explicit the form of life that is implicit in the ethical event and seeking to embody this form of life and this obedient hearing in the concrete specificity of historical existence. It consists in understanding that the life that God calls us to is *not* one that imagines we are, as Barth puts it, free to live at a “safe distance from the ethical battlefield” having a ready answer to every ethical dilemma near at hand, nor does it embody the belief that the real ethical issue confronting us is our need for knowledge so that we may “reach dry land as it were, and to stand there like God, knowing good and evil.”⁵⁰ Rather, it consists of practicing a form of life that bears witness to the all-sufficiency of God and our need to live in utter reliance upon the living God. It therefore consists of relinquishing all human claims to mastery and control and all illusions of human moral competence and capacity. It consists of the *manner in which we live* as we hold ourselves in readiness for the ethical event in which it may so please God to directly command us as he wishes. Therefore Christian ethics for Barth is far more a disposition of faithful obedience that is shaped by the reality of God’s covenantal faithfulness in Jesus Christ whereby we may confront the various circumstances of life with an attitude of radical openness to the command of God than it is a settled corpus of moral content concerning the knowledge of what may constitute right and wrong in every situation. In other words Christian ethics is the living out of a covenantal *relationship* rather than the application of a set of ethical *principles*.

Construing ethics in this way risks concluding that Barth’s ethics are unable to provide moral certainty and that his approach to ethics is merely an elaborate form of situation ethics or occasionalism.⁵¹ Approached as an ethical *system*, avoiding such a conclusion concerning Barth’s ethics is well-nigh impossible. As a *system* its radical openness of the command of God is both highly subjective and lacking moral certainty. But as Nimmo emphasises, this is precisely the point concerning Barth’s ethics. It is not about satisfying moral *principles*; rather it is about the actuality of the *relationship* between God and the ethical agent as a series of events forming a history of loving trusting hearing and obedience.⁵² Moreover as David Clough

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 11.

⁵¹ For further discussion of this point see Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 64ff.

⁵² Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 59.

recognises, there is a strong element of dialectic in Barth's ethics that he believes has not been sufficiently recognised.⁵³ In other words to appreciate the point Barth seeks to make one must be willing to hold simultaneously, in unresolved tension, two opposing poles neither of which is adequate on their own to fully characterise the reality Barth seeks to lay bare. On the one hand we must never suppose that we may possess certainty of knowledge of God's will, yet on the other hand we must be radically open to the command of God who in his sovereign freedom confronts us in the ethical event. Therefore, as Clough expresses it, "... we can neither claim to be in full possession of God's will for humankind – which would be idolatry – nor give up the attempt to discover it – which would be apostasy."⁵⁴

Consequently Christian ethics is a humble and modest undertaking. It must never presume beforehand to know with certainty what the specific command of God might be in any or every conceivable situation, for it always reckons with the God who is the sovereign and free lord of the cosmos. Nevertheless, this sovereign lord is also the God of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus and *on this basis alone* we may trust that his command conforms in every way to the inner logic of God's covenant faithfulness. Thus Christian ethics will never aspire to be a systematic ethics – it will never aspire to write in advance where on the plane of human action the command of God might move next, nor will it aspire to construct something that we might imagine we have invented and mastered by our own resources. Rather it will seek to embody a form of life that lives in conformity with the inner logic of the covenant and in so doing be a preparation for a faithful hearing and obeying of the command of God as and when it may come to us in the sovereign freedom of God.

3.2 Christian ethics as the one command of God

Barth begins his ethics of creation with the programmatic statement,

The task of special ethics in the context of the doctrine of creation is to show to what extent the one command of the one God who is gracious to man in

⁵³ David Clough, *Ethics in Crisis: Interpreting Barth's Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), xiii.

⁵⁴ Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*, xii.

Jesus Christ is also the command of his Creator and therefore already the sanctification of the creaturely action and abstention of man.⁵⁵

For all his insistence concerning the specificity of the command of God in the ethical event, Barth is adamant that special ethics cannot be reduced to a passive human agent directed at every moment by the direct command of God.⁵⁶ This means Christian ethics cannot take the path of assuming continuous divine inspiration to be a normative experience for every individual. As Barth is always at pains to remind us, because the God who commands us is the “one God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ”, this means that there is “constancy and continuity” in the command of God.⁵⁷ The command of God, however it may come to particular individuals in terms of its situationally specific content, always has its unifying reason, centre, and purpose in the inner logic of the covenant of grace. Therefore the specific command of God, as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God, is always the command of God’s faithfulness to the covenant and so is never arbitrary.⁵⁸ For Barth, behind and above every *specific* command of God there lies “a single unitary command” – “the *one* command of the *one* God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ”.⁵⁹

Barth uses the analogy of a vertical line from above intersecting with a horizontal plane below to illustrate the specific command of God (from above) coming to the human subject (below).⁶⁰ The specific command that comes from the God who is the sovereign and free lord of the cosmos can never be predicted, anticipated, or systematised so that the human subject may have mastery and control – it comes from above as a single point upon the plane of human action. But the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ has not simply issued a solitary command and left it at that. The ethical event is part of a *series* of events that form a history. This is because the God of the covenant fulfilled in Christ is always active, always at work, and always confronting individuals with his specific commands. Therefore, the vertical line of the specific command of God from above, rather than intersecting at a solitary *point* on the plane of human action below, traces a *line*, as a series of

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 3.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 15ff. For further discussion on the relationship between divine action and human agency in Barth’s ethics see Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 86ff.

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 17.

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 35.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 16.

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 17-19.

points over time, as the ethical event of the specific commands of God unfolds in human history.

It is the task of Christian ethics to discern and demonstrate, by the gracious enabling of God, the constancy and continuity of the one command of God that undergirds every specific command of God. As Barth expresses it,

Special ethics can then become the investigation and representation of the character which [the specific command of God] will always take, of the standard by which the goodness or evil of human action will be decided, not by the moralist and his ethics, but by God the Commander.⁶¹

Therefore, although the particular *content* of the specific command of God may take us by surprise it will nevertheless possess a constancy of *character* that we may recognise as bearing witness to the God of the covenant of grace – what Barth refers to as having a “formed reference”.⁶² It is on this basis I argue that Christian ethics consists of seeking to: (1) discern the character of the one command of God that we may (2) embody a form of life that bears tangible and concrete witness to the character of the one command of God as “instructional preparation” for the ethical event that we may (3) faithfully hear and obey the specific command of God in the ethical event as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God.

The overarching framework of Barth’s doctrine of creation is that the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the inner reason and basis for all that exists as created reality distinct from God. In the enactment of the covenant, God creates rational creatures that are genuinely human and which fully enjoy authentic creaturely integrity of being in order that God, in the infinite fullness of Father, Son, and Spirit, may graciously enter into a relationship of loving fellowship with these human creatures. The covenant is not for the sake of God, but for the sake of the human creatures that God elects to be gracious to. This covenantal purpose that motivates the divine election, in which God wills and promises to be *this* God for us, derives from the very being of the triune God who has his being in freedom and love. From all eternity God has elected to be *this* God and all the ways and works of God aim at the fulfilment of this covenantal purpose and thus fully conform to God’s faithfulness to his covenantal promise. In relation to discerning the character

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 18.

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/4, 18.

of the one command of God, it is only because of *who this* God is that we are divinely authorised to trust that we may know with confidence that *all* that this God does and commands aims at only one thing – the fulfilment of the covenant of grace – for *this* is the inner reason and purpose of creation and it is for this that *all things* hold together in Jesus Christ. It is on this basis alone that the claim can be advanced with confidence that the *specific* command of God, for all its particularity, really only aims at the fulfilment of the *one* command of God – the affirmation of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ that accomplishes the sanctification of our creaturely being, which is our life, our freedom, and our good.

The work of God is a unity. God does not aim at one thing in creating us, another in reconciling us, and a third thing in redeeming us for eternal life. Yet this unity, in all its infinite richness, depth, and glory confronts us in ways that mean we can only grope, as though blinded by its brilliance, so as to apprehend it. Even at our very best we can only apprehend it in fragmentary ways. This is not because the unity of the work of God is obscure from God's side, but rather from our side. In our limitation, for "now we see in a mirror, dimly" and "know only in part" (1 Cor. 13:12), we are unable to apprehend and express the one command of God fully and completely. All our attempts to do so are inadequate; they are always approximations. But as Barth puts it,

There is no sense in regretting [this] inadequacy. For adequate knowledge of God here and now would not be real knowledge any more than a direct look into the sun would be real seeing. In both cases we could only be dazzled and therefore blinded. If we were to see God here and now as He is, and as He sees Himself, we should die.⁶³

The reason that there is no sense in regretting the inadequacy of our knowledge is because, in Jesus Christ, God gives us all the knowledge of himself that he deems sufficient for our needs. And in the covenantal will of God our need is to *trust*, more than it is to know, for it is the will of God to bring us into *relationship* rather than to simply give us knowledge. God has so constituted the reality of the cosmos that it is through faithful trust that the knowledge of God is found and not the reverse. Thus the methodology we began with is the methodology we are compelled to continue with – faith seeking understanding.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 34.

Therefore we are unable to express fully and completely the one command of God as it meets us on the plane of human action. But by the grace of God we can draw near, and from different perspectives express the one command in ways that, while being approximations and therefore provisional statements, may nevertheless be sufficient for our need. Because this whole project has approached the knowledge of God through the Christian doctrine of creation our attempts to express the one command of God will bear this imprint and be shaped by this particular approach. But we may have confidence that this will not result in an expression of the one command of God that stands in contradiction to an expression that we might have derived had we approached this question through the doctrine of reconciliation or the doctrine of redemption.⁶⁴ Indeed as he approached his incomplete ethics of reconciliation Barth was at pains to emphasise that ethics takes a somewhat different shape and flavour when written under the three “chapters” of creation, reconciliation, and redemption in a way that is analogous to the Trinity. Nevertheless while recognising distinctiveness, Barth emphasises unity – there are not independent commands under the three different headings.⁶⁵ Rather, Barth says, “Special ethics has to speak about the one totality of the event in three chapters corresponding to the threeness of these standpoints.”⁶⁶

In the context of the doctrine of creation Barth expresses the one command of God as follows: “... the one command of the one God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ is also the command of his Creator and therefore already the sanctification of the creaturely action and abstention of man.”⁶⁷ The “man” that Barth refers to here is the true and genuine human that is created and constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by good action that affirms and bears witness to this true humanity – action that is *for* God and *for* neighbour. Thus the one command of God is, by the grace of God, that we become and be the true and good human creatures created for fellowship with God and for fellow-humanity that God has created us to be. It is *this* that God sanctifies and approves by his Word, it is *this* that all of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ aims toward fulfilling, it is *this* that the sanctifying office of the

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 32-35. In his incomplete fragment in *CD* IV/4 in which Barth seeks to write the ethics of the doctrine of reconciliation, he chooses to do so under the heading of “invocation” rather than under the heading of “freedom” as he does with the ethics of the doctrine of creation. It is intriguing to imagine how he would have approached the ethics of the doctrine of redemption. See Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, 36-46.

⁶⁵ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, 9.

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, 8.

⁶⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 35.

Holy Spirit works in us to bring to maturity in this present age, and it is this that the consummation of the new creation will manifest in all its glorious perfection in the age to come. It is this that the Sabbath rest points to and aims toward.⁶⁸

The foundational fact that gives us confidence that the unity of the one command of God can be expressed in this way is that the God who commands us is the God who is “gracious to man in Jesus Christ”. The grace of God in Jesus Christ, as Barth continually affirms, is both the noetic and ontic basis for creation.⁶⁹ In Jesus Christ (the Word of God made human flesh) God has constituted and determined for all eternity what true humanity shall consist of and for our sake the Word of God incarnate has suffered, died, been raised, ascended, and is now incorporated into the very being of God. In this way “[our lives] are hidden with Christ in God” and “[w]hen Christ who is [our] life is revealed, [we] also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4). It is the one command of God, and all that the will of God aims toward fulfilling, that the true human life that he has constituted for us and hidden and safeguarded for us in Jesus Christ be revealed in glory in the fullness of time.

At its most elemental, therefore I argue, we can express the one command of God in the context of the doctrine of creation as “*Live!*” – but only understood in light of the covenant as the internal basis of creation and true human being created and constituted in Jesus Christ. “*Live!*” can never mean live as an isolated and solitary individual in competitive conflict with God, others, and the world. It can never mean a life that is exclusively focussed on simply securing the means to exist independently of God and indifferently in relation to others. “*Live!*” means to actively affirm the creaturely being that God has constituted us to be in Jesus Christ and to seek to be rightly orientated toward God, toward our neighbours, and toward the created environment which God has placed us in as the external basis of the covenant.

The Bible uses the terms “live”, “have life”, and “salvation” more or less synonymously.⁷⁰ The Christian proclamation of salvation is that God, in

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 98.

⁶⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 39.

⁷⁰ In the story of the Rich Young Man recorded in Matthew 19:16-30, the terms “eternal life” (v16), “enter into life” (v17), “be perfect” (v21), “treasure in heaven” (v21), “enter the kingdom of heaven” (v23), “enter the kingdom of God” (v24), “be saved” (v25), and “inherit eternal life” (v29) are all used synonymously.

faithfulness to his covenantal promise, has acted in Jesus Christ to save us *from* a life that stands in contradiction to the life-affirming covenantal purposes of God and to free us *for* a life that stands in conformity with God's eternal purpose in establishing the covenant of grace. Thus God saves us that we may *live* – that we “may have life and have it abundantly” to use the language of John (Jn. 10:10). This same idea is expressed in the language of Paul: “the one who is righteous through faith shall live” (Rom. 1:17).⁷¹ This may be understood in light of Barth's doctrine of creation as meaning that the one who accepts and trusts God's saving word concerning who we truly are in God's covenantal determination and who in freedom elects, by God's gracious enabling, to live in conformity with this truth shall have life – the life that God has constituted for us in Jesus Christ. This life is both a present and an eschatological reality. It has the characteristics of both a present actuality and a future consummation and fulfilment. It is a life that holds together in fruitful tension, a “now” and a “not yet”. It is a life that is constituted in an eternity that has its being in the here and now. Thus the life that God saves us to is both a present reality and a future hope. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in detail Christian eschatological thought. But insofar as it relates to our present concern we may say that the consummation of the fullness of life that Christian hope is orientated toward is an empirical space/time reality that God brings to fulfilment at the consummation of the ages in the new creation that lies outside of the normal progression of the historical process as we know it. While much of the detail remains hidden from us, as Barth notes, its essence is contained in the Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:1-3) – God resting with his human creatures in the goodness of created reality – everything that God does and aims toward points to this and finds its consummation and fulfilment in this.⁷²

Therefore Christian ethics occupies a space of eschatological tension between the “now” of the present reality in which we do not yet see (except by faith) the salvation that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ and the “not yet” of the fulfilment of God's covenantal purposes in space/time empirical reality beyond the present historical process. It is precisely in this space between the now and the not yet that the one command of God comes to us as instructional preparation for the specific command of God in the ethical event. It is in the eschatological tension of

⁷¹ This is the footnote alternative translation in the NRSV.

⁷² Barth, *CD* III/1, 98.

the now and not yet that God calls us to “live” and to actively affirm our creaturely being. God’s one command is always consistent with and aims toward the fulfilment of what he has created us to be and what God seeks to save us to through his reconciling and redeeming purposes in Jesus Christ. Moreover God’s one command is also the saving promise of God and the saving promise of God is also the gracious enabling of God whereby, through his life-giving Spirit in Jesus Christ, God begins in our lives a process of sanctifying transformation that is begun in the now of present reality to be fulfilled in the not yet of the new creation.

Understanding the one command of God as the command to actively affirm the creaturely being that God has constituted us to be in Jesus Christ, as Barth emphasises, is to understand the command of God as an appeal to our freedom – our freedom to choose the choice of God that we be the human creatures he has created us to be.⁷³ Indeed Barth writes his entire ethics of creation in *Church Dogmatics* III/4 under the heading of “freedom” – Freedom before God, Freedom in fellowship, Freedom for life, and Freedom in limitation. The true freedom that God calls us to, as I argue in Chapter 2, is not so much an action to accomplish, but a status to enjoy. It is the freedom to choose the choice of God. The covenant, and thus all of creation, as I argue in Chapter 1, arises out of the freedom and love of God. God creates humankind for covenantal relationality *in* freedom and love *for* freedom and love – not for bondage and abandonment. Therefore, both the one command and any specific command of God is always an appeal to the freedom of the individual to affirm one’s humanity in the covenantal determination of God. This is our *true* freedom, the freedom that God calls us to.

God does not simply call us to act in a certain way so as to be well pleased by mere external conformity to a moral code while our hearts may be far from him. God’s concern is that we be in *relationship* with him as loving father and trusting child. Thus obedience to the command of God is the obedience of love and is therefore the true obedience of a heart that is trustful, joyful, and glad. Because the command of God is an appeal to our freedom it is a call to genuine and joyful inner agreement based upon a relationship of genuine loving trust and therefore is always an invitation to the human subject to good conscience.⁷⁴ Therefore the obedience that

⁷³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

God calls us to is not simply moral action, but a whole-of-being response in which we offer our entire selves to God and in so doing realise ourselves in our God-given and Christ-constituted humanity.⁷⁵ Moreover, as Nimmo emphasises, the conformity of our ethical action to the being of God is deeply actualistic. It is not an appropriated state that we may accomplish and possess, rather it is an *event* that God graciously enables and which we must continually receive anew morning by morning.⁷⁶ In this way the command of God, “*Live!*” is the invitation to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves and in so doing to participate by faith in our true humanity and purpose. This is our ontology, our being, our worship, and our work, and because it is these things it is also our freedom.

For the purposes of this thesis, we now must ask what all this might suggest for economic life. The active affirmation of our creaturely being in response to the one command of God may be thought of as having three orientations – in relation to God, in relation to others, and in relation to our functioning in the created environment. In relation to God, the active affirmation of our true humanity in response to the one command of God consists in our recognition that the God of the covenant of grace is the God who creates us and is therefore the source and origin of our being and that this God is the God of freedom and love who creates us for freedom and love in covenantal relationship with God and is therefore the goal and purpose of our being. Obedience to the one command of God to actively affirm our true humanity in relation to God means “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). The command to love God with all our being involves the totality of who we are and therefore has economic implications. This is the freedom that God calls us to in the covenant and its exercise is our worship as it finds expression in relation to God. Because the covenant is the inner reason and purpose of all reality and because it is the will of God in establishing the covenant that we come into loving fellowship with God, it follows that the purpose of our activity as economic agents is to serve the goal of human fellowship with God.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

⁷⁶ Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 161-62.

In relation to others, the active affirmation of our true humanity in response to the one command of God consists in our recognition that *all* people, ourselves included, are beings that God has created for grace and fellowship – that *every* human being is created, loved, accepted, and granted inconceivable honour by God in Jesus Christ. Obedience to the one command of God to actively affirm our true humanity in relation to others means “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). To love myself is simply to accept and find joy in the fact that by the grace of God in Jesus Christ I am created and constituted a genuine “I”. To love my neighbour as myself is to do likewise in relation to him – to acknowledge and find joy in the fact that she also is created and constituted a genuine “Thou” by this same grace of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore all that I am and all that I do (including how I behave in the world as an economic agent) ought to be an affirmation of this truth. This is the freedom that God calls us to in the covenant and its exercise is our worship as it finds expression in relation to fellow-humanity. Because the covenant is the inner reason and purpose of all reality and because it is the will of God in establishing the covenant that we come into fellowship with fellow-humanity, it follows that the purpose of our activity as economic agents is to serve the goal of human fellowship with fellow-humanity.

In relation to our functioning in the created environment, the active affirmation of our true humanity in response to the one command of God consists in our recognition that the created environment is the concrete reality that God has created to be the external basis for the fulfilment of the covenant in history in Jesus Christ. It means that we are to recognise that God has richly resourced the world so that it may serve God’s covenantal purpose and that God calls us in our work to exercise proper dominion over the created environment that it may serve this purpose in the providential governance of God. The affirmation of our true humanity in relation to our life of work in the created environment means that we are to use the resources of the world through economic activity in order that *all* human life is nourished and protected in order that all people may enjoy the span of time that God has given us so as to be the living beings whose primary work is the affirmation of our true humanity in relation to God and others. This is the freedom that God calls us to in the covenant and its exercise is our worship as it finds expression in relation to our activity in the created environment. Because the covenant is the inner reason and purpose of all reality and because it is the will of God in establishing the covenant

that the covenant be enacted in time/space concrete reality, it follows that the purpose of our activity as economic agents is to serve the goal of the covenant of grace being enacted on earth.

In Chapter 5 I elaborate at length upon these three orientations and argue that the Christian community may find the resources to enact an economic form of life in obedience to the one command of God through making explicit the economic implications contained within the three key rituals of the Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, and Baptism. The Sabbath rest reveals that neither God nor humans are bound by the necessity of some relentless work ethic that imposes its will from the outside and drives forever onward. The Sabbath signals God's priority in terms of what God wills for creation and it implicitly commands the relativisation of all human work and thus forbids the absolutisation of economic activity. In the Sabbath we are called to cease from our own work so as to rest with God and with one another and in so doing enjoy and consciously reflect on the work of God. For the Christian community to enact the economic implications of the Sabbath in a concrete embodiment of life represents a practical outworking of the one command of God as it orientates us to love God with all our being. In so doing the Sabbath orientates us to the work of God, relativises human work in light of the work of God, and stands against the absolutisation of human work which, as I argue in Chapter 4, is a very real risk in contemporary economic life.

The Lord's Supper reveals God's desire for fellowship with human beings and that we are created, reconciled, and redeemed in Jesus Christ for a form of fellowship with one another that embraces every aspect of life including the economic. The supper points to the humanity of God that in Jesus Christ God's living Word became flesh to be with us and for us for the sake of fellowship. Thus the supper signals God's purpose in terms of what God wills for creation and implicitly commands the humanisation of all human work and thus forbids the dehumanisation of one another through economic activity. In the Lord's Supper we are called to break bread together in fellowship around the Lord's Table and in so doing we are orientated toward fellow humanity under the lordship of Christ. For the Christian community to enact the economic implications of the Lord's Supper in a concrete embodiment of life represents a practical outworking of the one command of God as it orientates us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In so doing the Supper directs us to have

fellowship with one another, humanises human activity in light of the humanity of God in Jesus Christ, and stands against a lifestyle of dehumanising lovelessness toward our near and distant neighbours which, as I argue in Chapter 4, is a very real risk in contemporary economic life.

Baptism reveals God's transforming power in our lives and that it is God's will to deliver us from the corrupting power of a life alienated from God. Baptism points to the death of an old way of life characterised by disordered materialistic desire and to our birth into a new life characterised by correspondence to God in which we learn to love one another as God has loved us. It is enacted in identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit of God. Thus Baptism signals God's power to accomplish his priority and purpose for creation and implicitly commands the limitation and redirection of all human work and thus forbids the limitless pursuit of economic desire heedless of the will of God. In Baptism we are called to live lives in correspondence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in so doing "put to death ... evil desire and greed" (Col. 3:5). For the Christian community to enact the economic implications of Baptism in a concrete embodiment of life represents a practical outworking of the one command of God as it orientates us to live in the world. In so doing Baptism directs us to repudiate an old self-orientated way of life, places appropriate limits upon our material ambitions, and stands against us regarding our work solely in material terms which, as I argue in Chapter 4, is a very real risk in contemporary economic life.

3.3 Christian ethics as holding covenant and creation in proper order and unity

In the previous section I quote Barth saying

Special ethics can then become the investigation and representation of the character which [the specific command of God] will always take, of the standard by which the goodness or evil of human action will be decided, not by the moralist and his ethics, but by God the Commander.⁷⁷

In this section I use Barth's insight that the work of God has both a covenantal centre and a created circumference that must be held together in proper order and

⁷⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 18.

unity in order to develop a *standard* by which I believe we may discern the *character* God's specific command will take in relation to our activity as economic agents. This standard will enable us to speak coherently concerning how we may understand the one command of God as it orientates us toward God, toward others, and toward our actions in the created environment insofar as our behaviour as economic agents is concerned. Consequently this standard will provide the basis by which I articulate my Christian conception of economic life in part II of this thesis. In other words this standard, I argue, is the basis upon which we may both discern the constancy and continuity of the one command of God and the character the specific command of God will take in relation to economic life. However this standard can never be advanced as some sort of ethical absolute or axiomatic principle. It must always be prepared to give ground in the presence of the living God who in freedom and loving faithfulness to the covenant may command as he pleases. Therefore this standard must never be advanced so as to limit the one command of the living God who is the sovereign lord of his cosmos. Rather it is advanced so as to help *us* discern how the unity and constancy of the one command of God may be expected to confront us in the specificity and density of historical experience and thus provide instructional preparation as we hold ourselves in readiness to hear and obey the specific command of God as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God.

Barth says

... man's active life corresponds directly to that which according to Holy Scripture forms the centre of God's action, i.e., the coming of His kingdom, His activity as the Lord of the covenant, His work of reconciling the world to Himself. ... According to the witness of Holy Scripture, however, the action of God has a circumference as well as this centre. ... The God who is the Saviour and Reconciler of His creature ... does not cease to be faithful towards him as his Creator. ... As He intervenes for the world, conducting at its centre His own cause and the world's, He does not cease to care also for its continuance before Him, for the existence and welfare of all His creatures. ... And concern for this presupposition is God's action on the circumference of the centre which we have considered thus far. It is the sway of His fatherly providence. What we now call the work of man corresponds to this providential rule. ... [Work] cannot, then, be the centre of human activity. It

constitutes its circumference, just as the rule of divine providence is not the centre but only the circumference of God's activity. But as God's activity has this circumference as well as the centre, the same is true of the activity which He requires of man. In work [man] affirms his particular existence corresponding to the particular divine affirmation conferred by his creation as man and therefore by the fact that he, too, in his particular existence is an object of the providence and care of God's universal lordship over the cosmos created by Him. Yet his particular existence lies in [an] hierarchically ordered unity ...⁷⁸

For Barth therefore, covenant and creation exist in an irreversible order and an unbreakable unity. Creation exists for the sake of the covenant and the covenant determines the shape creation takes – they exist in this *order*, never the reverse! Yet the covenant requires the creation as the theatre for its enactment and it is only within the material structures of created reality that the covenant has its history – they exist in this *unity*, never one without the other! Because the covenant is the internal basis that provides the motivating reason for creation and the inner logic determining its shape, it lies at the *ruling centre* of God's purposes. Contrawise the creation, because it is the enabling possibility for the enactment of the covenant, lies at the *serving circumference* of God's purposes. For this reason and to this end human beings are created by God as psychosomatic beings constituted also in an irreversible order and unbreakable unity. As the ruling *souls* of our serving bodies we are orientated toward the covenantal centre of the work of God. In this way we stand in relation to God and in relation to fellow-humanity that we may know God and recognise our fellows. But to actualise this relatedness God constitutes us the serving *bodies* of our ruling souls and as such we are orientated toward the created circumference of the work of God. In this way we stand in relation to the created environment that we may act responsibly before God and our fellows upon the earth.

The fact that God creates a *substantial* world to be the external basis for the enactment of the covenant and creates human beings as the physical *bodies* of their souls to participate in a *material* creaturely existence, immediately and necessarily generates an economic necessity – we must act in the world to sustain our creaturely beings. Yet this necessity must be understood within the context that *everything*

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 516-518.

God creates and brings to pass in his providential lordship of creation has the fulfilment of God's covenantal purposes in view. All things only have meaning in light of this – or none at all. As Barth emphatically puts it,

As the creation of all the reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this purposed covenant and with a view to its execution, so the meaning of the continued existence of the creature, and therefore the purpose of its history, is that this covenant will and work of God begun in creation should have its course and reach its goal. There is no other meaning or purpose in history.⁷⁹

Corresponding to this will and work of God, our lives also have a centre and circumference. At the ruling centre of our lives is our work of worship and service that corresponds to the reconciling and redeeming activity of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ – its goal: fellowship with God and with fellow humanity. At the serving circumference of this ruling centre is our work of creaturely sustenance through economic activity that corresponds to the providential activity of God that sustains and upholds the created environment for the sake of the covenant – its goal: the flourishing of our creaturely lives that we may be fit for our covenantal service. Therefore our covenantal service and economic activity must stand in irreversible order and unbreakable unity. The meeting of our genuine and legitimate creaturely needs through economic activity is for the sake of our covenantal service – never the reverse. Yet our covenantal service embraces and includes the creaturely integrity of our lives and those of our fellows in the face of the economic necessity we all confront – never one without the other.

It is on this basis, I argue, that a Christian conception of economic life that serves its proper function in the economy of God will be recognisable. First, it will uphold the *unity* of covenant and creation and thus regard both Christian service *and* economic agency as integrated in unbreakable oneness. Thus it will avoid a form of life in which these exist independent of each other. It will neither conceive of Christian service as constituting the totality of a spiritualistic vision concerned only with the saving of souls that has no concern for the bodies of whose souls they are; nor will it conceive of economic agency as constituting the totality of a materialistic vision concerned only with the betterment of bodies that has no concern for the souls of whose bodies they are. Therefore it will regard both Christian service *and* economic

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 36.

activity as being integrated in unbreakable oneness. This *unity* of God's covenantal purpose and human economic activity is a recurring theme in scripture. For example James says, (slightly paraphrased)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can [that sort of] faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; [God bless and keep you and let his face shine upon you]," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

This passage recognises the *unity* that must exist between our participation in the covenantal purposes of God (our faith) and our economic action in the world as Christians (our works).

Second, a Christian conception of economic life that serves its proper function in the economy of God will be recognisable in that it will uphold the *order* of covenant and creation and thus put love of God and service to neighbour at the ruling centre and the work of economic agency at the serving circumference. Thus it will reject a form of life in which Christian faith becomes a tool serving economic advantage. It will not annex the glory of God to sanctify our material aspirations; rather it will seek to annex our functioning as economic agents in service of the glory of God. Thus we must reject a form of life in which Christian faith is made subservient to economic advantage. We must not try to use our Christian service to secretly advance our economic aspirations. Rather we must try to use our economic activity to openly advance the glory of God. This *priority* of God's covenantal purpose over human economic activity is likewise a recurring theme in scripture. For example Jesus says

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these [economic] things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:31-33)

This passage recognises the legitimacy of our creaturely material economic needs and God's concern that they be met. But it emphasises a clear *order* in which these must stand in relation to God's covenantal purposes – we are to "strive first" for the kingdom of God.

But the biblical emphasis on rightly ordering and unifying our lives as relational beings and our lives as economic agents under the constraint of economic necessity is not unique to a theological conception of life. The renowned economic historian and contemporary of Barth, Karl Polanyi (1886-1964), rejects the Enlightenment ideal that human beings are individualistic economic maximisers who are predisposed by nature to trade in markets for private gain. Rather, he argues, the great transformation that has ushered in neo-classical free market capitalism in modern times is an historical aberration that stands in opposition to our fundamental orientation as beings for whom economic action serves social purpose and not the reverse. Says Polanyi,

The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. ... [This is why] the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.⁸⁰

Thus using the language of Polanyi, the theological conception of economic life I am arguing for is one in which the economic system – whatever type of system it may be – must be embedded in social relations and never the reverse! That is, the economic system must be determined by, shaped by, and serve a ruling social centre – a relational centre that either knowingly or unknowingly affirms our true human being in the covenantal purposes of God.

There is a wealth of Biblical material that emphasises that how we conduct ourselves in relation to the circumference of economic life impacts directly on the integrity and coherence of our lives at the centre in relation to God and fellow-humanity. For example, in the Old Testament, the prophet Amos brings a message of rebuke to the prosperous people of pre-exilic Israel who imagine that they can somehow reverse the order of covenant and creation and thus delude themselves into thinking that they can claim the blessings of covenant faithfulness on the one hand while conducting themselves as economic agents in ways that violate the covenantal purposes of God for creation on the other (Amos 2:6 and 8:4-7). Just as graphically

⁸⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 48 and 60.

the book of Revelation depicts the judgement of God upon those that separate covenant and creation so as to make the pursuit of wealth the sole purpose and centre of life heedless of any other consideration (Revelation 18:9-20). The Bible makes it clear that our worship and our economics are, whether openly or secretly, inextricably related. As M. Douglas Meeks astutely observes, economic realities influence our relationship to God and our conceptions of and worship of God influence our economic life – “... unjust economic conditions destroy the true worship of the Triune God ... and worshipping God in distorted ways contributes to the dehumanization of economic life.”⁸¹ Thus centre and circumference *are* in reality always stand in relation to one another – this is true regardless of how we choose to live. The real issue is *how* we choose to relate them. The Word of God compels us to explicitly link God and economics together and forbids us to pretend that Christian faith may exist independent of how we live as economic beings or that how we act as economic agents has no bearing upon our relationship with God.

It is my contention that holding covenant and creation in proper unity and order provides us with a standard by which I believe we may speak coherently concerning how we may understand the one command of God as it orientates us toward God, toward others, and toward our actions in the created environment insofar as our behaviour as economic agents is concerned. Moreover this standard enables us to discern the character God’s specific command will take in relation to our activity as economic agents and thus serve to shape our lives as preparation for the ethical event. Because God has constituted created reality an ordered *unity*, this means that our economic activity cannot be divorced from the centre of our lives in the covenant. But it also means that our economic activity has its own dignity, legitimacy, and proper place in *unity* with the covenantal purposes of God. On the other hand, because God has constituted reality an *ordered* unity, this means that our economic activity cannot be elevated above and take priority over the centre of our lives in the covenant. But it also means that our economic activity has its own dignity, legitimacy, and proper place in *serving* the covenantal purposes of God.

Because of the unique nature of Christian ethics it may frequently seem counter-intuitive. Indeed it frequently may have the appearance of weakness and foolishness

⁸¹ M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 20.

to a non-Christian perspective. For Christian faith, the decisive factor that renders this apparent weakness as the power of God and this apparent foolishness as the wisdom of God is trust in the goodness of God. It is the goodness of God revealed in Jesus Christ that is the foundation stone upon which the whole edifice of Christian ethics is founded. Therefore the reason why Christian ethics may often seem counter-intuitive, weak, or foolish to us is precisely because it is God alone (and *not* us) that is good. If we were good as God is good then the command of God would not appear to us counter-intuitive, weak, or foolish. Rather, we would perceive in the command of God the wisdom and power of God cohering in perfect unity with the inner logic of the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A good example of this apparent counter-intuitiveness, weakness, and foolishness is the way that Paul deals with the ethical question of how Christians ought to settle disputes that arise between them outlined in 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. The option that the Christians in Corinth had taken – going to court and standing under the judgement of a pagan judge (v1) – utterly appals the apostle. It represents a complete failure to live consistently with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to affirm the goodness of God. It fails to bear witness to *God* as lord and judge and it fails to recognise that it is God who provides and thus we are not to desperately grasp at the material means of life. It holds up the church to the charge of hypocrisy because the reality this behaviour in effect bears witness to is that the gospel does *not* have the resources to allow fellow believers to settle their differences and to live in peace with one another. What it in fact bears witness to is that the Christian participants involved in this public dispute do not, in reality, believe the foundational story by which they claim to live, put their trust in quite a different account of reality, and as a consequence manifest a form of life that bears witness to that account. For Paul there are other options far preferable to this. His preferred option is for the Corinthians to appoint someone from among their number “wise enough to decide between one believer and another” (v5). But failing this, it is far better to simply “be wronged” or “defrauded” (v7). Either of these options is preferable to that of two Christians going to court and standing under the jurisdiction of a pagan judge.⁸²

⁸² In appealing to Caesar, Paul indicates that he recognises that it is often appropriate for Christians to make use of the legal protections that the State makes available to its citizens (Acts 21:27ff, especially 25:6-12). But the issue here is a *civil dispute* between two Christians that could be settled in a variety of ways that need not involve the legal machinery of the State. For Christian disputants

But Paul's option of being wronged or defrauded is utterly counter-intuitive and appears in every way to be simply weak and foolish when conceived within an alternative framework of reality. But within the framework of a Christian account of reality, to "be wronged" resonates powerfully with the goodness of God as this is revealed in the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The injunction to "be wronged" bears powerful witness to trust that it is God who provides and thus we have no need to grasp and fight for the resources we think are necessary to sustain us. It bears powerful witness to the fact that our lives do *not* consist in the abundance of the things we possess.⁸³ Furthermore, it bears powerful witness to faith in an eschatological reality in which all things are made new in Christ and thus the outcomes that we experience in this life are not central and decisive for our true being and destiny that is hidden with God in Christ. Moreover to "be wronged" holds out a real possibility for the healing of relationships. Reconciliation, forgiveness, and the restoration of right relationship is rendered much more likely in a non-litigious environment than in an adversarial environment that pits two participants in a competitive fight between an ultimate winner and an ultimate loser. To "be wronged" is in fact to bear witness to one's own genuine humanity and is therefore an appeal to the true humanity of the other. It bears powerful witness that our lives are truly and genuinely constituted in Jesus Christ and that it is our ontology, in the creative purposes of God, to be orientated toward our neighbour as Christ is orientated toward us. To "be wronged" is in fact to affirm actively our creaturely being in the covenantal will of God and thus is a response that is fully consistent with the command of God. Moreover, to "be wronged" is not merely an abstract ethical injunction, rather it arises within a community that seeks to practice "a still more excellent way" of love that "does not rejoice in wrongdoing" but in willingly suffering wrong nevertheless "hopes all things and endures all things" (1 Cor. 12:31 and 6-7). In this way to "be wronged" bears eloquent and compelling witness to the *centre* of our lives ruling the circumference, whereas going to judgement before a pagan court reveals a way of life in which the circumference seeks to rule the centre and thus bears witness to a *disordered* relationship between centre and circumference.

to elect to go before the courts and to call upon the judgement of an unbelieving judge, who in all probability, holds the Christian account of reality in contempt, is "shame[ful]" (v5) and to be "already ... defeat[ed]" (v6).

⁸³ "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15).

However, to “be wronged” risks losing the *unity* between centre and circumference. It risks suggesting that the material means of existence have *no* significance in relation to a Christian conception of life. In other contexts in relation to the Corinthian Christians Paul is very concerned that there *not* be divisive discrepancies in the material well-being of Christians that lead to the degrading of one’s own humanity or the humanity of others.⁸⁴ In relation to the material goods that sustain creaturely being Paul’s concern is that there must be a “fair balance” (2 Cor. 8:13). His concern is that the helping of those in need should not mean that those who are helped have an abundance and those who give help are impoverished nor should it mean that those who suffer need should not be helped.⁸⁵

His actions in response to these issues are consistent with a view that regards a form of material distribution that degrades the humanity of people or one that drives some into destitution and impoverishment while others enjoy prosperity as standing in fundamental contradiction of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is in order to safeguard this concern, we may reasonably presume, that Paul prefers the option to appoint someone from among their number “wise enough to decide between one believer and another” (1 Cor. 6:5) over the option to simply “be wronged” (1 Cor. 6:7). Nevertheless we can be certain that the sort of “wisdom” that Paul has in mind is not the shrewd and self-interested worldly wisdom that he has earlier rebuked the Corinthians for seeking after, but rather the wisdom that comes from God in Christ that manifests all the good things that “be wronged” does in fact point to, yet which also ensures a “fair balance”.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Paul is appalled at the Corinthian Christians’ behaviour at the love feast in which the wealthy members bring an abundance of food and drink and gorge themselves and get drunk leaving the poorer members to go hungry (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).

⁸⁵ This issue arose in relation to the issue of raising funds to help alleviate the suffering in Judea as a result of famine. “For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.” (2 Corinthians 8:12-14). It is also worth noting that while Paul’s primary concern was to “suppl[y] the needs of the saints” (2 Cor. 9:12), he also envisaged the contribution serving the wider population and describes this action as “bring[ing] alms to my nation” (Acts 24:17).

⁸⁶ “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength ... But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” (1 Corinthians 1:20-25 and 27).

This is the outcome that is sought; one that holds together in proper unity and order both centre and circumference and one that bears witness to the active affirmation of our creaturely being in relation to God, others, and our activity in the material environment – the material environment that God has created as the external basis of the covenant that makes possible our creaturely being and in which God has ordained that we obey his command. It is precisely this counter-intuitive nature of Christian ethics that makes possible human responses that are genuinely innovative, creative, and radical in the face of human conflict, disorder, and misery. As Kathryn Tanner puts it, in the context of alternative thinking about economic life, it is precisely a theological vision of economic life that can “... free up space in which to imagine alternatives ...”⁸⁷ The New Testament does not provide an exhaustive catalogue of possible Christian responses to every conceivable ethical situation. Rather, it provides a set of examples of how the inner logic of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ may be heard and appropriated by the community of faith with the invitation – “Follow Me!” Thus Christian ethics is primarily seeking to follow Jesus. It is not a slavish conformity to a set of rules. Rather it is an appeal to our humanity and freedom as constituted by God in Christ. Therefore it is primarily an appeal to our trust in the goodness of God and our being obedient to his command rather than a question of knowing good and evil as such. Therefore a key aspect of Christian ethics is cultivating a form of life that develops beliefs, dispositions, and ways of living that prepare for a faithful hearing and obeying of the command of God that enables us to know what “Live!” and “Follow Me!” might mean in any specific context.

⁸⁷ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 32.

Part II: A Christian conception of economic life – creation as the external basis of the covenant

In the second part of this thesis I seek to develop a Christian conception of economic life by locating it within the framework of creaturely reality I have established in part I. Whereas part I looks at the totality of creaturely reality from the point of view of the covenant as the internal basis of creation, part II looks at the economic dimensions of this reality from the point of view of the creation as the external basis of the covenant. Therefore part II seeks to understand the same reality as part I – but from a different perspective. Part I is concerned with the *totality* of creaturely being whereas part II focuses on the *economic dimensions* of this totality, but always within the context of this totality. Part I seeks to understand the covenant of grace as the inner reality that gives rationality and meaning to the external creation and thus views creation from the perspective of covenant and creation as an *ordered* unity of a ruling covenantal centre governing a serving created circumference – never the reverse! On the other hand, part II seeks to emphasise that the creation possesses its own legitimacy and integrity as it functions as the external location and environment for the enactment of the covenant, but never independent of or separated from the covenant. Therefore part II views creation from the perspective of covenant and creation as an ordered *unity* of a ruling covenantal centre in indissoluble oneness with a serving created circumference – never one without the other! Whereas chapter 1 emphasises the “goodness” of creation in terms of its serviceability for the enactment of the covenant chapter 4 emphasises God’s providential governance of creation that ensures the creation continues to be “good” for this covenantal purpose. Whereas chapter 2 emphasises that true humanity in the covenantal purposes of God is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by good action chapter 5 emphasises the shape Christian economic activity must take if it is to correspond to the good action of God that is constituted in and characterised by Jesus Christ. And whereas chapter 3 emphasises human obedience to the one command of God that we are to live in the active affirmation of our creaturely being as ordained in the covenantal purposes of God chapter 6 emphasises the form of life the Christian community must enact in the midst of contemporary culture so as to prepare for a faithful hearing and obeying of the command of God as it confronts us in the specificity of our lives as economic agents.

Chapter 4: Economic life in relation to the covenantal purposes of God

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:28-31)

In chapter 1 I emphasise the “goodness” of creation in terms of its serviceability for the enactment of the covenant and thus the light and shadow side of creation are understood as bearing witness to God’s positive covenantal will. In this present chapter in the first section – *Economic life and God’s providential governance of creation* – I emphasise that God’s providential governance of creation ensures the creation continues to be “good” for the enactment of the history of the covenant. In particular this includes God ordaining and enabling human skill and ingenuity to devise mechanisms and institutions to meet the economic necessity that God’s creation of human beings presupposes. Nevertheless the goodness of creation is not something we may determine for ourselves independent of God’s covenantal purposes. God’s intention in creating all things is to fulfil his covenantal purposes and *all things* are created to serve this end. On this basis I argue that Christian faith must affirm this is true also of the economic dimension of life; therefore economic mechanisms and institutions exist and are ordained by God with a view to the execution of the covenant and are rendered serviceable for this purpose through the providential fatherly lordship of God. Moreover these things, along with all creation, bear witness to our *telos* – that we have been made for God and fellow-humanity and that our lives are in peril if we seek our *telos* outside of covenantal relationship with God.

In the second section – *Contemporary market capitalism and the light and shadow side of God's good creation* – I demonstrate that our economic necessity does in fact bear witness to both the light and the shadow sides of God's good creation and thus to our *telos*. I argue that contemporary market capitalism actually does an extraordinarily good job of: channelling self-interest to serve the benefit of others; producing and distributing goods and services that meet genuine need for the well-being of large segments of humankind; and providing the prosperity and resources whereby people may take responsibility for their lives. In this way contemporary market capitalism is able to bear witness to our *telos* – that God creates and resources us that we may pursue lives of obedience to the one command of God. But there is a shadow side to contemporary capitalism also: industries go into decline with changing technology and demand patterns resulting in unemployment and shattered vocational dreams and life aspirations for many. Indeed our mastery of economic processes is limited and all too often well-intended economic actions slip from our control delivering perverse outcomes. But these aspects of capitalism may also be serviceable to God's covenantal purposes – they are not hostile to God's covenantal purposes and thus they are not evil. They also bear witness to our *telos* – that we have not been created by material processes to find ultimate fulfilment in the material outcomes generated by economic activity, but that we have been created by the God of the covenant to be saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. On this basis we may understand these aspects of capitalism as being part of God's good ordering of creaturely reality.

In the third section – *Contemporary market capitalism and the menace of nothingness to God's good creation* – I argue that the economic system stands, as does all created reality, in precarious proximity to the disorder and menace of the chaos that God has rejected and passed over at creation, that is, the evil of nothingness. Therefore there is always the risk of nothingness achieving actuality in the creaturely world. I argue that in relation to economic life, nothingness risks becoming an actuality when there is a failure to uphold the *unity* of centre and circumference and economic activity is regarded as autonomous and separate in relation to the covenant, or there is a failure to uphold the *order* of centre first and circumference second and the work of production and consumption is regarded as central and primary and love of God and faithfulness to neighbour as peripheral and secondary. The economic manifestations of this will include avarice in all its

various forms as legitimate self-interest degenerates into greed incarnating exploitative practices that render perpetrators both Godless and neighbourless and their victims degraded and impoverished. Therefore the necessity to act as economic agents in the world places people in a position of potent possibility and peril. Christians in particular must be cognisant of this reality. On the one hand we have the capacity through the enabling possibilities of market capitalism to realise outcomes that bear witness to the light side of God's good creation, but these same enabling possibilities have the potential to realise, as Barth puts it, outcomes that are both "supremely insolent and wholly ineffectual".¹

4.1 Economic life and God's providential governance of creation

The fact that God creates a *substantial* world to be the external basis for the enactment of the covenant and human beings as the physical *bodies* of our souls to participate in a *material* creaturely existence, immediately and necessarily generates an economic necessity – we must act in and upon the world to sustain ourselves. The economic necessity the enactment of the covenant presupposes is implied in the first blessing and command of God to his human creatures.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."
(Gen. 1:28)

This passage speaks of the filling and inhabiting of God's good earth by human beings under the blessing of God and alludes to the economic implications this process involves through the human need to "subdue" the earth God has created and to have "dominion" over the living creatures God has populated it with. "Subduing" recognises that for the earth to support human habitation requires the modification of created resources through the economic process of manufacture, and "dominion" recognises the domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants to support human habitation. In this way the world is richly resourced by God to enable human creaturely material sustenance that we may "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."

¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

As part of God's good providential ordering of the cosmos and as part of human creaturely integrity to act responsibly in the world in relation to God and neighbour in obedience to the one command of God; God ordains and enables human capacity and ingenuity to devise social and political structures to meet this economic necessity in a coordinated and coherent manner. As Paul expresses it "... there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1). Paul understood this authority as embracing all the structures of the state including economic mechanisms. However, as Webster is careful to point out, although in general Barth emphasises the important role of political systems, he emphasises that the subjection spoken of in Romans 13 is a relative not an absolute subjection – it is respect of an office rather than a person.² This means that economic systems are part of this God-instituted provision for humanity and may participate in the blessing of God's good ordering of the cosmos. The scope of this blessing therefore may embrace the endeavours of: economic science to the extent that it seeks to better understand how the economic system functions and may be improved to promote genuine human flourishing; economic institutions and policies to the extent that they are used to authentically enhance the orderly and just functioning of human life; and economic agents as business people, investors, workers, and consumers to the extent that in these roles they faithfully seek outcomes consistent with the covenantal purposes of God.

Contemporary market capitalism is *one* system that human capacity and ingenuity has devised to answer and give effect to the reality of economic necessity. Although the theological framework I have outlined has the resources to critically engage with *any* economic system, it is on account of market capitalism's nearly all-encompassing spread and reach in the contemporary world that I give it specific and exclusive attention in this thesis. Throughout this thesis I use "contemporary market capitalism" or similar expressions as a catch-all expression to describe the various free market economic systems that derive from neo-classical economic theory and the institutions of modern government. The overwhelming majority of actual economies as we find them in the contemporary world are mixed economies that, generally speaking, are market-based economies that seek to maximise the strengths of capitalism, but which recognise a role for government intervention and regulation to militate against its weaknesses. It is well recognised by the overwhelming

² Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 206.

majority of economists that free market capitalism is subject to two key weaknesses or limitations –*efficiency* issues that prevent an optimal allocation of economic inputs for production such as externalities, imperfect information, and monopoly power; and *equity* issues that prevent a fair allocation of economic outputs for consumption such as inequality of income distribution, inequality of opportunity, and discrimination in its various manifestations.³ In simple terms, a key factor that accounts for the specific differences between various free market economies is the different decisions these countries make in relation to resolving these two limiting issues.

Christian economist Donald Hay, in seeking to understand the essential features of capitalism, argues that we must think in *abstract* terms since this provides an underlying conceptual apparatus that, with the use of empirical detail, allows an understanding of the diversity of *actual* economies as we find them in the world.⁴ The two essential features Hay identifies as being fundamental to the capitalist market economy are “... the institutions of private property and the fact that exchange is mediated through markets.”⁵ Private property includes property in one’s own labour and thus freedom to hire one’s resources to the highest bidder and the opportunity to maximise one’s gains through ownership, production, and consumption. Markets play a decisive role in that they enable exchange and generate prices that provide information regarding costs of production, consumer utilities, and expenditure decisions and thus worker incomes, producer profits, and consumer and producer budget constraints.⁶ Private property provides a powerful incentive for individuals to maximise the value of resources they own and markets are an efficient mechanism for allocating resources between competing uses and enabling them to pass into the hands of those who can generate the greatest economic value from them. Essential to the orderly operation of such an economy are the governmental institutions that enforce contractual obligations and protect private property rights, and an underlying social morality that is largely willing to accept these conventions without the need for costly enforcement.⁷ Capitalist market economies become a global phenomenon when individual countries are

³ Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics* 18th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 35ff, 158ff, and 382ff.

⁴ Hay, *Economics Today*, 146.

⁵ Hay, *Economics Today*, 147.

⁶ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 25ff and 225ff.

⁷ Hay, *Economics Today*, 149.

linked via the institutions of international trade networks and the mobility of finance, capital, and labour. Overlaid upon this base of market capitalism are the economic functions of modern governments that appropriate financial resources through taxation and borrowing and direct these resources into areas of political priority such as education, health, welfare assistance, policing, and national defence. It is this well-recognised mixture of pure market capitalism and government participation and control of economic processes that I have in mind when using the expression “contemporary market capitalism”.

Christian faith affirms that God providentially upholds and sustains the cosmos as the theatre for the enactment of the covenant. But as Barth emphasises, we may only affirm this on the basis of *Christian* faith. He states, “The Christian belief in providence is faith in the strict sense of the term, and this means first that it is a hearing and receiving of the Word of God.”⁸ To have confidence God meets our every need, is actively present in and in control of all the events of world-occurrence, turns to good all that afflicts us, and ensures that nothing can separate us from God’s love is only possible on the basis of faith in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as witnessed in Holy Scripture. If we seek to ground this confidence on some other foundation, the Christian doctrine of providence is immediately imperilled. Our confidence has to shift from faith in God to faith in something else – the essential goodness of the world, the beneficence of cosmic or human processes, some pious ideology of nature, or some other form of religious or philosophical speculation concerning the cosmos or human potential. However, on the basis of *Christian* faith that God’s covenant of grace is the inner basis and reason for creation, Christians can have confidence that, as Barth expresses it,

As the creation of all the reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this purposed covenant and with a view to its execution, so the meaning of the continued existence of the creature, and therefore the purpose of its history, is that this covenant will and work of God begun in creation should have its course and reach its goal. There is no other meaning or purpose in history.⁹

Therefore Christian faith in the providence of God affirms that *somehow* God works in world events, processes, histories, and institutions such that they are made to

⁸ Barth, *CD*, III/3, 15.

⁹ Barth, *CD*, III/3, 36.

serve the covenantal purposes of God. Moreover and specifically, this means that Christian faith must affirm this is true of the economic dimension of life also – economic systems, processes, histories, and institutions also exist and are ordained by God with a view to the execution of the covenant and are rendered serviceable for this purpose through the providential fatherly lordship of God.

But *Christian* faith in the providence of God is the *same faith* that affirms, as Barth holds, “I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son our Lord, in order to perceive and to understand that God the Almighty, the Father, is the creator of heaven and earth.”¹⁰ Outside of this Christological faith the world is obscure to us, and to our natural perception the lordship of God is far from obvious or self-evident. As Barth notes, the world is God’s mask, not his face, therefore the character and purposes of God cannot be read directly from the world or events that transpire within the cosmos.¹¹ Empirical observation of the cosmos cannot reveal to us *unambiguously* that the world is good for the covenantal purposes of God or that the lordship of God providentially maintains it; nor does Christian faith in the providence of God supply Christians with a privileged interpretive perspective that allows them to discern with clarity and certainty the hand of God in world events and in humanly contrived economic mechanisms.¹² Therefore Christian faith does not first look at the world and on *this basis* believe it is good for the purpose of God, rather, it looks first to God as revealed in Jesus Christ and attested in Holy Scripture, and *then*, and *only* on this basis, seeks to understand the world as good for the purposes of God. As Barth is careful to point out, the person of faith looking at the world of occurrences does not see another reality, ignore reality, or see through reality – he sees it as it is in all its obscurity and perplexity, but always in light of the “nevertheless” of God’s providential lordship in Jesus Christ.¹³ The person of faith confronting world reality, and the processes and outcomes of contemporary global capitalism in particular recognises and affirms, despite much apparent evidence to the contrary, that in *all things* we have to do with the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ and not some alien force, principle, or spirit. Therefore the Christian conception of economic life I envisage seeks to understand the world of economics as standing

¹⁰ Barth, *CD*, III/1, 29.

¹¹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 19.

¹² Barth, *CD* III/3, 23.

¹³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 44.

under the providential lordship of God and as pointing us to our *telos* in the covenantal purposes of God but doing so in ways that are often obscure to us.

In chapter 1, making use of Barth, I interpreted the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 from within the theological framework that the covenant is the internal basis for creation. The Genesis creation accounts bear witness to this reality by portraying the cosmos created by God such that humanity is both secure yet in jeopardy.¹⁴ God's good created world is well prepared to nourish God's human creatures, yet their dwelling place is in close proximity to hostile regions and realities that have the capacity to threaten, menace, and overwhelm them. On this basis I argue that in God's good world every created thing directs us to recognise the reality of our *telos*. It is in this way we may understand the light and shadow side of God's good and positive will. The light side of creation is that which bears positive witness to and reminds us of the security and nurturing that God's good creation affords human beings that we may be encouraged and resourced to know God, to love God, and to act responsibly before God. The shadow side is that which bears negative witness to and reminds us of the jeopardy and menace that God's good creation represents to human beings outside of the grace of God that we may fear God, trust and obey God, and seek God's providential governance in human affairs.¹⁵

To this end God has created his cosmos "good" for his covenantal purposes. This does not mean that the world is intrinsically good or that we have the capacity to evaluate and judge the world as good. As Webster summarises Barth's thought at this point, "... for [Barth] the goodness of creation is 'teleological' rather than simply 'original'. The creation is good in so far as it functions as equipment for grace."¹⁶ This means that because God renders the world serviceable for the enactment of his good purposes fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we may only understand the world as being good in light of what God accomplishes in the world through Jesus Christ – not on the basis of what the world is in and of itself. Therefore, in this matter as in all things, Barth reminds us that God calls us to trust and obey God.¹⁷

¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

¹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

¹⁶ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 63.

¹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/3, 42.

But in order to be the God of the covenant, God has not created a world that is “perfect” in the sense that it is self-sustaining thus requiring no fatherly governance and maintenance, as with Deism.¹⁸ God has not created a world in which his human creatures can establish a viable and sustainable autonomous ontology independent of God or in violation of God’s purposes for creation, nor has God created a reality in which we may independently enjoy uninterrupted bliss on the basis of our own resources and potential. The reality God has created serves his covenantal purposes to be our loving lord and saviour and thus points us to our *telos*. Consequently God’s world bears witness to the fact that our lives may only have ultimate stability and purpose in relationship with God and that our lives are menaced and threatened if we seek ultimate stability and purpose from a Godless and neighbourless existence that God has already judged, rejected, condemned, and defeated in Jesus Christ. Because God has determined to be the loving lord and saviour of human beings we are therefore always dependent upon God’s gracious maintenance of the cosmos.¹⁹

Consequently within the span of the enactment of the covenant and God’s providential ordering of the cosmos are God’s blessing and mercy, God’s punishment and wrath, God’s loving judgment and covenant-faithfulness, and God’s holy fire that ultimately will separate us from our sin.²⁰ As Barth eloquently puts it, Much may vary in the sphere of the divine disposing. In it there is a place for prosperity and adversity, victory and defeat, peril and protection, life and death, angels and demons, even human sin and human liberation. God is Lord in all these things. He is so in very different ways. But properly and in the last resort exclusively it is He who is always Lord.²¹

Moreover it is consistent with the good purposes of God for God to create a world that consists of both a light and shadow side. As Barth so poignantly expresses it,

It is true that in creation there is not only a Yes but also a No; not only a height but also an abyss; not only clarity but also obscurity; not only progress and continuation, but also impediment and limitation; not only growth but also decay; not only opulence but indigence; not only beauty but also ashes; not only beginning but also end; not only value but also worthlessness. ... [b]right and dark, success and failure, laughter and tears,

¹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/3, 12.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 13.

²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 33-34.

²¹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 19.

youth and age, gain and loss, birth and sooner or later its inevitable corollary, death.²²

But as emphasised in chapter 1, Barth is adamant that *both* aspects of creation, the light *and* the shadow side, reflect the goodness of God for both these things – from God’s right hand and his left – emerge from God’s positive will for creation and serve the covenantal purposes of God to save his human creatures by grace through Jesus Christ.

My purpose in this chapter is to seek to understand selected aspects of contemporary market capitalism within this theological framework. That is, to recognise the various aspects, processes, and outcomes of capitalism as participating in the light and shadow side of creation and on this basis being serviceable to the providential lordship of God for the enactment of God’s good covenantal purposes for creation. However, before embarking on this task, three delimitations must be made clear. First, in arguing that, by the providential lordship of God, contemporary market capitalism may be rendered serviceable to God’s good purposes is *not* to argue that contemporary market capitalism is *intrinsically* good. God alone is good. Contemporary market capitalism is a human construct that exists as a result of human social and economic arrangements devised in the face of the economic necessity we are confronted by and supported and enabled by humanly constructed institutions and conventions. As a human construct it bears the marks of human brokenness, sin, alienation from God, and the human propensity to glory in the works of its own hands. Nevertheless, as a flawed human construct, God graciously ordains to make the mechanisms and outcomes of capitalism serviceable to the enactment of his good purposes. Second, God’s providential ordering of the cosmos is obscure to us. Therefore in seeking to understand contemporary market capitalism within Barth’s theological framework of the light and shadow side of God’s good creation involves conjecture and speculation. In what follows, the aspects of contemporary market capitalism I identify as pointing to the light or shadow side of God’s good creation, or even participating in the evil of nothingness, cannot be regarded as definitive. These details are obscure and debatable. But it is my contention that the *theological framework* that Barth enables these things to be located within enables us to understand how the economic system functions within the covenantal purposes of God and bears witness to our *telos*. My evaluation of

²² Barth, *CD* III/3, 296-97.

contemporary market capitalism within this theological framework is intended to be indicative of how a Christian conception of economic life may fruitfully utilise Barth's central insight that creation is the external basis of the covenant and as such partakes of both the light and shadow side of God's good creation. Third, no aspect of contemporary market capitalism can be unambiguously categorised as "light" or "shadow" or "evil" within this theological framework. Even those aspects of capitalism that appear to shine most brightly in relation to the covenantal purposes of God lie under a shadow, and it will also be true that even those aspects that appear most closely aligned to the evil of nothingness may contain a light that is known to God and may, by the grace of God, be rendered serviceable to God's good purposes.

In the remainder of this chapter, with these delimitations in mind, I seek to elucidate selected aspects of contemporary market capitalism. In the next section I do so in relation to how capitalism can be understood to function as part of the light and shadow side of God's good ordering of the cosmos, positively – by bearing witness to the security and nurturing that God's good creation affords human beings and, negatively – by bearing witness to the jeopardy and menace that God's good creation represents to human beings outside of the grace of God. In the third section I outline the potential for contemporary market capitalism to actualise that which God has judged, rejected, condemned, and defeated in Jesus Christ – the menace of nothingness – and thus generate outcomes hostile to the purposes of God.

4.2 Contemporary market capitalism and the light and shadow side of God's good creation

One compelling way contemporary market capitalism may be understood to point to the light side of God's good creation is the way it harnesses the self-interestedness of humanity for productive ends that promote the common good. A key insight by Adam Smith (1723-1790), "father" of modern economics, known as the "invisible hand theorem", is that the individual acting in his own best interests

... intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to

promote an end which was no part of his intention. ... By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.²³

Smith was intrigued by the way individual agents, acting in their own self-interest within a framework of morality and law, maximise their own gains through using their talents, skills, and resources to their best private use; yet in so doing bring great benefit to others. Every day, the needs of individuals are met by an army of self-interested people who produce a vast array of goods and services that are available in the most convenient quantities and locations feasible. But in order for these individuals to avail themselves of the fruit of this labour, they too are required to produce things that others value. This is because the fundamental law of the market is that there can be no consumption without having money to buy, there can be no buying unless one has earned an income through work, and there is no work except for those who are able to produce goods and services that others find valuable and are prepared to pay for. In this way our self-interest for private consumption motivates us to do productive work for others such that, to an astonishing extent, the greater good of society is served.²⁴

Understood as a relative principle the invisible hand, as it works itself out in competitive markets, is a remarkably effective means by which self-interest can be directed to serve the well-being of others. This is a truly remarkable mechanism. The self-interest motive, *at its best*, is a powerful mechanism that harnesses talent, energy, and resourcefulness and directs these toward ends that meet the needs of others. It is a mechanism that provides powerful incentives, both positively and negatively, to compel people to serve others for the mutual benefit of all.²⁵ The self-interest motive, *at its worst*, is an entirely different possibility that I explore in the next section, but at this point I am emphasising its many positives. Christians are certainly justified, along with many others, in critiquing its many shortcomings. Yet, within the theological framework of God's covenantal purposes for creation within which I seek to conceive economic life, Christians ought to recognise the way it bears witness (always imperfectly) to our being and *telos*. The invisible hand as it is worked out in market capitalism points to the reality of human relational

²³ Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952), 194.

²⁴ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 28ff.

²⁵ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 26ff.

interconnectedness – that we simply cannot live lives of neighbourless self-sufficiency and isolation. It bears witness to the theological truth that our lives really are bound up with the lives of others and that our genuine good is found in lives of service toward others for their good in a form of reciprocal fellow-humanity.²⁶

A second feature of market capitalism that can be understood as pointing to the light side of God's good creation is its sustained capacity to produce goods and services that genuinely meet the legitimate creaturely needs of human beings. In other words it provides viable incentives to produce goods that people actually want and derive real value from. This may be described as "market monarchy".²⁷ At its best this is another astonishing and desirable feature of the working of the invisible hand – self-interested producers who seek profit produce and distribute goods and services that self-interested consumers want to buy and which genuinely contribute to their wellbeing. Again, market monarchy at its worst is another matter, nevertheless the incentives with which capitalism provides entrepreneurs and business people ensure that an astonishing array of goods and services are produced that promote genuine human well-being. Foodstuffs are produced and made available that provide human nourishment, sustenance, and wellness; clothing and housing that ensure human warmth, shelter, and security; household items that facilitate enriched family-life, social reciprocation, and hospitality; the means of transport and communication that make possible wide-ranging social connectedness, transmission of ideas, and delivery of aid to those in need; therapeutic devices and remedies that ease the pain and discomfort of human frailty, illness, and old-age; and a vast array of tools and machines that makes possible a measure of relief from the relentless toil of economic necessity, thus making possible genuine human well-being and flourishing.

Timothy Gorringer, although scathing with respect to the many short-comings of contemporary market capitalism, acknowledges the significant increases in living standards, quality of housing, reduction in mortality rates, reduction in major diseases, and increased access to music and the arts that capitalism has made

²⁶ It is also the case that marketisation separates people from one another too. This is especially the case with people being alienated from those who produce the goods they consume. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), chapter 3.

²⁷ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 28ff.

possible through industrialisation.²⁸ Moreover, the engine of capitalism does not merely produce these goods and services – it has the capacity to produce them on a prodigious scale, with extraordinary efficiency, and at surprisingly low cost such that these benefits are accessible to significant proportions of entire populations. In this way capitalism, when underpinned by the appropriate institutions of government, social cohesion, and morality, has the capacity to be an astonishingly powerful engine of growth that may lift vast numbers of people out of poverty within remarkably short periods of time.

Beyond the obvious economic benefit, lifting people out of poverty enables a significant measure of individual freedom that makes possible a relative capacity for people to realise a vision of who they understand themselves to be in the covenantal purposes of God. Johan Norberg, Swedish historian and advocate of globalisation, notes the way that in recent times there has been a significant improvement in the material wealth of large sections of humanity due to the expansion of free markets within the global network.²⁹ He emphasises the fact that the real problem of poverty is powerlessness – it is “about being deprived of basic opportunities and freedom of choice.”³⁰ This is reinforced by the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen who argues that economic development must be understood as serving the interests of individual freedom. In Sen’s view this is best accomplished through harnessing the power of economic freedom and capitalism. His language resonates with the programmatic statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 when Sen says, “the rejection of the freedom to participate in the labour market is one of the ways of keeping people in bondage and captivity”.³¹ This is also confirmed by economist Jeffrey Sachs who reports that although working conditions for Bangladeshi women in the garment industry are certainly arduous by our contemporary Western standards, these women nevertheless regard their freedom to enter the labour market as being “the greatest opportunity that [they] could ever have imagined, and that their employment has changed their lives for the better.”³² Not only do they enjoy opportunities for personal freedom unimaginable to their sisters still in “rural misery” but also they

²⁸ Timothy Gorringer, *Fair Shares: Ethics and the Global Economy* (New York: Thomas and Hudson, 1999), 26-29.

²⁹ J. Norberg, “*In Defence of Market Capitalism* (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2003), 21-23.

³⁰ Norberg, *In Defence of Market Capitalism*, 27.

³¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 7. Luke 4:18-19 says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

³² Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, (London: Penguin, 2005), 12.

are “on the first rung of the ladder of rising skills and income for themselves, and within a few years, for their children.”³³ Crucial to this freedom are the capitalist institutions of private property and free markets for labour and goods that are enforced by governmental action. Sachs emphasises that since their adoption of free market capitalism within the global economy, India and China have experienced significant growth that has lifted literally hundreds of millions of people out of the misery and hopelessness of extreme poverty.³⁴ This analysis is reiterated by economic writer Tim Harford who argues that a key driver of China’s economic prosperity over the last 30 years has been the measured replacement of doctrinaire socialism with pragmatic capitalism.³⁵

A third feature of contemporary market capitalism that points to the light side of God’s good creation is its capacity to generate surplus value or profit. The enormous wealth, abundance, and economic prosperity that capitalism is capable of generating provide individuals and countries with the potential to invest in infrastructure for the betterment of life. Key investments that are especially beneficial to human well-being are education, which is perhaps the single most important human initiated factor that may bring “freedom to the oppressed”, and better health and sanitation systems that allow “recovery of sight to the blind”. Gordon Preece points out that it is unhelpful to regard biblical injunctions against wealth as absolute prohibitions. Rather they are condemnations against wealth that is hoarded for private individual consumption and power over others. Wealth that is used for future production that allows investment in social infrastructure for the alleviation of poverty and the pursuit of human wellness is an entirely different conception. Preece argues, the prophets condemned not *profit* as such but

... the people’s narcissism and callous indifference to the poor ... instead of practicing Exodus principles of material and social liberation and solidarity, they adopted an Egyptian way of life [that enslaved and oppressed others]”.³⁶

However there is nothing inherent within capitalism itself that ensures it will *necessarily, inevitably, or certainly* generate these beneficial outcomes. Whether it

³³ Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 12.

³⁴ Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 15-18.

³⁵ Tim Harford, *The Undercover Economist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 231ff.

³⁶ Gordon Preece, “Business as Calling and Profession: Towards a Protestant Entrepreneurial Ethic,” in *Christianity and Entrepreneurship*, ed. S. Gregg and G. Preece (St. Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies, 1999), 12.

does so or not is not primarily an economic question in relation to the sort of *system* that it is. Rather it is an ethical question in relation to the sorts of *decisions* and *values* that people who live within the system make and have in relation to the opportunities that the capacities of capitalism make possible. It is only on this basis that contemporary market capitalism may point to the light side of God's good creation by positively bearing witness to the security and nurturing that God's good world affords human beings. For capitalism to fulfil its potential to point to the light side of God's providential governance of creation within the covenantal purposes of God depends upon the extent to which its functioning takes place under the lordship of God and seeks to be consistent with the covenantal purposes of God. And this depends upon the extent to which those who live within its structures are motivated to enact an ethical form of economic life that is consistent with a theological vision of capitalism's place and possibilities within the purposes of God for creation.

We must stress capitalism's capacity to point to the light side of God's good creation. But there is a second side that we must equally stress and keep alongside the first so that we hold both together in proper balance and proportion – capitalism's capacity to point to the shadow side of God's good creation. As we have already noted from Barth, in creation there is *both light and shadow*.

... [N]ot only progress and continuation, but also impediment and limitation; not only growth but also decay; not only opulence but indigence; not only beauty but also ashes; not only beginning but also end; not only value but also worthlessness.³⁷ [And in God's world] there is a place for prosperity and adversity, victory and defeat, peril and protection ...³⁸

It is my view that this is actually a very apt, though I suspect unwitting, description of the restless dynamic process of capitalism that the economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) described in the memorable expression "creative destruction".³⁹ It is precisely because capitalism is such a powerful engine of production, wealth creation, and entrepreneurial opportunity that it is so restless and dynamic. As consumer preferences gyrate around new possibilities, and investors and entrepreneurs vigorously seek-out and pursue profit and gain; the processes and mechanisms of capitalism unleash prodigious waves of seething economic energy

³⁷ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296-97.

³⁸ Barth, *CD*, III/3, 19.

³⁹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* 3rd ed. (George Allen & Unwin Ltd.: London, 1950), 81-87.

that drive technological innovation, capital investment, employment, product development, and marketing. In this process much wealth and economic opportunity is both created and destroyed. For those well placed to ride the crest of these waves it provides wonderful opportunities for wealth creation, employment, income growth, and financial security.⁴⁰ On the other hand there are many who are displaced and overwhelmed by this process – those whose investments in now defunct industries and businesses become worthless, whose skills become redundant and unvalued, whose economic life-prospects are shattered, and whose opportunities to catch a new economic wave of growth are limited or non-existent.

These waves of creative destruction that provide an exhilarating ride for some and wreak havoc for others occur for various reasons within the restless dynamic of capitalism. New technology renders existing technology obsolete, as, for example, the way computerised word processing has rendered obsolete manual typewriters and typesetting. Alternatively, changing costs of production may render traditional locations for production uncompetitive and new low-cost industrial plants are established in non-traditional areas, as, for example, the way large swathes of manufacturing has declined in the USA and Europe to be replaced by massive industrial plants in Asia. Or again smarter and more nimble new entrants, who see opportunities to out-compete established incumbents who have grown complacent enter traditional markets and displace established interests, as, for example, the way Asian automobile makers have established plants in Britain contributing to the decline of English brands. Creative destruction may also occur as a result of changes to the regulatory structures governing the economies of countries. For example, changes to employment law, import regulations, health and safety requirements, resource management legislation, immigration policy, the priorities of taxation and government expenditure, and a host of other regulatory policies and structures that can significantly change economic costs, benefits, and incentives so as to unleash new waves of creative destruction. Within the restless seething dynamic of capitalism the process of creative destruction is ceaseless and on-going. While this process is responsible for the many positives that I have identified as pointing to the light side of God's good creation, it is also responsible for many

⁴⁰ Schumpeter uses the analogy of "gales" to describe the process of creative destruction. However, I think that "waves" illustrates more effectively that some people may be positioned to profitably (creatively) ride these waves whereas others will be economically devastated (destroyed) by them. Schumpeter *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 84.

negatives that must also be acknowledged – the resulting unemployment, shattered vocational dreams and life aspirations, and the economic loss and privation experienced by those for whom the waves wreak havoc.

As a restless and dynamic mechanism that unleashes prodigious waves of seething economic energy that drive technological innovation, capital investment, employment, and product development; capitalism is inherently unstable.⁴¹ New technology, changing demand or supply conditions, changing government economic priorities, or changing expectations and market evaluations of economic agents may give rise to a train of economic decisions and responses that significantly alter the structural distributions of wealth and resources in an economy. For example, the early part of the 2000s has witnessed the crash of the digital technology sector as hopes for massive wealth channelled vast investment into this sector only to be replaced by disappointment and huge losses. This was followed by an investment bubble in the real estate sector fuelled by a credit boom that reached giddy heights of exuberance only to be followed by massive losses of wealth and confidence as grossly indebted borrowers were exposed by diminishing property valuations in what has been called the “global financial crisis”.⁴² In this process colossal losses and redistributions of wealth have occurred and no part of society has been left unscathed.

The costs of these economic instabilities are often borne very unevenly across economies. In relation to the global financial crisis and subsequent world-wide recession that began in 2008 following the collapse of the real estate bubble, the costs include: the losses borne by shareholders of financial institutions that have suffered massive reversals, which in many cases include the pension funds of many workers; the losses borne by depositors in failed financial institutions, which in many cases include the savings of older people who now have no further capacity to earn; the losses borne by borrowers whose real estate wealth has collapsed into negative equity, many of whom include borrowers who now face homelessness as a consequence of bank foreclosure; the losses borne by taxpayers who have financed the massive bailout and stimulus packages of governments and who must now,

⁴¹ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 467ff.

⁴² The antecedent causes of this crisis are explored in Joseph, E. Stiglitz, “Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy,” in *Essential Readings in World Politics*, ed. K. A. Mingst and J. L. Snyder (New York: Norton, 2008), 555ff.

inevitably, experience either reduced future government provision of public goods as the opportunity cost of these emergency measures, or alternatively, bear the cost of future tax increases or inflation as a consequence of financing these expenditures; and finally, the losses borne by those whose employment and businesses have been lost as a result of the structural readjustments that are taking place in response to this crisis.⁴³

The invisible hand, as I described its beneficial potentiality earlier in this section, is an excellent example of how, positively, capitalism is an astonishingly powerful vehicle whereby humanity may reap valuable and desirable things from what it sows. But the invisible hand also has a negative capacity to generate outcomes that, while positively *intended*, are nevertheless undesirable and destructive of value and threatening to human flourishing. *All* human choices, once activated by the economic mechanism that capitalism so powerfully enables, bring forth fruit – both positively and negatively! Examples of the negative or problematic consequences of well-intentioned economic initiatives abound. These include: the way well-intentioned new technology may bring harm, as, for example, the way many agricultural innovations have damaged biodiversity and diminished the nutritional value of food; the way economic measures intended to support and help selected sector groups have brought suffering and privation to others, as, for example, measures intended to subsidise the incomes of farmers in first-world countries have resulted in poverty and ruin for farmers in third-world countries; the way in which new products intended to deliver a specific and limited benefit have utterly transformed in unpredictable ways entire cultures, as, for example, with the development of the automobile, television, and digital technology; the way in which the marketing of products that respond to legitimate consumer demand thus bringing a measure of satisfaction, but which nevertheless prey upon the vulnerabilities, insecurities, and false hopes of people and spawn massive self-perpetuating industries that drag a plethora of social problems in their wake, as, for example, with alcohol, tobacco, gambling, cosmetics, jewellery, fashion, movies, music, and fast-food; and the way that many products, in their manufacture, use, and disposal generate toxic by-products that may contaminate, debilitate, and kill for decades, as, for example, with batteries, asbestos, pesticides, and chemicals.⁴⁴

⁴³ Stiglitz, “Freefall”, 561 ff.

⁴⁴ For further discussion concerning the problematic outcomes of capitalism see Gorringer, *Fair Shares*, 29ff.

American sociologist Robert K. Merton attributes the unanticipated consequences of social actions to human ignorance, human error, a myopic preoccupation with a desired outcome that blinds actors to other possibilities, attachments to cherished ideological values that negate consideration of alternative perspectives, and otherwise correct predictions that cause altered behaviours generating unanticipated outcomes.⁴⁵ But a theological understanding of this reality must look further than these otherwise plausible explanations. The invisible hand mechanism is activated, within the enabling structures of capitalism, by *human agents* acting in *their own self-interest*. Yet, as emphasised in chapter 3, God alone is good. Human beings are flawed and thus we do not possess the moral capacity to competently judge between good and evil. Therefore, in absolute terms, we simply do not know what is good for us – outside of the grace of God we do not know where our true interests lie! As part of God’s good equipping of human beings for creaturely life God grants us a *relative capacity* to distinguish good from bad, worthy from unworthy, and beneficial from harmful. But these are relative capacities and are given to us by the grace of God that we may live abundant creaturely lives only in a relationship of trustful obedience to the loving God who really does know where our true interests lie. But because we do not know infallibly what is genuinely good for us we frequently are in the position of making choices we suppose to be in our own self-interest, but which in fact bring us harm.

In this context Barth speaks of “powers” that originate as legitimate human resources, capacities, and potentials that are given to humankind by God for the purpose of carrying out the God-ordained commission to subdue the earth and to have dominion over created life that rebel against us even as we rebel against God. Barth calls them “the lordless powers”.⁴⁶ These powers begin ostensibly under the authority of their human masters and initially give every indication of serving a worthy outcome. In the form of political rule these powers begin with the promise of effective government;⁴⁷ in the form of economic activity they begin with the assurance of prosperity and security for the future;⁴⁸ in the form of intellectual constructs they begin with the prospect of generating genuine knowledge;⁴⁹ and in

⁴⁵ Robert K. Merton, “The Unanticipated Consequences of Social Action,” in *Social Ambivalence and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), 149ff.

⁴⁶ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 213-33.

⁴⁷ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 219-22.

⁴⁸ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 222-24.

⁴⁹ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 224-27.

the form of technology they begin with the vision that this will enable human mastery of world processes.⁵⁰ But all the while these powers have in reality rebelled against their putative human masters as surely as humans have rebelled against their heavenly lord. Political rule degenerates into corruption and tyranny; economic activity into money-lust and exploitation; intellectual activity into ideology and propaganda; and technology into devices and mechanisms that dominate, alienate, and despoil.⁵¹ As Barth put it,

[Man's] capacities when he uses them, as Goethe describes so vividly and with such frightening profundity in his poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, become spirits with a life and activity of their own, lordless indwelling forces. To be sure, he thinks he can take them in hand, control them, and direct them as he pleases, for they are undoubtedly the forces of his own possibilities and capacities, of his own ability. In reality however, they escape from him, they have already escaped from him. They are entities with their own right and dignity. They are long since alienated from him. They act at their own pleasure, as absolutes, without him, behind him, over him, and against him, according to the law by which they arose, in exact correspondence to the law by which man himself thought that he should flee from God. ... In reality, he does not control them but they him. They do not serve him but he must serve them.⁵²

This is an excellent description of the unintended consequences of human action of which Merton speaks. It is also an excellent description of the way in which economic agency that seeks to “subdue the earth” and “have dominion over [created life] (Gen. 1:28) may be subverted so as to become, as Barth puts it “both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective”.⁵³ These things are actualised in the economic realm as a result of human capacities, ingenuity, and industry that are enabled by the potent forces of market capitalism. Forces that, to be sure, are capable of generating much that is genuinely worthy, but which in reality are so prone to slipping from human control and subsequently confronting us as technological and economic monstrosities that threaten to overwhelm and enslave us. As already noted many examples of this in relation to economic life abound. Additionally Barth speaks of

⁵⁰ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 227-32.

⁵¹ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 219-32.

⁵² Barth, *The Christian Life*, 214-15.

⁵³ Barth, *CD III/1*, 188.

the way Mammon in the form of money is an exceedingly useful means by which transactions may take place, but by degrees comes to promise wealth and prosperity, then creates anxiety and lust, and finally spawns speculative crises and war.⁵⁴ He says,

It does not have to do all these things, but it can. It can and does: not money as such, but the money that man thinks he possesses, although in truth it possesses him, and it does so because he wants to have it without God and thus creates a vacuum in which this intrinsically harmless but useful fiction becomes an absolutist demon, and man himself can only be its football and slave.⁵⁵

Max Stackhouse, in arguing for the role of theology in political economy, also recognises the propensity for money to degenerate into Mammon such that “... it can no longer be controlled by any nation state” contending that “in most societies, it is religion that holds these Powers together and under constraint.”⁵⁶ This insight concerning the true spiritual nature of money is echoed by Philip Goodchild who argues that

All religions, in essence, direct and distribute time, attention, and devotion. ... If there is an opposition between God and money, then fundamentally it comes down to this: wealth contains its own principles according to which time, attention, and devotion are allocated. ... It is the very obligation to do so that constitutes the spiritual power of money.⁵⁷

This theological understanding resonates with the findings of psychologists Kathleen Vohs et al who have demonstrated experimentally that, when conditioned to think of money, people tend to behave more individualistically and less communally. They report that participants “primed with money”, relative to those who were not, tended to request less help from and be less helpful toward others and preferred to “... play alone, work alone, and put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance.”⁵⁸

Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel prize for Economics 2001, member of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Clinton, and chief economist and

⁵⁴ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 222-24.

⁵⁵ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 224.

⁵⁶ Stackhouse, “Public Theology and Political Economy in a Globalizing Era”, 186.

⁵⁷ Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 6.

⁵⁸ Kathleen D. Vohs, Nicole L. Mead and Miranda R. Goode, “The Psychological Consequences of Money,” *Science* vol. 314 (17 November 2006): 1154-56.

senior vice president at the World Bank (1997-2000), provides a compelling account that, perhaps unwittingly, bears witness to the “lordless powers” – in particular how intellectual constructs that begin with the prospect of generating genuine knowledge degenerate into ideology and economic activity that begins with the assurance of prosperity and security for the future degenerates into money-lust and exploitation. He is very critical of the way that the “sister organisation” to the World Bank – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – has so often required borrowing countries to implement policies that are ideologically developed and driven without being scrutinised or informed by alternative perspectives. From personal experience at the highest levels of policy formulation and implementation he speaks of how rather than dispassionately setting aside ideology, gathering evidence, and seeking the best course of action “... decisions were often made because of ideology and politics. As a result many wrong-headed actions were taken, ones that did not solve the problem at hand but that fit with the interests or beliefs of the people in power.”⁵⁹ Stiglitz goes on to observe that “... many of these policies became ends in themselves, rather than means to more equitable and sustainable growth.”⁶⁰

As an impersonal mechanism, the invisible economic hand does not possess a guiding moral mind. As a mechanism that translates activated human choices into tangible economic outcomes, the invisible hand is incapable of distinguishing between that which is genuinely good, that which is well-intentioned but harmful, and that which is unambiguously destructive of human flourishing. But again, there is nothing inherent within capitalism itself that ensures it will *necessarily, inevitably, or certainly* generate these outcomes. Whether it does so or not is not primarily an economic question in relation to the sort of *system* that it is. Rather it is an ethical question in relation to the sorts of *decisions* and *values* that people who live within the system make and have in relation to the form of economic life they seek to enact and how they choose to utilise the opportunities that the capacities of capitalism make possible. The human construct that is capitalism provides the potential for human beings to exercise their economic freedom to make decisions in relation to what they regard as serving their best interests. But the use of this human power always risks unleashing the lordless powers. It is for this reason that human economic agents – both individually and as actors within corporate structures of

⁵⁹ Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2002), x.

⁶⁰ Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*, 53-54.

economic and political governance – must be willing to submit to moral boundaries that conform to a theological vision of economic life that will limit and direct their choices in relation to the possibilities that capitalism enables.

Nevertheless in all this, both in its creation and in its destruction, capitalism may be understood to point to both the light and shadow side of God's good creation. We may understand these aspects of capitalism as being part of God's good ordering of creaturely reality – they are not unambiguously hostile to God's covenantal purposes and thus they are not evil. They bear witness to and remind us of our *telos*. Positively, that God creates and resources us in order that we may pursue lives of obedience to the one command of God. And negatively, that we have not been created by material processes to find ultimate fulfilment in the material outcomes generated by economic activity nor are we to put our hope and confidence in these things. Loss of wealth, disappointed vocational hopes, economic instability, and the fact that we experience unanticipated consequences from the use of our economic power that slips from our control are not hostile to God's covenantal purposes to save us by grace. Within the uncertainty and suffering caused by economic volatility and misfortune, the goodness of God's covenantal purposes for the human creatures he loves may nevertheless be discerned and by the grace of God realised in contemporary life. The ancient Hebrew poet and prophet Habakkuk eloquently express the truth of this reality.

Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation. (Hab. 3:17-18)

As explained in chapter 1, Barth conceives the totality of creation, in both its positive light side and its corresponding negative shadow side, as pointing to the goodness of God's creation.⁶¹ Barth does not discern the world in this way because

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

he observes the world and *then* on this basis rationally determines that it must be constituted thus. Barth understands the world to be constituted in this way because the world in its light and shadow sides

... corresponds to the intention of God as revealed by Him in the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of the world with Himself effected in Him. For in Him God has made Himself the Subject of both aspects of creaturely existence. And having made it His own in Jesus Christ, He has affirmed it in its totality, reconciling its inner antithesis in His own person.⁶²

Because *both* aspects of God's good creation, the positive light side and its corresponding negative shadow side, are united and reconciled in the person of Jesus Christ Barth argues that Christian faith must therefore affirm that the cosmos is constituted in this way and as such is good and not evil.

4.3 Contemporary market capitalism and the menace of nothingness to God's good creation

God has created the cosmos with a positive light side and a corresponding negative shadow side to point us to the reality of our *telos* within the covenant of grace. But as explained in chapter 1, within the covenantal will of God for creation there also lies the bewildering fact that God has allowed a specific reality to possess a "fragmentary existence" that God has rejected, passed over, condemned, and defeated in Jesus Christ that has the capacity to menace, threaten, and overwhelm God's human creatures – the evil of nothingness.⁶³ It is Barth's understanding that one of the functions of the negative shadow side of God's good creation is to serve as a warning and reminder to human beings of the peril and jeopardy we expose ourselves to when we reject the grace of God and orientate ourselves toward that which God has rejected. Barth regards the shadow side as lying on the "frontier" of nothingness and human beings having the capacity to cross this frontier.⁶⁴

Thus the shadow side, while not overtly hostile to the purposes of God, serves as a warning of the peril we expose ourselves to should we continue to move closer to

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/3, 296.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 367.

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* III/3, 350.

the frontier that demarcates the boundary between shadow and darkness. In relation to economic life, I argue that this frontier is crossed and nothingness actualised when human beings as economic agents act to reverse the order or break the unity between covenant and creation. This means that we allow economic function to rule at the centre of our lives – lives that become *centred on* production and wealth acquisition over and above God’s covenantal purposes. Or alternatively, we allow economic function to comprise the totality of our lives – lives that become *constituted by* materialism and consumption independent of God’s covenantal purposes. The risk of economic function becoming the primary or only reality ruling or constituting our lives is especially prone to being actualised within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism because of the unique potentialities capitalism possesses. My purpose in the remainder of this chapter is to explore this possibility and some of the characteristics it may take. I do so in relation to the one central vulnerability that all economic systems are threatened by, but which contemporary market capitalism is especially prone to actualising in economic agents – *self-interest degenerating into greed!* Within the structures of capitalism I argue that this potent possibility spawns a family of related degenerating tendencies – the entrepreneurial spirit degenerating into depraved entrepreneurial business practices; consumption degenerating into materialistic consumerism; and production degenerating into plunder, pillage, exploitation, and expropriation. Each of these overlapping degenerating tendencies spawned by the insatiable appetites unleashed by greed bear witness to the spectre of human beings crossing the frontier that lies at the boundary of the shadow side of God’s good creation, entering the realm of nothingness, and being invaded by it. This realm is constituted by a Godless and neighbourless “fragmentary existence” that is anathema to genuine human well-being and flourishing and stands in active opposition to God’s covenantal purposes for creation.

Adam Smith’s invisible hand theorem has sometimes been popularised, although grossly misrepresented, by the slogan “greed is good”.⁶⁵ However, in analysing the economic role of self-interest in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) Smith clearly understood from his earlier *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) that for self-

⁶⁵ This expression is used in the 1987 movie *Wall Street* by the character Gordon Gekko who says “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A.”

interested economic action to advance the interests of society requires an underlying moral basis.⁶⁶ In summarising Smith's thinking, economist Jerry Evensky argues ... the foundation of Smith's moral philosophical vision never changed. If a society of free people and free markets is to avoid the Hobbesian abyss, justice must be enforced not by institutions and police, but by self-government – that is, by citizens who share and adhere to a common, mature standard of civic ethics.”

But modern economics has largely lost sight of Smith's understanding that self-interest, while being a *necessary* condition for unleashing humankind's productive energy, on its own it is not a *sufficient* condition.⁶⁷ On its own and disconnected from a guiding moral mind, self-interest is a human power that risks slipping from our grasp, degenerating into greed, and thus unleashing the “lordless powers” into the economic realm. The modern idea that autonomous amoral self-interest can somehow through the free market mechanism generate a socially desirable outcome contrasts with the consensus view of the authors of the biblical material for whom greed in *all* its various forms is uniformly condemned as an unmitigated evil. For these prophets and apostles, the mantra that “self-interest produces the common good” would be regarded as sophistry – an irrational fiction based on the alchemy that vices might somehow transubstantiate into virtues.⁶⁸ Furthermore it would be regarded as a cynical self-serving justification of human selfishness, lack of concern for others, and will to power. Moreover it would be regarded as bearing compelling witness to the human capacity for self-deception and point to a profound lack of trust in the provision of God.

In the Old Testament, *batsa* (and related words) is generally translated “greed,” “covetousness,” “avarice,” or “insatiable desire” and denotes a “... distorted or misplaced desire which issues in dishonest gain, or the greed for more which has become a common social disposition.”⁶⁹ Moreover, as this develops within a person or community “... distorted desires lead to a greed which will unlawfully dispossess another in order to satisfy cravings ...”⁷⁰ A good example of this is the extortion by

⁶⁶ Jerry Evensky, “Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments: On Morals and Why They Matter to a Liberal Society of Free People and Free Markets,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* vol. 19 no.3 (Summer 2005):128-29.

⁶⁷ Evensky, “Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments,” 110.

⁶⁸ Long, *Divine Economy*, 210-211.

⁶⁹ G. J. Pigott, “Covetousness,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 267.

⁷⁰ Pigott, “Covetousness,” 267.

King Ahab of the vineyard belonging to the ancestors and descendants of the citizen Naboth (1 Kings 21). As such, this covetousness is a direct violation of the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet ... anything that belongs to your neighbour” (Ex. 20:17). This is stated in the context of the all-sufficiency of the God of grace who “... brought you out of the ... house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:2-3). Thus in Old Testament thought greed reflects a disordered inner life, is destructive of community, represents a lack of trust in the provision of the God of the covenant of grace, and thus amounts to idolatry. Consequently “... those greedy for gain [in effect] curse and renounce the Lord” (Ps. 10:3). The prophets regard greed as a chief cause of Israel’s spiritual decline, degeneration into idolatry, and impending judgement – “I will [bring judgement upon them] because ... everyone is greedy for unjust gain ... everyone deals falsely” (Jer. 8:10).⁷¹

In Greek thought *pleonexia*, (and related words) are used to mean “wanting more”, not simply materially but in terms of power, pleasure, the willingness to use force, and “... the will to press one’s advantage ...” in order “... to take the greater share ...”.⁷² Thus it involved “... the urge to assert oneself, ... encroaching on what belongs to others, ...” and as such “... grasping beyond that which is ordained [by the gods] for man ...” thus disrupting the harmony of both society and the cosmos.⁷³ Consequently, greed is “... not just a social evil, it is the greatest evil for man himself ...”⁷⁴

These ideas are largely adopted and expanded in the New Testament. “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed [*pleonexias*]; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). The link between greed and idolatry that is clear in ancient Hebrew thought is made even more explicit in the New Testament – “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [or money]” (Matt. 6:24).⁷⁵ Greed amounts to idolatry because it replaces love, trust, and obedience to God with love, trust, and obedience to money

⁷¹ Chris M. Smith, “Greed,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 673.

⁷² Gerhard Delling, “πλεονέκτης, πλεονεκτέω, πλεονεξία,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. VI, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1968), 266.

⁷³ Delling, “πλεονεξία,” 266-68.

⁷⁴ Delling, “πλεονεξία,” 268.

⁷⁵ Delling, “πλεονεξία,” 271.

and reflects a conviction that fullness of life may only be derived from the abundance of things possessed rather than from the God of grace who fills all things in Jesus Christ. As Goodchild astutely observes, “God and wealth are set in competition; for time, in terms of “storing up treasure”; for attention, in terms of the health of the eye; and for devotion in terms of service.”⁷⁶ He argues that the desire for wealth becomes an idolatrous secular religion rivalling faith in God since “All religions, in essence, direct and distribute time, attention, and devotion.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, in the context of the early church community that “had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), for a fellow believer to refuse to graciously share his or her food and possessions with others amounted to a denial of the faith, therefore “to be greedy ... [is] to be guilty of flagrant disloyalty to group values, in effect, to betray the group’s identity.”⁷⁸ The practical outworking of this is explored in the Pastoral Epistles that contrast greed with contentment with the warning (that reads very poignantly in our contemporary global financial crisis setting) to avoid being “... trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction ...” (1 Tim. 6:9). Thus greed is not only seen as the product of a disordered inner life that leads to idolatry, but also as a factor that ravages human relationships through hard-heartedness and lack of compassion toward others. When those with food and possessions turn their backs upon others in need it inevitably devalues and degrades both victim and perpetrator and, as a consequence, produces insecurity, resentment, and conflict. And as these manifestations permeate and infect all our key relationships greed obscures the truth about God, others, ourselves, and the created environment.

First, greed obscures the truth about God because it leads to idolatry – a humanly devised construction of the god we think God might or should be – and thus a humanly devised determination of that which is worthy of our highest devotion, that which elicits our deepest confidence, and that which compels our life-long service. Greed amounts to a repudiation of the first and greatest commandment “... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ...” (Matt. 22:37) and replaces it with “love of money” – it *must* do this for one *cannot* serve two masters! Idolatry results from greed because it inevitably

⁷⁶ Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, 6.

⁷⁷ Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, 6.

⁷⁸ Brian S. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 156.

produces a false account of God's activity in the world through generating the self-serving religious ideology that God endorses and sanctifies our every material ambition. It also leads to the conviction that material wealth is a certain sign that its possessor is a recipient of God's grace, and thus the poor are not.⁷⁹ Moreover, it risks producing an over-realised eschatology in which the Kingdom of God is overwhelmingly conceived in material terms reflecting a conviction that economic progress can redeem humanity.

Second, greed, in its social and economic dimensions, obscures the truth about how people ought to perceive and treat others. Other people now become the object of envy and their possessions and bodies objects of selfish desire and exploitation. This tendency is exacerbated by the false anthropology of modernity that human beings are autonomous individuals for whom "... interpersonal relationships take the form of domination and subordination ... with the effect that other persons are turned into the instruments for the realization of an alien will."⁸⁰ This contrasts with the biblical anthropology in which our true personhood is constituted in Jesus Christ for fellowship with God and fellow-humanity. Greed, left unchecked, leads to conflict and dispute, and the inevitable degradation of others – both as victims and as perpetrators. As such greed amounts to a repudiation of the second great commandment "... You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt. 22:39). Failure of neighbour-love results because the economic pursuit of greed inevitably aligns itself with the self-serving ideology that, via the invisible hand mechanism of free market capitalism, one's consumption will, via the "trickle-down effect", bring benefits to the poor who are willing to work hard. Thus I am no longer directly obligated to be my brother's keeper, rather, all I need do is selfishly pursue my own desires and, through the market mechanism, my brother will be kept indirectly by me thanks to the alchemy of the invisible hand.

Third, greed, in its economic dimensions, obscures the truth about how a person ought to perceive him or herself as a human being within the covenantal purposes of God. The assumption that a person's life *does* consist in the abundance of the things possessed is, from the point of view of Christian faith, a false account of human

⁷⁹ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 10-22.

⁸⁰ Christoph Schwöbel, "Human Being As Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology," in *Persons Divine and Human* ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 158.

being. Christian faith regards this obsessive preoccupation with acquisitiveness, not as an “iron law” of the normative human condition but rather as a manifestation of the extent to which sinful humanity has lost its true orientation as the creature of God – created for covenantal relationship with God and for loving relationality in community with others. It regards the human obsession with consumption not as that which serves individual liberty, but rather an expression of human captivity to its own disordered desire.

Fourth, greed obscures the truth about the created environment. Paradoxically economic science speaks of the scarcity of resources, yet has unbridled optimism that market mechanisms and human technological inventiveness will allow limitless economic growth. This has fuelled in market capitalism a pursuit of growth, such that, in the words of Christian missionary Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998),

... [I]ncreased production has become an end in itself; products are designed to become rapidly obsolete so as to make room for more production; a minority is ceaselessly urged to multiply its wants in order to keep the process going while the majority lacks the basic necessities for existence; and the whole ecosystem upon which human life depends is threatened with destruction. Growth is for the sake of growth and is not determined by any overarching social purpose. And that, of course, is an exact account of the phenomenon which, when it occurs in the human body, is called cancer.⁸¹

The creation is finite, and although richly resourced so as to allow human flourishing within the covenantal purposes of God it is not capable of sustaining an unlimited obsessive human greed that has been enabled by the machinery of market capitalism to pursue such a level of growth that it now threatens the ecosystem with destruction.

The potent possibility that self-interest may degenerate into greed is a very real risk in contemporary market capitalism. Jim Wallis, American public theologian and social justice activist, seeks to understand the moral background of, and an appropriate Christian response to, the present global financial crisis. In exploring the vulnerability of self-interest and the invisible hand Wallis says, “Self-interest often does its [proper] job, but not always. Basic self-interest can turn into self-

⁸¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness To The Greeks: The Gospel & Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 114.

obsession, narcissism, and dangerous pride.”⁸² When this happens in the context of our lives as economic agents, I argue that it spawns a family of related degenerating tendencies.

One degenerating tendency that contemporary market capitalism is exposed to when self-interest degenerates into greed, thus corrupting human beings as economic agents, is the entrepreneurial spirit degenerating into what I call “depraved entrepreneurship”. When the order of centre first and circumference second is reversed, human beings come to believe that the work of production and consumption are central and primary. The entrepreneurial spirit, when guided by a desire for a moral outcome, does indeed press into useful service the self-interest motive that generates products that serve a worthy social purpose, employment opportunities that give dignity to employees, and business profits that contribute to the building of valuable social infrastructure. But in the absence of an ethical basis by which we govern our economic agency, Adam Smith’s invisible hand inevitably turns feral. The entrepreneurial spirit degenerates into depraved entrepreneurship in which the very same business skills and economic incentives that are a legitimate part of economic function are turned to an immoral end in which products that do not serve a worthy social purpose are produced, the employment generated by these activities degrade the humanity of those involved, and the business profits that are amassed are subverted to serve corrupted motives and ends. Examples of such depraved entrepreneurship abound and include slavery in all its forms; organised crime; trade in destructively addictive substances and activities; the commercialisation through bribery of judicial, policing, and political functions; and the commodification of human sexuality through prostitution, pornography, and the sexualisation of otherwise legitimate products. Moreover depraved entrepreneurship gives rise to the production and marketing of a plethora of “goods and services” that ought to properly lie outside of the realm of commercial transactions, are unambiguously criminal, or which do not genuinely contribute to the well-being of the individuals and communities that produce and consume them. Examples include trade in body parts and endangered species; contract killing; arms and drug trafficking; excessive marketing of alcohol, tobacco, and gambling; and loan-shark

⁸² Jim Wallis, *Rediscovering Values on Wall Street, Main Street, and Your Street* (New York: Howard Books, 2010), 54-55.

financing to name but a few.⁸³ All of these and many others are now multi-billion dollar global businesses. The only criterion that the invisible hand is subject to, once divorced from an ethical basis by which we govern our economic agency, is that of money facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers – whether they do so willingly, by coercion, or through deception makes no difference! When human greed is allowed free reign in people’s lives, the transactions of buyers and sellers seem to know no limitation and thus all boundaries are willingly violated and crossed. When human beings cross the frontier that lies at the boundary of the shadow side of God’s good creation and enter the realm of nothingness, depraved entrepreneurship has the capacity to spawn all the destructive manifestations of economic greed known to human ingenuity and in this way stands in active opposition to God’s good covenantal purposes for humanity. Kept within its proper bounds, the invisible hand as a *relative* principle is able to legitimately serve a theological vision of economic life. But when it breaks out of its proper bounds, and the market as a mechanism is *absolutised*, it degenerates into depraved entrepreneurship. As such nothing is permitted to countermand the criterion of transacting buyers and sellers regardless of the consequences, and in this way the invisible hand turns feral and becomes demonic. As Gorringer perceptively notes, when genuine and legitimate self-interest collapses into greed-fuelled insatiable desire this redefines what it means to be human and “The economy no longer exists to serve human needs, but human needs have to be distorted [through manipulative advertising] to serve the expanding market.”⁸⁴ In this way the order of ruling covenantal centre governing a serving created circumference is reversed.

A second degenerating tendency that contemporary market capitalism is exposed to when self-interest degenerates into greed, thus corrupting human beings as economic agents, is consumption degenerating into materialistic consumerism. When the unity of covenant and creation is severed and creaturely life is regarded as autonomous and separate from the covenant, human beings come to believe that material existence is the *only* reality that constitutes their lives. This gives rise to the practical triumph of materialism as an ideology. In Barth’s view, a materialistic conception of human being has triumphed, not because it is soundly based in science – for it cannot account for the self-consciousness of human being – but because of

⁸³ For further discussion of this tendency toward the commodification of all things see Meeks, *God the Economist*, 38ff.

⁸⁴ Gorringer, *Fair Shares*, 35.

its alliance with economic materialism.⁸⁵ Within the logic of materialism there is no adequate basis, Barth argues, to bridge from the purely physical to the purely psychical or vice versa and so the “soul” must be recast in materialistic terms.⁸⁶ In relation to economic life the logic of materialism points to the conviction – contrary to the biblical warning that “... one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3) – that one *does* live by bread alone and indeed, because material existence is thought the only reality that constitutes our lives, we *must* live by bread alone! On this basis the economic system and the needs and requirements of human beings can only be understood in materialistic terms. This is because within the framework of materialism human beings cannot now be conceived of as a ruling soul governing a serving body.

Barth argues “... materialism with its denial of the soul makes man subjectless ...”⁸⁷ We become subjectless when we have no adequate basis upon which we may say “I” in distinction to another “I” and thus we have no adequate basis upon which to address one another as “Thou” and “Thou”. This then is a question of *identity* and the basis upon which a person can recognise and authentically affirm his or her own identity and the identity of others. It is my view that subjectless material “man” has become incarnated in the consumerism that economic materialism has spawned within the enabling structures of contemporary market capitalism in which subjectless people have become obsessed with the problem of individual identity. So many goods and services that the economic system finds profitable to produce and sell through marketing are dedicated to an endless cycle of simultaneously undermining and promising individual identity. All this is strongly suggestive of an anxious neurosis in which people feel that their identity is insecure and threatened in a materialistic world and that it can only be maintained by sheer force of will and, in terms of its economic manifestations, by the slavish consumption of appropriately marketed goods and services. Wallis explores the connection between consumerism as an attempt to garner material markers of status and our sense of identity with the warning, “An identity built on these things is a weak one indeed; and it is an identity that can easily dissolve, crack apart, or be taken from us.”⁸⁸ This makes a mockery of the proud concept of market monarchy – the lofty conviction that consumers are

⁸⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 382-90.

⁸⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 430.

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 392.

⁸⁸ Wallis, *Rediscovering Values*, 50.

co-rulers in the market place along with profit-seeking producers and demand only those things that contribute to our autonomously determined utility preferences. In a world dominated and defined by economic materialism, humanity is confronted with two haunting questions: “What secures individual identity, authenticity, and the affirmation of that identity?” and, in the absence of this, “What prevents a person from becoming ultimately indistinguishable from the mass of animated organic material (other human beings) that surround them at every point?” This is not simply a crisis for the individual, massive though it is. It is a crisis for society as a whole. For when individuals have no adequate basis upon which to secure their identities and thus become obsessed by the futile pursuit of a form of economic alchemy that promises to transubstantiate psychical identity out of purely physical base resources, then the individual has no basis upon which they can recognise and affirm their own identity as a genuine “I” or that of another as a genuine “Thou”. In this way the subjectless individual is condemned to an existence of agonising neighbourlessness and loneliness, and the subjectless “other” is merely regarded as another product of the economic system to be bought and consumed in the relentless pursuit of identity.

This is the ultimate horror of pure economic materialism that spawns a hideous and demonic form of competition – a deadly game of life and death in which all boundaries may be violated in a desperate attempt to find and secure a sense of self-identity. In this pursuit, the rationalistic calculus of individual utility maximisation permeates every dimension of life in which every other human being, and indeed God himself, alternates between being an enemy to overcome or a resource to exploit. As Barth puts it,

Where man seeks his self-fulfilment in a self-transcending attempt to have the divinity, the fellow-man and all things as consumer goods for himself, where his vital hunger leads him to be himself the one in all things, we have to do unequivocally with the evil which can only have its wages in death.⁸⁹

When the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and materialistic consumerism is realised in the creaturely realm, there is no basis for the genuine affirmation of the other and a genuine sense of community in which there is recognition, communication, and mutual assistance given and received in freedom

⁸⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 282.

and gladness. In this way economic agency is dehumanised and the foundations of community are destroyed.

Kept within its proper bounds, material consumption is a valid creaturely function that arises out of the economic necessity that God's creation presupposes and which bears witness to our true creaturely *humanity* within a theological vision of economic life. But when it breaks out of its proper bounds, and consumption as an economic function is *dehumanised*, it degenerates into materialistic consumerism. As such nothing is permitted to countermand the criterion of individual utility maximisation regardless of the consequences, and in this way consumption turns feral and becomes demonic. As people allow themselves to be seduced by greed so that they willingly use all the potentialities contained within the consumption possibilities of contemporary market capitalism and therefore treat other human beings solely as material resources, the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and materialistic consumerism is realised in the creaturely realm.

The third degenerating tendency I identify in this section that contemporary market capitalism is exposed to when self-interest degenerates into greed thus corrupting human beings as economic agents is production degenerating into plunder, pillage, exploitation, and expropriation. When the invisible hand is contained within the supporting structures of an appropriate morality, self-interest motivates individuals to satisfy their need for material goods through the legitimate *production* of goods and services. But human ingenuity has long known of effective alternative means by which individual needs may be satisfied, namely *plundering* the wealth and production of others. As I have argued elsewhere,

Self-interest and the prospect of profit is a powerful motivator for an ethical person to work hard, save, invest, take risks, build a business and provide job opportunities for others. But self-interest [particularly when it has degenerated into greed] can easily motivate an unethical person to engage in theft, dishonesty, fraud, and corruption.⁹⁰

When self-interest degenerates into greed, in the absence of moral restraint the desire for acquisition turns feral and instead of energising productive activity that

⁹⁰ Andrew Callander, *Understanding the Economic Environment* 3rd ed. (Wellington: LexisNexis, 2011), 583.

builds community, it provides a powerful mechanism whereby corrupted human resourcefulness channels itself into the worst aspects of criminal theft. Whether this is undertaken crudely or more sophisticatedly, it ends up stealing, killing, and destroying, thus is ruinous of the abundance of life that Jesus seeks to realise in human community in the kingdom of God for “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. [Jesus] came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10:10.

Kept within its proper bounds, wealth acquisition through production is also a valid creaturely function that bears witness to our true creaturely humanity within a theological vision of economic life. But when it breaks out of its proper *limits*, and is *unrestricted*, wealth acquisition degenerates into plunder. As such nothing is permitted to countermand the criterion of individual wealth maximisation regardless of the consequences, and in this way production turns feral and becomes demonic. As people allow themselves to be seduced by greed so that they are willing to make use of all the potentialities contained within the wealth generating possibilities of contemporary market capitalism and therefore treat the resources of other human beings solely as objects of acquisition, the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and plunder is realised in the creaturely realm.

When self-interest degenerates into greed and economic agents elect to make use of all the enabling possibilities within free market capitalism, the invisible hand in the absence of a guiding moral mind has the capacity to degenerate into depraved entrepreneurship, materialistic consumerism, and economic plunder. Nevertheless yet again I emphasise there is nothing inherent within capitalism itself that ensures it will *necessarily*, *inevitably*, or *certainly* generate these degenerating outcomes. Whether it does so or not is not primarily an economic question in relation to the sort of *system* that it is. Rather it is an ethical question in relation to the sorts of *decisions* and *values* that people who live within the system make and have in relation to the form of economic life they seek to enact and how they choose to utilise the opportunities that the capacities of capitalism make possible. And this depends upon the extent to which those who live within its structures are motivated, whether as Christians or non-Christians, to enact an ethical form of economic life that is, knowingly or unknowingly, consistent with a theological vision of capitalism’s place and possibilities within the purposes of God for creation.

Economic life requires a moral vision to keep it within its proper bounds within the positive will of God for creation. In order to function effectively, capitalism requires a whole range of capitals including what might be termed “moral capital”. An economic system is a complex web of transactional social relationships and as such involves the transactional interaction of human beings who bring a moral dimension to all their activity as economic agents. Every aspect of economic behaviour has a moral dimension in relation to things such as the honest fulfilment of contractual promises, good faith in discharging obligations of trust, and respect for the property and interests of others. When these things are absent or uncertain, enormous costs that diminish well-being are added to the economic process. These costs are added either directly, as costly systems of protection that must be installed to mitigate the risk of fraud, theft, misrepresentation, or abuse of trust; or indirectly, where these protections are absent, these costs are borne though suffering the effects of corruption, extortion, or other methods (either crude or sophisticated) of expropriation and plunder.

Market capitalism is good at regenerating *some* of the capitals it is dependent upon for its productive inputs. It is excellent at regenerating, via financial markets and industrial factories, the financial and manufactured capitals that it consumes and destroys in the productive process. However, some of its capitals come from outside of its own processes and its own processes are powerless to generate them. An obvious example is the environmental capital that supplies the raw material inputs into the economic process and which is expected to absorb the vast quantity of waste products generated in the production, consumption, and disposal of its prodigious production. Environmental capital is in fact an inherited capital that derives from an entirely different source from the capitalism that is dependent upon it. Like environmental capital, the moral capital that capitalism is dependent upon for low cost production is an inherited capital that comes from outside of its own processes. Capitalism is dependent upon moral capital as a condition of its own possibility and yet through greed, capitalism’s very processes always risk undermining, corrupting, and subverting this moral capital. The beliefs and behaviours that arise out of capitalism’s underpinning assumptions and processes that are embodied in the behaviour of individuals as economic agents are frequently destructive of some of the key capitals that capitalism depends upon. This represents a crisis for capitalism

as it voraciously consumes and destroys, as never before, the various inherited capitals that lie at the heart of its own possibility.

The market mechanism, within the enabling structures of contemporary market capitalism, is an extremely potent human construct. Its capacities are extraordinarily prodigious, and precisely for this reason extraordinarily dangerous. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the reality of economic necessity compels us to engage in the economic functions of “subduing the earth” and “having dominion over [living things]” (Gen. 1:28). But this must be understood in the context of God’s “very good” – that these functions can only legitimately take place in service of God’s good covenantal purposes under the blessing of the lordship of God. As noted in chapter 1, Barth cautions that humans can never be the lords of nature since we are not its creator, we can only carry out a commission from God who is the lord of humankind. Therefore, Barth argues, human beings need a special blessing to exercise this lordship.⁹¹ But Barth warns that this activity of humankind “... assumes a dangerous proximity to God’s activity as Creator in which it may be both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective.”⁹² The reality of our economic necessity puts human beings in a place of potent possibility and peril. In creating human beings to exist under the burden of economic necessity God places us in a precarious position in which we may indeed perform this function under the blessing of the lordship of God, or alternatively may elect to exercise this dominion under our own lordship. Consequently we may exercise this dominion in ways that either bear witness to the light side of God’s good creation or alternatively in ways that are “both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective”. If the latter – we risk the power of our economic dominion slipping from our hands, unleashing “the lordless powers”, crossing the frontier, and actualising nothingness in the creaturely world”.

Barth’s warning is especially apt in relation to the human possibilities that the prodigious potency contained within the capacities of capitalism is able to unleash in economic life. As noted earlier in this chapter, for capitalism to participate in the blessing of the light side of God’s providential governance of creation within the covenantal purposes of God depends upon the extent to which its functioning takes place under the lordship of God and seeks to be consistent with the covenantal

⁹¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

⁹² Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

purposes of God. And this depends upon the extent to which those who live within its structures are motivated to enact an ethical form of economic life that is consistent with a theological vision of capitalism's place and possibilities within the covenantal purposes of God.

In chapter 5 I seek to provide a basis in theological ethics that may enable Christians as economic agents to stand against the degenerating tendencies they are exposed to within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism that put them at risk of behaving in ways that are “supremely insolent and wholly ineffective”. In doing so I attempt to provide the theological and moral resources to accomplish three related subsidiary objectives with a view to accomplishing one primary objective. First; to *relativise economic function* so that Christians may resist the tendency to behave as market participants in ways that degenerate into depraved entrepreneurship; second, to *humanise economic agency* so that Christians may resist the tendency to behave as utility seekers in ways that degenerate into materialistic consumerism; and third, to *restrict economic purpose* so that Christians may resist the tendency to behave as wealth seekers in ways that degenerate into plunder. A moral basis for human behaviour that is rooted in theological ethics that provides the resources to stand against these three degenerating tendencies also provides the resources to stand against the primary degenerating tendency that spawns these three – self-interest degenerating into greed.

Chapter 5: Economic life in relation to the one command of God

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.
(Gen. 2:1-3)

In chapter 2, following Barth, I emphasised that true humanity in the covenantal purposes of God is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by action that orientates us toward God and neighbour. In this present chapter I emphasise the shape economic life must take if it is to correspond to the good action of God that is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by his being for God and for us. In chapter 4 I provided a theological framework that, like light, might illuminate and enable us to understand economic life within the purposes of God for creation. This involves understanding the processes and outcomes of contemporary market capitalism as bearing witness to the light and shadow side of God's good creation and the risk that economic agents subject themselves to, when motivated by greed, to actualise the economic manifestations of the evil of nothingness. I argued that there is nothing inherent within capitalism itself that means it will *necessarily, inevitably, or certainly* generate these outcomes. Whether it does so or not is not primarily an economic question in relation to the sort of *system* that it is. Rather it is an ethical question in relation to the sorts of *decisions* and *values* that people who live within the system make and have in relation to the form of economic life they seek to enact and how they choose to utilise the opportunities that the capacities of capitalism make possible. In this present chapter I attempt to articulate a moral vision of economic life that, like salt, may enable people to resist and stand against the degenerating tendencies they are exposed to within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism. Because this conception of economic life is rooted in a dogmatic theological account of reality, this is addressed, in the first instance, to Christians. But I also wish to speak to a wider audience – to all those who seek a moral basis for a more equitable and just form of economic life.

Barth writes his ethics of the doctrine of creation in *Church Dogmatics* volume III part 4 under the heading of “freedom” and in his first section “Freedom before God” he begins his exploration of the one command of God in the context of the *praxis* of the Sabbath command. This points me in the direction I seek to take in this chapter. I seek to explore the one command of God as it orientates us toward God, toward others, and toward our functioning in the external world, under Barth’s headings – freedom before God, freedom for fellow humanity, and freedom for life in limitation within the framework of key integrating ritual acts of obedience that govern and shape Christian life and then extrapolate from them what they suggest for economic life in our contemporary context.¹ However in the remainder of his ethics in the doctrine of creation Barth makes no further reference to specific Christian *praxes*. Nevertheless it was his intention to do so in his uncompleted ethics of reconciliation that he began to write under the heading of “invocation” in *Church Dogmatics* volume IV part 4.² It was his plan, only partially fulfilled, to elucidate the ethics of reconciliation as invocation in light of the Lord’s Prayer and to begin this with the *praxis* of Baptism as the foundation of the Christian life and to conclude with the Lord’s Supper as its renewal.³ Therefore I not only wish to make use of Barth’s material on the Sabbath that he explicitly links to his doctrine of creation but also the material on Baptism he completed in relation to the doctrine of reconciliation. I also use material on the Lord’s Supper I derive from other sources.

Therefore my purpose in this chapter is to explore the one command of God in relation to these three key integrating rituals that govern and shape Christian life and extrapolate from them what they suggest for economic life in our contemporary context. Each of these *praxes* – the Sabbath, the Lord’s Supper, and Baptism – are commanded by God and contain within them in microcosm the whole story of the covenant in ritual form. In this way the truth concerning the work of God in creation is made real in the lives of Christians and is the basis upon which this reality is actualised in the external world in the conscious enactment of a form of life that corresponds to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.⁴ By making explicit the economic implications these *praxes* contain I hope to provide a moral basis rooted in

¹ This last heading combines two of Barth’s headings “freedom for life” and “freedom in limitation”.

² Barth, *The Christian Life*, 42ff.

³ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 46.

⁴ For further discussion on the interrelatedness of narrative and ritual in the formation of Christian community see Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 36ff.

theological ethics by which Christians may resist the three degenerating tendencies within contemporary market capitalism I identify in chapter 4 that are spawned by self-interest degenerating into greed. Thus my three sections are (1) *The Sabbath and the relativising of economic function as our freedom before God* – in which I make explicit the economic implications within the Sabbath so as to provide moral resources to resist the tendency within capitalism to *absolutise* economic function thus rendering market participants vulnerable to behaving in ways that allow the entrepreneurial spirit to degenerate into depraved entrepreneurship; (2) *The Lord's Supper and the humanising of economic agency as our freedom in fellowship* – in which I make explicit the economic implications within the Lord's Supper so as to provide moral resources to resist the tendency within capitalism to *dehumanise* economic agency thus rendering market participants vulnerable to behaving in ways that allow legitimate consumption and utility maximisation to degenerate into materialistic consumerism; and (3) *Baptism and the restricting of economic purpose as our freedom for life within limitation* – in which I make explicit the economic implications within Baptism so as to provide moral resources to resist the tendency within capitalism toward *unrestricted* economic purpose thus rendering market participants vulnerable to behaving in ways that allow legitimate production and wealth seeking to degenerate into plunder and pillage.

5.1 The Sabbath and the relativising of economic function as our freedom before God

The one command of God calls us in freedom to active responsibility before God as the human creatures that God has prepared and ordained for covenantal relationship. This freedom to live in the active affirmation of our creaturely being has, firstly, a Godward dimension. In his ethics, under the heading “Freedom before God”, Barth considers the Sabbath, confession, and prayer.⁵ He argues that the one command of the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ is first to be understood as freedom before God and that this consists in rightly relating the totality of our being, and thus our work, to the work of God. This involves: obedience to the Sabbath command in which our work is relativised in light of the work of God. It comes as quite a surprise to the reader, following three lengthy part-volumes of “The Doctrine of

⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 47ff.

Creation” in the *Church Dogmatics*, to finally reach the fourth part-volume on the ethics that flow out of this doctrine – to *begin* with the “Holy Day”.⁶ This comes before any consideration of ethics in relation to our fellow humans or any analysis of the ethical dilemmas of life one would expect to be decisive in any discussion of ethics. Barth, I think, intends this to be a surprise and suggests as much – he says, “This arrangement may seem to be strange, but it is so only in appearance.”⁷ Barth is adamant that ethics embraces the totality of our being in *all* its different relationships and that of *first* importance it must address our relationship to God. Thus ethics cannot be reduced exclusively to our behaviour in relation to others. While it is true that love of God is to undergird and give focus to love of neighbour, love of God is not identical to love of neighbour. Barth states,

There is a claim of God on man in respect of his relationship to Him which, although and because it underlies and includes all His other claims on man, is nevertheless not simply identical with them, but by reason of its general bearing must also be heard together with others and therefore independently.⁸

On this basis Christian ethics must *begin* with the human orientation toward God and not our orientation toward others. Our orientation toward others is of course critically important, but it *follows*, and thus does not precede, subsume, fulfil, or replace our orientation to God.

Ethics concerns the content of human activity and abstention in relation to the *totality* of our lives. The command of God “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” is the “greatest and first commandment” (Matt. 22:36-40). This means that the *first* orientation that the one command of God directs us toward is Godward. Rather than seeking to describe love of God as an abstract concept, I use the theological vehicle of the Sabbath, in terms of resting with God, to give it concrete expression thus showing in practical terms what love of God may consist of – especially as this relates to the economic dimension of life. In the Sabbath command God commands us to cease from our work and to rest, and to actively and consciously with all of our heart, soul, and mind reflect on and participate in the work of God. In this way we are to participate

⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 47.

⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 50.

⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 48.

consciously in the work of God – the salvation that God has provided through Jesus Christ and to “... celebrate, rejoice, and be free to the glory of God.”⁹

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the historical practice of the Sabbath in both ancient Israel and in the Church. My concern is to examine the *theological intent* of the Sabbath in relation to the covenant and how this is to be understood in relation to economic life. In the biblical chronology, the first Sabbath rest occurs on the seventh day of creation and has its origin in the culmination of the work of God and concludes the six days of creation with a day of rest. The emphasis is firstly on the rest of God from all *God's* work. The hallowing of the day, from a human perspective, involves the cessation from all *our* work and a conscious participation in rest so as to be restored and refreshed from the toils of working life.

As Barth observes, the Bible has no great enthusiasm for work and regards it primarily as repetitive toil that threatens to crush and consume us.¹⁰ Therefore the Sabbath is seen as a compassionate provision in which periodic relief from the toil of economic necessity gives refreshment. This refreshment is enjoined upon *all* who labour including animals, slaves, and foreigners. “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your home born slave and the resident alien may be refreshed” (Ex. 23:12). This relief from the burden of toil was extended to the land itself. “Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land” (Lev. 25:1-4). In biblical thought the whole of creation is regarded as somehow participating in this vain toilsome process from which relief and rest is sought and promised.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom. 8:19-21)

⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 50.

¹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 536.

Therefore, creaturely existence that is *only* orientated toward the material means of life is seen as futile and suffers under an unbearable burden that yearns for relief. In the Jubilee,¹¹ the theological intent of the Sabbath is extrapolated – it comes to represent a vision in which all the people of God are set free from the ceaseless burden of economic necessity and the impoverishment they sink into as a consequence of being alienated from their economic and cultural resources. It anticipates, as Ronald J. Sider expresses it, “... the eschatological vision of a new day when once again all will delight in the fruits of the their own land and labor [and] we see a social ideal in which families are to have the economic means to earn their own way.”¹² Therefore the weekly Sabbath rest is a holy day that celebrates the covenant and anticipates its future fulfilment in the jubilee of the kingdom of God.

In the chronology of the story of creation, the seventh day of rest is the *first* day of the male and female who are created in the image of God on the sixth day. They had not, as yet, entered upon their work to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it ...” (Gen. 1:28). As Barth puts it,

It is the event of divine rest in face of the cosmos completed with the creation of man – a rest which takes precedence over all man’s eagerness and zeal to enter upon his task. Man is created to participate in this rest.¹³

This underscores the statement of Jesus that “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). Because humankind is created on day six and the Sabbath on day seven this means that humankind was created to participate in this rest and the rest was made for humankind. This is because the covenantal rest lies at the centre of God’s work and thus comes *first*, and humankind entering upon their God-ordained work lies at the circumference and thus *follows*. But this circumference is never separated from this centre for the work of God is always ordered and unified. In this way the Sabbath expresses the *unity* of covenant and creation. In it, as the *bodies* of our souls, the physical and creaturely being of humans is acknowledged and honoured and our need for bodily rest and refreshment

¹¹ “You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month – on the day of atonement – you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.” (Lev. 25:8-10)

¹² Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 65.

¹³ Barth, *CD* III/1, 98.

provided for. But also, as the *souls* of our bodies, the spiritual and creaturely being of humans is acknowledged and honoured and our status in the covenantal purposes of God is sanctified and affirmed. But we must emphasise that the Sabbath also expresses the *order* of covenant and creation – it is a *holy* day. Therefore physical rest is the serving circumference of the governing centre of active and conscious participation in the salvation of the God who sanctifies us, and not the reverse. But the one is never separated from the other, it is always rest *and* participation.

The Sabbath is envisaged as a weekly *praxis* – a practical enactment in ritual form in which the theological truth concerning the covenantal work of God in creation bears fruit in the lives of human beings. It is a conscious human enactment in correspondence to the activity of God – we are to rest from our labour on a weekly basis in correspondence to the creative activity of God that is concluded in rest. As Barth puts it, the Sabbath command says,

[T]here must be from time to time an interruption, a rest, a deliberate non-continuation, a temporal pause, to reflect on God and His work and to participate consciously in the salvation provided by Him and to be awaited from Him. It says that man's own work is to be performed as a work bounded by this continually recurring interruption. This interruption is the holy day.¹⁴

The Sabbath points to certain things, and as a consequence implicitly commands certain things. As Barth emphasises, the rest of God signals God's limit in terms of what God wills for creation. God's rest reveals the freedom of God. Neither God nor his creature is bound by the necessity of some relentless principle that imposes its will from the outside that drives forever onward.¹⁵ God's rest also reveals his love. A relentless drive onward is never satisfied. Love has a definite limited objective. Because God has found the object of his love, he ceases his creative activity for he has no need of further works.¹⁶ God's loving freedom is the true criterion of his deity revealed in his rest. As noted in chapter 1 of this thesis, the seventh day confirms the conclusion of God's work. God's "very good" (Gen. 1:31) indicates God's verdict that nothing further needs to be added and all that remains is

¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 50.

¹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/1, 215.

¹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/1, 215.

for humankind to be confirmed and preserved under God's rule.¹⁷ As Barth puts it, in his rest God does not retreat into "... the aseity of the inner glory of His being and existence before creation ...",¹⁸ but enters into relationship with the specific reality that God willed to create. Here in the seventh day God is most truly himself and humankind most truly fulfilled in its purpose. In his rest God links himself in a temporal act with the being and purpose of humanity. This, as Barth argues, really is the aseity of his own glory, the glory of the incarnate Christ who is God *with us*.¹⁹ Thus the meaning of the Sabbath rest is the revelation of the true nature of the deity of God, his freedom and love. And in his freedom and love God reveals that he belongs to and binds himself to what he has created. Therefore, Barth argues, the history of the covenant is really established in the events of the seventh day – God in his true deity in direct relationship with humankind in our true humanity.²⁰ Everything that follows in the history of the covenant is the road back to this point. This is the purpose of creation and humankind – to rest with God in the goodness of created reality.²¹

But the freedom of God to rest from his work, to set a limit to his work, and to enjoy the definite and well-defined object of his love stands in marked contrast to the relentless pursuit of economic growth, progress, wealth, and consumerism that is the substance of so much contemporary economic activity. On what basis can contemporary economic agents say, "It is finished" and rest from all our work of labour and production? Does this not underscore our un-freedom and enslavement to a world-process that confronts us as relentless, unceasing, and never ending? Does this not point to the fact that all our economic striving has not given us something that we can truly love and be satisfied with? Does it not account for the sense of un-control that we have in relation to our economic lives and the sense of our being complicit in a mechanism that consumes and determines us and which we feel we have little ability to control or escape?

But because the rest of God signals God's limit in terms of what God wills for creation it therefore implicitly commands the *relativisation* of all human work and all human constructs. As Barth puts it,

¹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/1, 213.

¹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 214.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 216-17.

²⁰ Barth, *CD* III/1, 217.

²¹ Barth, *CD* III/1, 98.

The Sabbath commandment requires of man that ... he believe in God as his Ruler and Judge, and that he let his self-understanding in every conceivable form be radically transcended, limited and relativised by this faith, or rather by the God in whom he believes.²²

The relativisation of human work by the command of God does not deny human work but puts human work in its proper place. And *because* it puts it in its proper place, it gives human work its proper God-ordained dignity, legitimacy, and right. The work of God in covenant and creation is an *ordered unity* thus the covenant is linked to creation in inseparable unity and indestructible order. The centre rules the circumference and the circumference exists for the sake of the centre and not the reverse. But our economic task at the circumference has its own legitimate place of dignity and honour as this corresponds to God's fatherly and providential care for creation so that the cosmos may continue to be the environment in which human life may be sustained and flourish that we may actively affirm our creaturely being in obedience to the one command of God. This is what the Sabbath command points toward and commands – the re-centring of human work so as to give priority to the covenantal work of God fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is our work of worship; and the relativising of human work so that it may take its proper place of service at the circumference of the work of God, which is our work of economic activity.

But the Sabbath also points away from certain things, and as a consequence implicitly forbids certain things. In relativising human work the Sabbath forbids us absolutising our work. The absolutisation of work leads to the belief that the sole purpose of human existence is to be about our own work – that we live in order to work and that it is through our work we realise ourselves and through our work we somehow save ourselves. Therefore we are forbidden to regard economic activity, consumption, and wealth as a secular alternative to salvation; economic and social progress as a secular alternative to the kingdom of God; and economic capacity as the basis for national peace and security. In its proper place human work does indeed have a *relative capacity* to contribute to the realisation of human potential, social progress, national peace and security, self-esteem, and material wellbeing. But the absolute realisation of these things lies outside of human capacity and depends upon factors that lie under the providential and lordly control of God.

²² Barth, *CD* III/4, 58.

Therefore the Sabbath command means we are to renounce absolute confidence in our own work. Thus we are forbidden to regard our work and livelihood as the absolute means by which we sustain and uphold ourselves in relation to our creaturely needs for we are only ever upheld and sustained by the grace of God who provides for us. We are not to link our status, identity, and self-esteem to our work and the income earned from work. We are not to use work and business as a distraction to stand in the way of making ourselves available to God and available to others. Thus the Sabbath prohibits that we be satisfied and fulfilled with our own work. The Sabbath does indeed direct us to our own work, but, as Barth emphasises, we are to renounce confidence in it – we are not to believe in it, hope in it, put our trust in it, or to see it as the means by which we save ourselves.²³ To trust in the work of our own hands is to absolutise our work and thus to create an idol that stands over and against God thus shaping and determining our thinking and acting. To save us from ourselves God calls us in the Sabbath command to first stand before God stripped of our own work and to place ourselves utterly in the hands of God.

This has profound consequences for economic life. The human attempt to absolutise human work and human constructs is really a human attempt to reverse the order of covenant and creation and thus to regard humanly generated outcomes as of primary significance in determining our humanity and destiny. It is also to break the unity of covenant and creation and thus to regard human capacity as constituting the totality of who we are. As I have argued in chapter 4, this absolutising tendency is one of the ways in which the potentialities within capitalism enable market participants to behave in ways that allow self-interest to degenerate into greed and the entrepreneurial spirit to degenerate into depraved entrepreneurship. In this way the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and economic depravity is realised in the creaturely realm. Therefore in order for theological ethics to provide resources that, like preserving salt, may enable people to stand against these absolutising tendencies it must seek to relativise economic function so that people may resist the temptation to use the potentialities within capitalism in this way. To resist this corrosive and destructive tendency requires that economic agents within contemporary market capitalism live by a “moral capital” that derives from resources outside of capitalism’s own capacities – a moral capital that capitalism depends upon as a condition of its own possibility, but which it cannot generate or

²³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 54.

supply from its own ideological resources. I argue that this moral capital may be realised through the Christian community embodying the economic implications of the Sabbath command as a *praxis* by which the truth concerning the work of God in creation is made real in the lives of Christians and the basis upon which this reality is actualised in the external world in the conscious enactment of a form of life that corresponds to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

Such a *praxis* must stand in diametrical contrast to the way many of the underlying implications of neo-classical economic science have been incarnated in contemporary market capitalism. I refer specifically to the way in which the scientific method applied to neo-classical economic science betrays an absolutising tendency that seeks to absolve economic processes and outcomes from moral critique. Neoclassical economic theory is an Enlightenment project that seeks to discover the truth about the world on the basis of the scientific method that has enabled economic scientists to discover various “laws” of economic behaviour. As economist Herman Daley and theologian John Cobb explain, key to this project is the separation of “facts” and “values” so as to find a place of supposedly value free neutrality upon which human rationality may discern the underlying “laws” and “principles” that govern the functioning of all physical and social systems.²⁴ But as Timothy Gorringer argues, when the laws of economic behaviour are understood in the same way as physical laws, this risks economic outcomes being regarded as immutable “iron laws” that compel us to believe that “if there are laws of the market as there are laws of gravity or relativity, then all we can do is accept them.”²⁵ On the basis of this logic, it can only make sense to accept that economic mechanisms in fact function according to immutable laws and that all we can do is try to understand these laws regardless of their outcomes, and then develop ways of living productively in harmony with them. This means that the outcomes of the economic processes that are constructed upon these laws are therefore considered exempt from ethical critique.²⁶

²⁴ Herman E. Daley and John B. Cobb Jr. *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment and a Sustainable Future* (London: Green Print, 1990), 30. For further discussion on the separation of facts and values see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (London: SPCK, 1989), 27ff.

²⁵ Timothy J Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom: Theological Ethics and Economic Order* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 34.

²⁶ Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom*, 32.

But this amounts to the absolutisation of human constructs in violation of the command of God. As this command is understood in light of the Sabbath it requires the relativisation of *all* human constructs and *all* human work in light of the work of God. Therefore theological ethics cannot accept uncritically the descriptions and prescriptions that flow out of this methodology. Theological ethics cannot accept uncritically that an economy is primarily a complex *mechanism* that operates in the same ways as a system of material objects whose operating principles are governed by immutable “iron laws”. Rather, within the framework of theological ethics, an economy must primarily be understood as a complex set of transactional social *relationships* between human beings.²⁷ The economic mechanisms, processes, and outcomes that constitute the economic system, and the institutions and policies that govern them, are *human* constructs and the economic agents who make decisions within these constructs are *human* beings. Therefore economic outcomes are not primarily a matter of physics, but of *anthropology* – that is, how we conceive of ourselves as human beings, what we believe represents our highest good, and what we believe our purpose to be. Thus there is, as William T. Cavanaugh so astutely observes, “... an implicit anthropology and theology in every economics.”²⁸ Therefore economic processes and economic outcomes are not, *and never can be*, exempt from moral critique.

The relativising of economic function by the command of God represents our freedom before God because it provides a basis for a moral vision for economic life that resists the absolutising tendencies within contemporary market capitalism. In doing so this orientates us to who we truly are as human beings and to the economic function that affirms our true humanity – an economic function that corresponds to the work of God. The command of God points us to the fulfilment of God’s covenantal work in relation to the totality of our lives insofar as they are orientated toward God. In the same way that the Sabbath rest is a holy day that celebrates the inauguration of God’s covenantal work that is fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ and anticipates its consummation in the jubilee of the kingdom of God, our work must correspond to this inauguration, fulfilment, and consummation also. Human work that is unrelated to or stands in opposition to the covenantal work of God is

²⁷ For this idea I am indebted to Julie A. Nelson, an economist at Tufts University, who says, “Where [*Economy of Grace*] takes a wrong turn, in my opinion, is in assuming that economies are defined by “principles” rather than by actual relations.” Nelson, “Economy of Grace,” 783.

²⁸ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 60.

ultimately futile, without meaning, and hostile to the purposes of God. And for human beings to do this is to elect a Godless existence that is ontologically impossible – it is to elect an existence that stands in contradiction to our genuine humanity and in contradiction to all that God has said “Yes” to. Therefore it is to elect an existence that can only have a “fragmentary existence” within the confines of nothingness – an existence in which we forfeit our freedom.

5.2 The Lord’s Supper and the humanising of economic agency as our freedom in fellowship

The one command of God calls us in freedom to active responsibility before God as the human creatures God has prepared and ordained for covenantal relationship. This freedom to live in the active affirmation of our creaturely being has, secondly, an outward dimension toward others. In his ethics, under the heading “Freedom in Fellowship”, Barth considers the relationship between men and women, parents and children, and near and distant neighbours.²⁹ For my purposes I wish to use Barth’s heading because of the prominence that it gives human obedience to the command of God as constituting our freedom. As emphasised in chapter 3, the one command of God that we actively affirm the creaturely being God has constituted us to be in Jesus Christ must be understood as an appeal to our freedom.³⁰ But the true freedom God calls us to is not so much an action to accomplish, but a status to enjoy – it is the freedom to choose the choice of God. Although I want to use Barth’s heading, “Freedom in Fellowship”, the relationships he explores in this section do not give me scope to explore the economic implications of this idea nearly as well as his earlier Christological material that focuses on relationality and encounter as pointing to our true humanity that is constituted in Jesus Christ and characterised by action that orientates us toward others in fellow-humanity.³¹ Furthermore, unlike his previous section, “Freedom before God”, which gives prominence to the *praxis* of the Sabbath as a key integrating ritual, the material Barth works with under this present heading lacks an equivalent. Therefore to this extent I now depart from Barth – while still working under his heading, I seek to explore the economic

²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 116ff.

³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 13.

³¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 55ff and 203ff.

implications of his ethics of human relationality and encounter by giving prominence to the Lord's Supper as a key integrating Christian ritual.

Barth is adamant that ethics embraces the totality of our being in *all* its different relationships and that, of second importance, it must address our relationship to others in light of our primary relationship to God. He argues that the one command of the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ, having first been understood as freedom before God, is then, on this basis, to be understood as freedom in fellowship with others. As Barth expresses it,

... man, in and with his creation, and therefore as he may exist as man, is destined to be the covenant-partner of God, and that this determination characterises his being as being in encounter with his fellow-man. His ordination to be in covenant relation with God has its counterpart in the fact that his humanity, the special mode of his being, is by nature and essence a being in fellow-humanity.³²

As the one command of God now orientates us toward our fellow human beings, one crucial dimension of our freedom before God that is secured and constituted in Jesus Christ is that we must have this freedom before God in fellowship with fellow-humanity. For this is how God has *constituted* us, this is our *ontology* – this is what we are “by nature and essence”. This is one way Christian ethics may be put in a nutshell – having been liberated by the grace of God to experience and express our true ontology as human beings in freedom *before God*, we are now also liberated by this same grace to experience and express our true ontology as human beings in freedom *in fellowship with others*. In relation to the outward dimension toward others, the active affirmation of our true humanity in response to the one command of God consists in the recognition that *all* people, ourselves included, are beings that God has created for grace and fellowship – that *every* human being is created, loved, accepted, and granted inconceivable honour by God in Jesus Christ. Thus the experience and expression of the affirmation of our true humanity in relation to others is that “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). This is the second command that is like the first.

³² Barth, *CD* III/4, 116.

Rather than describing neighbour-love as an abstract concept, I explore the Lord's Supper so as to give concrete expression to the concept of *fellowship* in order to show in practical terms what love of others ought to consist of – especially as this relates to the economic dimension of life. In this way the Lord's Supper is understood as containing the whole narrative of the covenant in microcosm and thus the means by which the truth concerning the one command of God is given practical enactment in ritual form so as to become the theological basis by which genuine loving relationality may be realised in the lives of human beings. As with my use of the Sabbath in the previous section, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the historical practice of the Passover and the Lord's Supper in both ancient Israel and in the church. My concern is to examine the *theological intent* of the supper in relation to the covenant and how this is to be understood in relation to economic life.

The Lord's Supper was introduced by Jesus on the eve of his betrayal and grew out of and refocused the Jewish Passover meal. Throughout the Old Testament era, the Passover (and the Exodus that followed) was seen as the decisive saving act of God that constituted Israel and gave it its identity and mission.

You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. (Ex. 12:17)

Being rescued “out of the land of Egypt” became an expression for the faithful fulfilment by God of God's covenantal promises to Israel. Moreover, it became the standard by which Israel was to structure all of its relationships – toward God, others, and created things. This is most decisively the case in relation to the Ten Commandments. “Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me ...” (Ex. 20:1-3). This saving act of God in which God delivers Israel from the bondage of Egypt to bring them to a new land and a new life may legitimately be described as constituting the *ontology* of Israel as the covenant people of God. The annual celebration of the Passover as it re-enacted the Exodus continually orientated Israel to its status in the faithfulness of God and provided the theological and ethical basis for Israel to *enact* faithfulness, in correspondence to the faithfulness of God, in all of its relationships. And we may say, using Barth's expression, that this whole covenantal relationship was written under the heading of freedom – freedom *from* the “house of slavery” in Egypt to secure freedom *for* new

life before God and in fellow-humanity in the land of promise. A similar significance attaches to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. The supper points directly to the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the "new covenant" that constitutes the church's origin, ontology, identity, and mission. The Apostle Paul says,

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The Christian church understands the Lord's Supper as a gift from God embracing five key dimensions of faith.³³ The Lord's Supper is first; thanksgiving to the Father for his every gift of creation, life, and providential care; second, a memorial in which God's salvation in Christ is joyfully called to mind and Christ's real, living, and active presence is confessed; third, prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit is undertaken as acknowledgement that without the Spirit of Christ the Lord's Supper is merely a human ritual without significance;³⁴ fourth, communion and fellowship of the faithful in the church who in sharing the meal are nourished by Christ and are recommitted to service of one another; and fifth, the meal is an eschatological anticipation of the kingdom of heaven where God is glorified, justice reigns, and for which the church longs "until he comes".

For my purposes it is the fourth dimension that is of particular significance – "communion and fellowship of the faithful in the church who in sharing the meal are nourished by Christ and are recommitted to service of one another". In this way the Lord's Supper is reflective of the radically open table fellowship of Jesus who "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Lk. 15:2). Therefore the table is a place of

³³ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10-15.

³⁴ This is very much the view Paul D. Molnar attributes to Barth as he explores his theology of the Lord's Supper. He argues that in the same way as Barth locates the real efficacy of Baptism in the work of the Holy Spirit (see section three of this thesis chapter below) he does also in relation to the Lord's Supper. Paul D. Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper: A Systematic Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 136ff.

acceptance, intimate fellowship, and healing. Moreover, it is reflective of the breaking down of the barriers that alienate, divide, and disenfranchise people from the abundant life God intends each person to enjoy.³⁵ This is pictured most clearly in the Pentecostal church of Acts 2, which broke down all manner of social, racial, and economic barriers so as to practice the inclusive fellowship that Jesus calls his church to enact. “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Thus the Lord’s Supper represents in ritual form what God intends the church to be – a community of individuals, called into being by Christ through the reconciling and redeeming work of the Father, who in the power of the Spirit are called to participate with one another in God’s mission in the world through the practice of freedom in fellowship.

Our English word “fellowship” is used to translate the Greek word *koinonia*. This is an extraordinarily rich word in biblical thought. In the New Testament it is used in two key related ways. First it means, “To share with someone in something.”³⁶ The primary meaning here is that the “something” is the fulfilment of the covenantal promises of God in Jesus Christ and the “someone” is God himself. On account of God’s covenant-faithfulness in Jesus Christ, the individual Christian shares the blessings of restored relationality with the triune God. The individual now shares in and participates with God in all that God has planned and fulfilled in the covenant for creation – God’s loving judgment concerning the truth of who we are in the covenantal purposes of God and in God’s reconciling and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. This sharing includes both the blessings and sufferings of Jesus and embraces the totality of one’s being as one participates in the history of God’s saving work that has a present reality in this earth and its hope and consummation in the eschatological new earth to come. The secondary meaning that derives from this is that we share this reality with the whole *community* of believers who as individuals participate in God’s covenant-faithfulness in Jesus Christ as one body. Therefore there is an ontological unity that binds these individuals together within the being and purposes of God that is to be enacted and expressed in every dimension of human creaturely being – including the economic.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 242-260.

³⁶ Hauck, “κοινωνία,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. III, ed. Gerhard Kittel, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1965), 804ff.

The second meaning that flows out of the first is that *koinonia* means, “To give someone a share in something”.³⁷ Again the primary reference is that God graciously gives us a share in Godself and in his covenantal purposes for creation in Jesus Christ. The secondary meaning that derives from this is that, individually and in community with fellow believers, we are to give one another a share in the reality of God’s covenantal purposes for creation, and that the missionary purpose of the church is to give others who are not yet Christians a share in this common life of fellowship with God with a view to their own personal participation. And this sharing embraces the totality of creaturely being. It includes the sharing of our lives with one another in mutual loving relationality and the sharing of the material means of life through practical material assistance and the equitable redistribution of wealth and resources so as to undergird and facilitate genuine mutual loving relationality and participation. This is the theological basis for the church being understood as the *one* body of Christ of which every Christian, individually, is a member. In New Testament thought, the *authenticity* of the primary reference to participation in fellowship with God is attested in the practical enactment of the secondary meaning that derives from this – fellowship with one another. Indeed it is the essence of hypocritical self-delusion to claim the former in the manifest absence of the latter for “Whoever says, “I am in the light,” while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

The Lord’s Supper is envisaged as a regular *praxis* – a practical enactment in ritual form in which the theological truth concerning the covenantal work of God in creation is made real in the lives of human beings. It is a conscious human enactment in correspondence to the activity of God. In the Lord’s Supper we are to enact in ritual form freedom in fellowship and for this to become the theological basis for enacting fellowship in every dimension of our lives in the external world. The failure of the Corinthian church in this respect provides an instructive negative example.

When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and

³⁷ Hauck, “κοινωνία,” 808ff.

humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! ... Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. (1 Cor. 11:20-22 and 28-29)

The failure to “discern the body” has as its primary reference the body of Jesus crucified and risen, and as its secondary reference, that derives from the first, the church as the fellowshiping body of Christ as the visible manifestation of the covenantal community of God. As Biblical Scholar Craig L. Blomberg is at pains to emphasise, Paul’s reference to Christians taking the Lord’s Supper “without discerning the body” is primarily related to the socio-economic practice of rich Christians failing to share their bounty with poor Christians rather than to some supposed spiritual failure.³⁸ To refuse to participate in the humility of the poor and to refuse to share something with them to alleviate their poverty is to refuse them *koinonia*. It is a failure to discern the communal and economic significance of God’s purpose and mission in Jesus Christ.

Barth emphasises the communal nature of *koinonia* in the Lord’s Supper saying, ... in the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper it is not a question of the nourishment of one here and another there in company with neighbours, but of the eating of one bread and the drinking from one cup, of the common nourishment of them all, because it is He, Jesus Christ, who brings them to it, who invites them, who is the Lord and Host, who is Himself, indeed, their food and drink.³⁹

Thus the Corinthian failure to discern and act upon the socio-economic implications of the Lord’s Supper so as to ensure “the common nourishment of them all” bears witness to a religious life that has become disordered and fragmented. In their materialistic consumption, heedless of the needs of others, they bear witness to a religious life that has reversed the order and broken the unity between covenant and creation. Whereas rightly “discerning the body” in the Lord’s Supper recognises the *unity* of covenant and creation in that as the *bodies* of our souls, the physical and creaturely being of humans is acknowledged and honoured as we eat and drink around the table with others. And also, as the *souls* of our bodies, the spiritual and

³⁸ Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 187.

³⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. IV/2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 703.

creaturely being of humans is acknowledged and honoured and our status in the covenantal purposes of God is sanctified and affirmed. Likewise the supper also recognises the *order* of covenant and creation – it is a meal that only has significance in the reality that Jesus Christ stands at the centre of God’s covenantal purposes for creation.

The Lord’s Supper points to certain things, and as a consequence implicitly commands certain things. In particular it points to the *humanisation* of the work of God. The Lord’s Supper bears compelling testimony to the central facts of Christian faith – that the living and eternal Son of God was incarnated by the power of the Spirit in human flesh, and as a human being comes to dwell on earth with us so that through his death and resurrection we may be reconciled to God the Father. Thus the Lord’s Supper points to the genuine humanity of Jesus and in so doing it implicitly commands that we must allow our lives to be humanised by the humanising work of God. This is the essence of the *koinonia* God commands –we are to love others and to make this real through freedom in fellowship. As discussed in detail in chapter 2, the Christological basis upon which Barth seeks to understand genuine humanity in terms of relationality and encounter is particularly useful in this context. Barth emphasises first the need for authentic *recognition* – that we recognise and affirm the genuine God-given and Christ-constituted humanity every human being partakes of and that in turn we are to be visible, open, and recognisable to others.⁴⁰ Following recognition, the humanisation of our lives requires authentic *communication* – mutual speech and hearing without which there is no real encounter. This involves mutual reciprocity of expression and self-interpretation, mutual address and reception, in order that we may come to genuinely know one another.⁴¹ Recognition and communication prepares for *fellowship* – we are to be available to one another, share with and participate in the lives of others, render mutual assistance to one another, and be helped in this way by others. To deny either our need for the assistance of others or our capacity to give assistance to others is to deny our humanity. It is in *this* way that our lives, in a relative sense, can correspond to the life of Jesus who absolutely was man *for* others. This is how we may be *for* one another within the context of our human limitations.⁴²

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 250-52.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 252-60.

⁴² Barth, *CD* III/2, 260-64.

But the Lord's Supper also points away from certain things, and as a consequence implicitly forbids certain things. In particular it forbids the *dehumanisation* of human life. The dehumanisation of human life occurs when humans attempt to reverse the order of covenant and creation and regard humanly generated outcomes as of primary significance in determining our humanity and destiny. It also occurs when the unity of covenant and creation is broken and human capacity is regarded as constituting the totality of who we are. Therefore the Lord's Supper forbids us construing the Christian life solely in materialistic terms such that we imagine God is always well pleased with our ambitions for wealth and consumption and that God always blesses and sanctifies our material pursuits. Likewise it forbids that we construe our lives solely in non-materialistic terms such that we imagine that God has no concern for our material well-being or our responsibility to enact proper material fellowship in all of our interactions with others. Moreover it forbids the idea that we can have some sort of private religious interaction with God that bypasses human relationality and which isolates itself from the lives of others in all their economic and material neediness. This has profound consequences for economic life. As outlined in chapter 4, this dehumanising tendency is one way that people allow themselves to be seduced by greed so that they willingly use the potentialities contained within the consumption possibilities of contemporary market capitalism. In this way people are willing to treat other human beings *solely* as a subjectless and soulless material resource to achieve an economic outcome. When this happens covenant and creation are severed, the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and materialistic consumerism is realised in the creaturely realm.

However, a moral conception of what genuine human being consists of in God's fellowship-creating purposes for all humanity is disclosed in Jesus Christ. The community of faith is called to bear witness to this through the fellowship of the Lord's Supper that is to stand in stark contrast to the conception of human being that is disclosed in the materialistic consumerism of contemporary market capitalism through. Neo-classical economic science assumes that in describing the anthropology of "economic man" (*homo economicus*), it is engaged in the value free and neutral exercise of the scientific method. Consequently it believes that the predictions that flow from this description may tell us something objectively true

about real human beings.⁴³ However, as Daly and Cobb compellingly argue, this conception of *homo economicus* is a classic illustration of what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead calls the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” in which a theoretical abstraction is reified and thus incarnated as a material flesh and blood reality.⁴⁴ *Homo economicus*, much beloved of neo-classical theory, is supposedly a rational, materialistic, self-interested, utility maximising autonomous individual who on this basis acts sovereignly in the market with total freedom of choice. As a self-interested autonomous individual *homo economicus* is concerned only for his own welfare thus supposedly derives no value nor suffers no loss from changes in the economic fortunes of others or his own changing material ranking relative to them.⁴⁵ As a utility maximiser his normative experience in the world is that of non-satiation and so while he can never get enough, he is “acquisitive without limit” thus always striving to get more.⁴⁶ Nevertheless despite the obvious unreality of this abstraction, from an economic policy perspective, *homo economicus* is frequently treated as a real being. Sider reports that,

For several decades, secular policy elites have, explicitly or implicitly, worked on the assumption that persons are essentially economic/materialistic machines. Both liberals and conservatives thought that all we had to do to get the right behavior was switch the economic incentives and change the external environment.⁴⁷

He then goes on to argue, that “Any program for comprehensive social change that deals only with the material side of persons and ignores spiritual transformation is doomed to failure.”⁴⁸ Daly and Cobb observe that not only is this abstraction treated as a real human being, but in doing so real human beings come to resemble the abstraction. They report studies that show that students of economics who are explicitly exposed to the anthropological abstraction of *homo economicus*, compared to students in general, are less likely to behave in ways that altruistically seek the common good and more likely to regard fairness as an alien concept,⁴⁹ this being an example of how “The system attempts to remake people to fit its own presuppositions.”⁵⁰ Additionally Meeks reasons that the pervasive sense of scarcity

⁴³ Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom*, 30ff.

⁴⁴ Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 85ff.

⁴⁵ Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 86.

⁴⁶ Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 88.

⁴⁷ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 21.

⁴⁸ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 52.

⁴⁹ Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 90.

⁵⁰ Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 88.

and competitive striving for satiation that permeates contemporary consumer culture combine to make personal security a key issue for people such that they become desensitised to the needs of others.⁵¹

But from the perspective of theological anthropology every aspect of this non-theological anthropology stands in need of critique and its incarnation in contemporary culture in need of resistance and opposition. As an *autonomous individual* “economic man” risks becoming both Godless and neighbourless thus alienated from his true humanity constituted in Jesus Christ; as a *utility maximiser* he risks conceiving his life as being constituted by the abundance of things he possesses thus always destined to be “acquisitive without limit”; as *self-interested* he risks degenerating into greed and all of his interactions with others becoming instrumental based solely upon the selfish calculus of private advantage; as *materialistic* he risks becoming soulless and subjectless thus losing any basis for a sense of self beyond the purely material; and as a *rational being* he risks absolutising this function into a limitless and infallible rationalistic potential that renders him impervious to the Word of God. In short, from the perspective of the covenantal purposes of God, *homo economicus* is a dehumanised caricature of a genuine human being. Instead, he is a being that the ideology and potent possibilities of contemporary market capitalism threatens to incarnate in the lives of real people. And to the extent that *homo economicus* is incarnated in the lives of real people and the logic of pure economic materialism enacted in social relations, the boundary is crossed, the realm of nothingness entered, and materialistic consumerism is realised in the creaturely realm.

The outworking of the dehumanisation that characterises neo-classical thinking in relation to who we are as economic agents has its counterpart in the dehumanisation that characterises much contemporary behaviour of economic agents as individuals. Increasingly in the West, economic functions and outcomes have shifted from the circumference to the centre and have become defining markers of status, identity, and being. This dehumanising tendency may take various forms including an obsessive centring of life upon: that which is owned or consumed; one’s work or the income that is generated from work; and the status and power that comes from the economic functions of investment, production, and management. Any human

⁵¹ Meeks, *God the Economist*, 17-18.

function that moves from the circumference to the centre and thus supplants the God of the covenant of grace becomes an idol that inevitably degrades and dehumanises us.

Therefore, if theological ethics is to perform its role that, like preserving salt, may provide the moral resources to enable people to stand against these dehumanising tendencies it must seek to humanise economic agency so that we may resist the tendency to behave as market participants in ways that allow self-interest to degenerate into greed and utility maximisation to degenerate into materialistic consumerism. To resist these corrosive and destructive tendencies and consequences requires that economic agents within contemporary market capitalism live by a “moral capital” that derives from resources outside of capitalism’s own capacities – a moral capital that capitalism depends upon as a condition of its own possibility, but which it cannot generate or supply from its own ideological resources. I argue that, for Christians, this moral resource may be found in the God of the covenant of grace as the narrative of God’s covenantal activity is incarnated in the fellowship of the community of faith as it celebrates the story of the covenant through participation in the Lord’s Supper. As this fellowship is incarnated in the life of the community of faith in all its social and economic dimensions, it bears witness to the community’s desire to obey the one command of God and it bears witness to a theological conception of what true humanity consists of in God’s fellowship-creating purposes for all humanity.

The humanising of our economic agency by the command of God represents our freedom before God for freedom in fellowship because it provides a basis for a moral vision for economic life that resists the dehumanising tendencies within contemporary market capitalism. In doing so this orientates us to who we truly are as human beings and to a form of economic life that affirms our true humanity – economic agency that *corresponds* to the covenantal purposes of God. The command of God points us to the fulfilment of God’s covenantal work in relation to the totality of our lives as they are orientated outwardly toward others. In the same way that the Lord’s Supper is a holy fellowship that participates in and celebrates the inauguration of God’s covenantal work that is fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ and anticipates its consummation in the jubilee of the kingdom of God, our economic agency must correspond to this fellowship, inauguration, fulfilment, and

consummation also. Human work that is rightly ordered and unified by God's covenantal work is work that participates in the blessing of God for creaturely being and is therefore ultimately fulfilling, meaningful, and affirming of our true ontology and *telos*. God's providential determination to fulfil his covenantal purposes is not the electing will of an egotistical God. It is the recognition that, as human beings made in the image of God for fellowship with God and for fellow-humanity, we are created to be worshipping and serving beings. If we do not find the centre of our being in the love and glory of God we will find it in the love and glory of something else. At bottom this something else will also be a god – an idolatrous construction that we create or discover within ourselves or within the cosmos. Therefore when anything other than the God of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ takes its place at the centre and becomes the thing that we love with the totality of our being the result always degrades and dehumanises us and robs us of our freedom.

5.3 Baptism and the restricting of economic purpose as our freedom for life within limitation

This section combines two major sections in Barth's ethics – "Freedom for Life" and "Freedom in Limitation". The key ideas he explores are that we are to respect life, protect life, and pursue an active life, and to recognise, accept, and take advantage of the limited span and inconceivable honour that God has allotted to us.⁵² For my purposes these ideas can be most usefully exploited in relation to economic life by emphasising that economic activity has its legitimate role only in relation to enabling and sustaining life – that is, we are to place a limit on our *work* and direct its output so that we and others may *live*.

The one command of God, as Barth understands it, calls us in freedom to active responsibility before God as the human creatures God has prepared and ordained for covenantal relationship. God calls us toward himself in worship and then turns us toward our fellows in service and in this way orientates us to lives that correspond to the centre of the creative, reconciling, and redeeming work of God.⁵³ But the command of God also orientates us to the serving circumference of this ruling centre. Thus our freedom to live in the active affirmation of our creaturely being

⁵² Barth, *CD* III/4, 324ff and 565ff.

⁵³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 324.

has, thirdly, an outward dimension in relation to our economic work in the created environment that serves as the external basis of the covenant. God commands that we are to live in the active affirmation of our creaturely being – but not as an end in itself so as to treat our lives as our highest good so as to maintain our lives as though human life is a totalising central principle or to regard our lives as belonging exclusively to ourselves and thus to be grasped and sustained at all costs.⁵⁴ As Barth puts it,

As God the Creator calls man to Himself and turns him to his fellow-man, He orders him to honour his own life and that of every other man as a loan, and to secure it against all caprice, in order that it may be used in this service and in preparation for this service.⁵⁵

God prepares us for service – to love God with the totality of our beings and others as ourselves. In order for this service to be actualised in the creaturely realm, God creates us to be living beings – the souls of our bodies and the bodies of our souls – and places us in a created environment that is the theatre in which the history of this life of service is enacted and within which we are provided with the resources whereby we may sustain ourselves and one another. It is this overarching theological and anthropological truth concerning God's purpose for humanity that provides the meaning of economic life – we are called to our work of economic production, distribution, and consumption in order to secure and honour our own lives and the lives of others so that we might prepare and equip ourselves and our fellows for the life of service that God has created us for and secured for us in Jesus Christ. As Barth expresses it,

As he wills and posits himself as man and therefore in that ordered unity [of soul and body], he sets to work for the sake of the service required of him. As the service is required of him, so is work, work itself becoming an incidental but necessary prerequisite of his service.⁵⁶

Thus to put it simply, we are to work that we might live and we are to live that we might be rightly related to God and our fellows in worship and service. It is on the basis of this theological and anthropological conception of life that our economic work at the circumference may be rightly ordered and rightly unified in relation to our work of worship and service at the centre. Centre and circumference are rightly

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 325.

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 324.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 519.

ordered because we work so that we might live in order to serve – never the reverse. But centre and circumference are rightly unified because our economic work represents one of the ways by which we may serve our fellows. Our economic work is the way, in the face of the economic necessity the enactment of the covenant renders inevitable, in which the means of existence are brought forth from the resources of the earth whereby we may sustain human life – both our own and that of others – for the sake of service.

The biblical witness makes it clear that God *alone* has “life within himself” (Jn. 5:26) and thus our lives are not our own possession. Therefore we cannot own or possess ourselves or imagine we have an autonomous and self-contained existence. For, as Barth puts it,

Man’s creaturely existence as such is not his property; it is a loan. As such it must be held in trust. It is not, therefore, under the control of man. But in the broadest sense it is meant for the service of God.⁵⁷

It is because God is our creator, life-giver, and the Lord of our lives that God commands us to honour the loan of life that God grants to every human being and to direct our work of economic activity to securing human life for the sake of the work of service that God calls us into. Because we hold our lives in trust on behalf of God it follows we have an obligation, both in our work of service in relation to the centre of our lives and our work of economic production in relation to the circumference, to seek the health and effective functioning of all human life. As Barth understands it, “Health means capability, vigour and freedom. It is strength for human life.”⁵⁸ Because the reason for human work is that we may have healthy lives for the purpose of service, it follows that Barth’s definition of health provides a very serviceable base-line criterion for defining the purpose of economic activity. On this basis the purpose of economic action is to secure for all people – as far as is possible within the limits of individual capabilities – vigour, strength, and freedom for human life. But as Barth notes, this sort of health must be understood in very broad terms and has profound implications in relation to economic and social factors such as living conditions, housing, nutrition, public services, incomes, living standards, access to health care and education, personal freedoms, and protection from harm.⁵⁹ Moreover, one cannot be genuinely healthy in this sense as an isolated

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 327.

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 356.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 363.

individual surrounded by a sea of human poverty and suffering, for the biblical concept of a healthy corporate body is that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). This conception of health is holistic and communal and includes the social, political, technological and economic dimensions of life. Therefore this theological conception of economic life is consistent with business activities and government policy initiatives that produce goods and services and the means of livelihood that enable and foster the conditions in which personal and communal good health may flourish.

Nevertheless Barth insists that personal and communal good health must never be regarded as ends in themselves.⁶⁰ Our life and health are never individualistic and absolute possessions – they never lie at the centre for their own sakes. Because our life and health comes to us from God for the purpose of service, this means that faith and prayer are indispensable preconditions to the pursuit of a healthy life. But Barth is adamant that faith and prayer must not become a substitute for a life of action. Rather faith and prayer must be

... continually realised as the true power of the will required of man in this affair. They cannot replace what is to be modestly, soberly and circumspectly, but energetically, willed and done by man. ... They cannot replace hygiene, sport and medicine, or the social struggle for better living conditions for all. But in all these things they must be the orientation on the command of God which summons man inexorably, and with no possible conditions to will and action.⁶¹

Barth goes so far as to provocatively describe this prayer-orientated life of active affirmation in response to the command of God as “the will for power” (no doubt with a view to subverting and relativising Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) well-known expression).⁶² He elaborates saying,

We mean by this [will for power] man’s determination to make use of his capacity, to come to grips with the advancements and hindrances of life which impinge upon him from without, exploiting the former and resisting or at least enduring the latter. This capacity too, belongs to the actuality of life. And as God calls man to life, as and so long as He addresses him as a living

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 357.

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 368-69.

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/4, 390.

person, He wills that man should not neglect this capacity, the power, strength and force which he has been given, but affirm, will and accept it.⁶³

This is precisely what I am seeking to do in this chapter, particularly the latter – to find a basis in theological ethics that enables us to “resist the hindrances of life which impinge upon us from without”. In so doing I hope to provide a moral resource by which people may stand against the unbounded desire for more that contemporary market capitalism is capable of actualising in the lives of market participants and thus enable people to resist the tendency for self-interest to degenerate into greed thus risking the actualisation of the evil of nothingness in economic life. Thus the command of God that we actively affirm and pursue life and health for the sake of service means that we are to prayerfully and wilfully make use of our powers, resources, and capacities. This is especially so in relation to the economic dimensions of life. But in doing so we are also to recognise that not all of our choices in relation to our capacities and resources advance life. Sometimes these choices hinder and negate life and need to be recognised, limited, and resisted.

As I have argued in chapter 4, human economic power has the capacity to bear witness to and affirm life thus serving and participating in the light side of God’s creation, but it also has the capacity to slip from our control and unleash the “lordless powers”. Moreover, human power when wrongly directed has the capacity to actualise the evil of nothingness thus negating human life. Therefore theological ethics must provide the moral resources that will enable human beings, as economic agents, to wield economic power in such a way that will assist in serving the life-affirming command of God and limit the extent to which it may be subverted to serve life-negating ends. The wise and godly use of our economic power is a crucial aspect of the question I seek to address. Barth identifies criteria for the godly use of power – it must derive from God, be necessary for service, and remain in the hands of God.⁶⁴ But the “lordless powers” are powers that derive from human sources, do not submit to legitimate and necessary godly service, and resist being placed in the hands of God. For Barth the problem lies in a human pursuit of the “will for power” that is not activated by a genuine desire for service. It is seeking to use God-given human capacities in violation of a God-ordained purpose.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 390.

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 392-97.

I argue the answer lies in providing a moral basis whereby economic agents are enabled to place a *limit* upon their material desires and to enact a willingness to *restrict* their economic possibilities in the interests of using economic power and resources to bring forth only those outcomes that secure for people vigour, strength, and freedom for human life for the sake of service. What is required therefore, and which theological ethics can supply, is a moral basis to promote the advancements and resist the hindrances of life which impinge upon us from without. What is required, and what Christian “conversion” speaks of, is a turning away from a particular orientation toward life in which every possibility that is conceived is actualised and a turning toward an orientation that places a limit on individual desire and action for the sake of service. What is required therefore, and what Christian baptism points to, is nothing less than a thorough-going end to a certain way of life and an entirely new beginning to another – a *metanoia* that God alone accomplishes on our behalf. Any other alternative will only ever be well-meaning ideas and programmes that are conceived by human agents and as such involve putting forth human power and resources that as a consequence inevitably fall prey to the lordless powers – each putative solution carrying within it the seeds of the next crisis.

From the outset this thesis has been explicit that it seeks to understand the place and purpose of economic life on the basis of a *Christian* dogmatic account of the world. While always holding out the hope that its value may be recognised by those who do not share this presupposition, nevertheless faithfulness to the inner logic of this presupposition inevitably compels a specifically Christian path be taken. Barth does not shrink from this. He says, “...the basic form of the active life of obedience understood and affirmed as service of the cause of God is man’s direct or indirect co-operation in the fulfilment of the task of the Christian community.”⁶⁵ Barth recognises how arrogantly offensive this must seem to those outside of the community and elaborates.

This statement may seem to be intolerably narrow, extremely presumptuous and even alien and impractical. But it is unavoidable. The command of God the Creator regarding the active life has a centre, apex and range. If we are to comprehend it at this point, and therefore in its basic form, we cannot ignore the fact that the internal basis of creation is the divine covenant of grace. This means, however, that the command of God the Creator in

⁶⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 483.

relation to man's active life has its first goal in his action as that of the covenant-partner of God, and therefore of the responsibly active member of the Christian community.⁶⁶

God's solution to the problem of human greed and unbounded desire that crosses the frontier that lies at the boundary of the shadow side of God's good creation thus actualising the evil of nothingness in human affairs is not a humanly devised solution – it is the gospel of Jesus Christ fulfilled in the kingdom of God that calls us to repentance and renewal. Gorringer, as he surveys the worst aspects of capitalism, recognises that this cannot be resolved by political programmes implemented within "... the basic psychological structure of Western humanity" – what is required is a "transformation of consciousness", "... an anthropological revolution, a jump in the evolution of the human spirit."⁶⁷ Meeks also recognises that the only meaningful way in which the economy of God and human economic systems can be correlated is through what he terms "transformative praxis".⁶⁸ While recognising the necessary critical and theoretical role that must be played by the application of economic principles and social analysis, Meeks is adamant that the required "transformative praxis" must "... begin with the intent of conversion and [be] controlled by this intent. The norm of theology is given in conversion through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁹ The beginnings of this necessary transformation Barth argues, are to be found (as "alien and impractical" as this may sound) in Christian obedience in baptism and consists in a life that willingly yields to the transforming power of the Spirit of God.

Barth considers baptism in the incomplete fourth part-volume of the *Church Dogmatics* volume IV in his ethics of reconciliation under the heading *The Foundations of the Christian Life* in which he enquires concerning how a person becomes a Christian – that is, how human faithfulness may respond to and correspond to the faithfulness of God.⁷⁰ It should not surprise us that Barth's answer is Christological. Primarily and supremely it is the man Jesus Christ "... the One elected from eternity to be the Head and Saviour of all men, who in time responded

⁶⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 483.

⁶⁷ Gorringer, *Fair Shares*, 93.

⁶⁸ Meeks, *God the Economist*, 42.

⁶⁹ Meeks, *God the Economist*, 42.

⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by A. T. MacKay, T. H. L. Parker, Harold Knight, Henry A. Kennedy and John Marks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 3.

to God's faithfulness with human faithfulness as the Representative of all men."⁷¹

The transformation in human behaviour that we seek in which human beings become friends with God rather than enemies is the change, impossible for human beings but possible for God, that God has accomplished for us all in Jesus Christ.

As Barth expresses it,

As and because He was [Head, Saviour and Representative of all men], as and because, in the name and stead of all, He was born and suffered and died as the Man of God, as and because He was manifested for all in His resurrection as the One who did this for all, the change which took place in His history took place for all. In it the turning of all from unfaithfulness to faithfulness took place.⁷²

For Barth this is a universal truth – it took place for *all*. The Christian is merely someone who has been enabled by the grace of God to recognise and accept that this is true for him or her individually, to think and act in faithful correspondence to this, and enabled to participate in the historical outworking of this. It is the saving and transforming act of God that discloses this possibility to all humanity in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and opens it to specific individuals through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁷³

For Barth, the decisive *objective* foundation for the Christian life is the baptism of the Holy Spirit in which the risen and living Jesus Christ reveals and imparts himself directly through the active Word of his saving power to specific individuals.⁷⁴ This is an encounter and transformation effected by God which "... cleanses, renews and changes man truly and totally."⁷⁵ Baptism in water is the *subjective* human action which the human subject requests of the community of faith as a human response that bears witness to the reality of the objective divine action. As Barth expresses it,

... water baptism which is given by the community and desired and received by the candidates is the human action which corresponds to the divine action in the founding of the Christian life, which goes to meet this, which responds to baptism with the Holy Spirit and cries out for it. It is the human action whose meaning is obedience to Jesus Christ and hope in Him.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 13.

⁷² Barth, *CD* IV/4, 13.

⁷³ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 30.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 31.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 34.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 105.

Obedience to Jesus Christ and *hope* in him are the two headings under which Barth elucidates the one human action that constitutes the meaning of baptism. It is human obedience in that it corresponds to the command of God in relation to its basis in Jesus Christ and it is human hope in that it corresponds to the promise of God in relation to its goal fulfilled in the kingdom of God.⁷⁷ Therefore as obedience in hope, baptism calls forth both confession and petition – it confesses the lordship of God and the conversion of the human subject to the service of God, and it petitions God for the enabling of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful to this conversion and service.⁷⁸

In the conversion that the baptised person publicly confesses, they renounce a previously cherished way of life hostile to the purposes of God and pledge themselves to participate in an entirely new way of life that has now been revealed to them by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ As such, as Barth puts it, “... [in] baptism as the transition from an old way of human life to a new way, ... as an act of obedience, a specific renunciation is made and a specific pledge is given.”⁸⁰ This human renunciation and pledge made in baptism, Barth argues, corresponds exactly to the renunciation and pledge that God proclaims to humankind in Jesus Christ in our justification before God and sanctification for God.⁸¹ As Barth emphatically expresses it,

[Baptism] is thus the resolute renunciation of the old being of crude or subtle self-justification which has been rendered impossible and delivered up to death by God’s justifying and cleansing work and word. It is the equally resolute pledge which is made with reference to the new life of service to God and neighbour and therewith of peace with self which has been opened up by God’s sanctifying and renewing work and word.⁸²

Of critical significance from the perspective of this thesis is that water baptism is the free response of an individual that bears witness to the change that God has wrought in a person’s life and therefore has ethical implications. As Barth makes clear, “In [baptism] man effectively acquires his Lord and Master. As it comes to him,

⁷⁷ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 135.

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 74.

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 142.

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 158.

⁸¹ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 158.

⁸² Barth, *CD* IV/4, 202-03.

obedience is effectively demanded of him.”⁸³ As with the Sabbath and the Lord’s Supper, the Christian rite of Baptism contains the whole story of the covenant. It bears witness to God’s covenantal determination to save his human creatures by grace through Jesus Christ, to enter into judgement with us, and to declare to us the truth of our humanity, the truth of our sin, and the truth of God’s reconciling and redeeming purposes for our lives. In Baptism by the Holy Spirit God accomplishes a transformational change which we are incapable of accomplishing for ourselves. In Baptism in water God invites us in freedom to accept and affirm God’s claim, decision, and judgement concerning who we truly are in the covenantal purposes of God. In it God invites, commands, and enables us to accept his lordship that sets us free for lives of service and fellow-humanity. Nevertheless, as Barth is careful to point out, all this represents a *beginning* and is not yet perfect or complete. “It is a commencement which points forward to the future.”⁸⁴ As *hope* in Christ, baptism must confess the failure of the community of faith to live up to the ideal that God sets before it.⁸⁵ But as hope in *Christ*, baptism petitions God for the enabling, despite its many failings, that the community may nevertheless be resolute in its obedience – trusting not in its own capacities for goodness but the enabling of the goodness of God.⁸⁶ But for all the failings of the community of faith, baptism is nevertheless a real beginning of a new way of life in which the indwelling Spirit of God commands and enables the bringing forth of fruit that bears witness to the divine change that has taken place, yet all the while recognising these are but the “first-fruits” of an eschatological harvest that God will consummate in his coming kingdom.⁸⁷

The Bible describes baptism as participation in the death of Christ and crucifixion and burial of the “old self” “so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom. 6:6). Corresponding to this baptism is also described as a participation in the resurrection of Christ – “... we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Baptism therefore is a practical enactment in ritual form in conscious human correspondence to the dying and rising of Jesus Christ in which the reality of God’s transformative covenantal work in creation is actualised in the lives of human

⁸³ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 35.

⁸⁴ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 38.

⁸⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 208.

⁸⁶ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 206.

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD* IV/4, 39-40.

beings. Because baptism points to and away from certain things it implicitly commands and forbids certain things. The ethical implication that flows from baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ is that “... you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). The Bible makes repeated use of this baptismal formulation in ethical contexts to exhort the community of faith to recognise that since Christians have “died with Christ” we must likewise “put to death” vices such as “greed” and that since we have been “raised with Christ” we are to “clothe [ourselves] with [virtues such as] compassion [and] kindness”.⁸⁸ Therefore in baptism the believer enacts in ritual form the freedom of renunciation *from* a life that has broken the unity and reversed the order of covenant and creation and the freedom of obedience *to* a form of life that pledges in hope to bring into proper unity and order every aspect of its being under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Using Barth’s heading we may say that baptism therefore inaugurates believers in Jesus Christ into the freedom for life in limitation and that this is the theological and moral basis for the community of faith bearing witness to freedom for life in limitation in every dimension of life – including and especially the economic. Therefore, baptism points to the transformation of human consciousness and human behaviour that God seeks to accomplish in faithfulness to his covenantal purposes and implicitly commands life-affirming behaviours characterised by compassion, kindness, and opposition to greed.

In chapter 4 I explored the tendency within contemporary market capitalism for self-interest to degenerate into greed thus corrupting human beings whereby economic agents, in the pursuit of the legitimate economic function of production, break their proper *limits*. In this way human desire for material wealth and economic power becomes *unrestricted* and wealth acquisition degenerates into plunder, pillage, exploitation, and expropriation. Contemporary economic science makes much of the fundamental concept of scarcity in which it is held, as self-evident, that human needs and desires exceed the capacities of human and natural resources and thus individuals are forced to make choices between alternatives and must vigorously

⁸⁸ See Colossians 2:8 – 3:17 which is a sustained baptismal passage with ethical intent that has as its controlling thought that “you have come to fullness in [Christ] ... In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision by putting off the body of the flesh ... when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God ...” (Col. 2:10-12). The ethical implications that follow this are grouped negatively around the vices that are to be likewise put to death on account of our participation in the death of Christ, and positively around the virtues that are to come to life in the practice of the community on account of our participation in the resurrection of Christ.

compete against one another for these scarce resources to satisfy their supposedly unlimited desires.⁸⁹ But economic science does not, for the most part, seek ways in which to limit human desires or to critically evaluate that which is genuinely needful. Rather it tends to uncritically accept presented needs and desires expressed in the willingness to buy as an axiomatic given and to focus upon the efficient use of resources to satisfy them.⁹⁰ In this way economic power and capacity is continually called forth in a seemingly endless drive for increased productivity and growth in which work becomes unrelenting and there is little concern for limiting desire or restricting production for the good of humanity. The fundamental concept of scarcity is the presupposition that undergirds so much of modern economic thought, but the energetic activation of economic power that strives to overcome scarcity always threatens unleashing the lordless powers. In this way the greed-fuelled desire for more is continually stoked and results in much production that, as Barth observes, plays upon the foolishness, vanity, and bad-taste of others, is ruinous to them physically and morally, supports the negation of life, and simply serves to amass wealth through financial manipulation.⁹¹

In radical contrast to this striving to satisfy unlimited desires, Holy Spirit baptism on the other hand constitutes the moral basis, rooted in theological ethics, by which we are converted and commanded to limit our material desires and the work of economic activity we engage in with a view to satisfying these desires. This restriction of our economic purpose represents our freedom for life within limitation because it rightly orientates us to the centre of our lives in terms of our true humanity in the purposes of God. Limiting our desires, and the consequential economic energy we exert, in accordance with the criterion of that which is genuinely necessary for service frees us for a life of service to God and fellow-humanity. In other words it frees us for the kind of life in relation to God, neighbour, and created environment that God intends his creatures, covenant-partners, and children to participate in. As Barth repeatedly reiterates, it enables us to exercise our genuine freedom to affirm with our own “yes” the “Yes” of God by which we are constituted as human beings and incorporated into the reconciling and redeeming history of Jesus Christ by the gracious covenantal-faithfulness of God.

⁸⁹ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 3ff.

⁹⁰ For further discussion in this see Daley and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 92ff.

⁹¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 531.

However as Meeks perceptively observes, if Christians are not formed according to the economy of God they will be formed according to the economy of the world. As he expresses it,

The transformation of the church in our time depends on its rediscovery of its own *oikos* [economic] nature. A church that does not take seriously its character as the “[economic] household of God” will form its members only partially, which means that it will actually aid them in adapting to the predominantly defined *oikos* of the society.⁹²

This means that for the Christian community to simply focus on *resisting* being conformed to the economy of the world, as I have argued in this chapter, is insufficient. This vitally important negative task of resistance must also be combined with and be for the sake of the even more important positive task of being formed according to the economy of God for the sake of service in the world. Moreover as Sider rightly remind us, the necessary conversion we have spoken of in this chapter must not simply be limited to the vertical relationship with God, but it must include the horizontal relationship with fellow humans. This means that the transformation called for in *metanoia* must also involve radical changes in relationships with one’s neighbours and seeking to overturn the social and economic sins that oppress and marginalise people.⁹³ As noted from Barth earlier in this section, not only does the command of God call us to, negatively, resist the hindrances of life which impinge upon us from without, it also, positively, requires that we exploit the advancements of life for the sake of service.⁹⁴ This, I argue, involves the Christian community making use of the powerful potentialities contained within the capacities of contemporary market capitalism. It is this positive task of the Christian community being formed according to the economy of God and seeking to overturn the social and economic sins that oppress and marginalise people that I now turn to in the final chapter.

⁹² Meek, *God the Economist*, 36.

⁹³ Ronald J. Sider, *One-sided Christianity: Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 101ff.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 390.

Chapter 6: A Christian conception of economic life realised in the praxis of the Christian community

“ ... Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:27-29)

In chapter 3 I emphasised that human obedience to the one command of God consists in the active affirmation of our creaturely being as ordained in the covenantal purposes of God as we hold ourselves in readiness for the specific command of God as and when it may come to us in the sovereign good pleasure of God. In this present chapter I emphasise the shape that economic life must take in obedience to the one command of God so as to prepare for a faithful hearing and obeying of the specific command of God. In chapter 5 the focus was essentially negative in that I emphasised how the Christian community may maintain itself in its inner life through Sabbath, Lord's Supper, and Baptism so as to *resist* the degenerating and subverting tendencies we are exposed to as economic agents within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism. But the only legitimate reason for the community of faith to maintain itself through its inner life is for the sake of its outer life of service to the world in obedience to the command of God. Therefore the focus in this final chapter is essentially positive in that I explore ways the Christian community may faithfully obey the one command of God through *utilising* the powerful potentialities of contemporary market capitalism. The key thought from Barth that has resonated throughout this thesis is that covenant and creation are an ordered unity and thus members of the Christian community must integrate their lives as followers of Jesus Christ with their lives as economic agents in proper order and unity. This means the Christian community is called, despite the dangers this involves, to wield economic power in such a way that will assist in serving the life-affirming command of God and therefore to seek means by which it may make wise and godly use of this power. Therefore in this concluding chapter I seek to provide resources that, like permeating yeast, may

enable the Christian community to practice a form of economic life that faithfully bears witness to the covenant of grace and in so doing faithfully obey the one command of God. In this way it is my hope that the Christian church, as it allows itself to be formed according to the economy of God in obedience to the command of God, may *both* resist being conformed to the economy of the world *and* serve to transform the economy of the world.

I argue that this process involves three distinct steps that correspond to the three sections that follow. In the first section – *Enacting a Christian conception of economic life in the midst of contemporary culture* – I argue that the Christian community must recognise that the church is called to bear witness to the covenant of grace *within* the existing structures and processes of contemporary culture. This requires the church to take with equal seriousness the fact that although, on the one hand, the community of faith is not *of* the world (for it bears witness to another reality) it is nevertheless, on the other hand, very much *in* the world (thus it bears witness to this alternative reality in the midst of contemporary culture). Therefore the Christian community must not seek to escape the tension and complicity that this dialectic exposes it to but must seek to hold this duality in proper order and unity. In the second section – *God's one command and the economic agency of Christians* – I argue that, for the Christian community to faithfully and effectively bear witness to the covenant of grace in the midst of contemporary culture we must reflect deeply upon our functioning as economic agents. This process of reflection will involve identifying economic practices that need to be repented of and practices that need to be implemented so as to better integrate in proper order and unity the lives of Christians in the midst of contemporary culture in the world. In the third section – *God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ and the potent possibilities of contemporary market capitalism* – I argue that Christians may faithfully and effectively wield economic power in service to the life-affirming command of God by making explicit the economic implications contained in God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ. As the Christian community explores these implications, the fact that God has created us *in* freedom and love *for* freedom and love means that God grants considerable relative freedom for human imagination and industry to conceive ways whereby we may live in faithful correspondence to God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ. Thus, by God's gracious enabling, we may make holy and innovative use of the economic potentials within market capitalism to initiate outcomes that hold out the

hope of pointing to the light side of God's good creation through holding in proper order and unity God's ruling covenantal centre and serving created circumference. Therefore the economic possibilities that flow out of this free obedience to the command of God will be characterised by wondrous diversity as the various geographically located communities of faith utilise the gifting God has granted them, as they respond to the specific contingencies they confront in the communities they live within, and as the specific command of God may so direct them.

6.1 Enacting a Christian conception of economic life in the midst of contemporary culture

For Barth, the context within which Christian witness must take place is a place of dualism and tension between the world as we experience it in its present brokenness and the world as it is constituted and reconciled in Jesus Christ. As he puts it, it is an "... ambivalent state and course of things, with the twilight and vacillation of simultaneous knowledge and ignorance of God ...", "... righteousness and transgression, truth and falsehood ..." ¹ But Spirit and water baptised believers in Jesus Christ are enabled to bear witness to the truth of God in *hope* since this regime of vacillation within which we presently exist is not absolute because, as Webster summarises Barth's thought at this point, "There can be no question that the human situation is some final admixture of light and darkness, since [these things] are not ultimately definitive." ² Therefore, for Barth, Christians live in the midst of this state of vacillation as those who "... rise up in rebellion against the regime" ... – as those who participate in a "resistance movement". ³ The idea of a resistance movement is especially apt since it carries the connotation of a weaker party who is never expected to strike the decisive blow that defeats the enemy. But as those whose loyalties lie elsewhere, and as those who live according to the conviction that the liberating force that *will* destroy the regime is near at hand and indeed *has already* struck the decisive blow, they are emboldened to act in non-collaboration with the agenda of the alien occupier and thus to subvert it. Moreover as subjects loyal to the Liberator in occupied territory, they are both emboldened and commanded to live according to the constitution and cultural norms of the liberating force as a

¹ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 168 and 173.

² Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 93.

³ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 174.

testimony to the true reality that, while presently concealed, is soon to be revealed. As Barth puts it, “In all circumstances the Christian is summoned and is in a position to rebel against this plight, to rise up against it, [and] to enter into conflict against it.”⁴ However as Webster is careful to point out, Barth has a particularly nuanced concept of revolt in mind. It is not the rejection of a specific manifestation of nothingness nor is it subversive action for the realisation of a humanly devised state of affairs. Rather it is the active human struggle for the realisation of a specific possibility ordained by God that is rooted in the prayer “Thy Kingdom come”.⁵ Therefore it is a rebellion that is rooted in the power of God and a willingness to participate in the Kingdom of God that God alone can cause to “come” and that God alone can actualise upon earth. This means that it is the rebellion of true patriots who have aligned themselves with the covenantal will of God as a “resistance movement” that seeks to bear witness to God’s covenantal purpose and eschatological promise to establish the rightful rule of God over God’s creation and over God’s human creatures. Therefore it is a rebellion that is *for* and *on behalf of* humankind’s true interests in the most radical sense.

On this basis the Christian conception of economic life I envisage does not seek to construct the kingdom of God upon the earth either as an all-embracing global project for humanity as a whole or as a sectarian Christian-only project in isolation from the rest of the world. Therefore it is not, as of first importance, concerned to change the wider world so as to render it more amenable to Christian ideals, for example, through offering prescriptions to policy-makers in government with respect to a Christian perspective on how economic policy ought to be formulated and implemented; advocating the construction of a new economic order based on Christian principles; trying to re-establish the economic practices of the Old Testament or the early church; or seeking some Christian third way between Capitalism and Socialism. Nor, on the other hand, is it primarily concerned to establish a form of communal life congenial to Christian ideals that is cut off from the wider world, for example, through establishing economic mechanisms appropriate to a self-contained expression of Christian theocracy or expanded monasticism that would enable the practice of a peculiarly “Christian” lifestyle undisturbed by the tension and complicity of being *in* the world but not *of* the world.

⁴ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 211.

⁵ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 208.

As I seek to express it, a Christian conception of economic life should primarily be concerned to provide a coherent basis in theological ethics whereby Christians, both individually and corporately, are enabled to enact an economic form of life in the midst of contemporary culture that bears faithful witness to the covenant of grace and as such serves as testimony to the truth of God's rule and as preparation for an obedient hearing and obeying of the specific command of God in the ethical event. In this way my primary concern is to provide theological and moral resources whereby Christians can be assisted to think and act as economic agents who are loyal to the economy of God *within* the presently "occupied" structures, institutions, and frameworks of contemporary western culture as a "resistance movement".

Although in the *first instance* my concern is to speak to the Christian community, nevertheless I do also seek to engage with the world at large. This is inevitable in that a theological conception of the world from which a Christian conception of economic life is derived recognises that God is the loving lord of *all* creation and that his purposes for creation are for the genuine good of *all* humanity. So having first spoken to the community of faith, theological ethics cannot help but speak to the world also. But it will always endeavour to do so as a word that points to God's "Yes" to humanity – it will always seek to bear witness to the grace of God that "... God so loved the world ..." (Jn. 3:16).⁶ To the extent that the church is found to be uttering a "no" to the world of contemporary economics (and there will be occasions in which this is necessary) this "no" must always be in the context of and for the sake of God's much greater "Yes" to humanity. It is only on *this* basis that theological ethics will presume to offer prescriptions to policy-makers in government with respect to a Christian conception of economic life.

In chapter 4 I argued that in God's good world every created thing directs God's human creatures to recognise the reality of their *telos* – either positively by bearing witness to the security and nurturing God's good creation affords them, or negatively by bearing witness to the jeopardy and menace God's good creation represents to them outside of the loving protection of God. The main focus of chapter 4 was to show that this is true of economic agency within the structures and processes of contemporary market capitalism. As economic agents, we stand in a place of potent possibility and hold in our hands the capacity to enact a form of life

⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 507.

that either bears compelling witness to the light side of God's good creation or the capacity to unleash the lordless powers and so risk actualising the evil of nothingness in the creaturely realm. It is precisely *in this place* of potent possibility that God has located the human creatures that he has purposed from all eternity to save by grace. Therefore my primary concern in this chapter is to provide theological resources whereby the Christian community may enact a form of economic life *within the structures* of contemporary market capitalism that may faithfully bear witness to the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus. This requires the Christian community to recognise that its relationship with the political and economic institutions of the world inevitably involves some measure of tension and complicity and some measure of resistance and non-compliance. To function as individuals and as diverse communities of faith in the world means that Christians come under the jurisdiction of various political systems. Thus to sustain human life through economic activity, we must engage as economic agents within the structures of prevailing political and economic systems. The conception of economic life I envisage involves Christians, both individually and corporately, seeking ways to live faithfully and fruitfully *within* these political jurisdictions and economic structures rather than imagining we can hope to eliminate *all* tension and complicity by seeking to live a self-contained Christian existence in isolation from the world or by transforming the world to conform to a putative Christian ideal. It is my view that it is only by seeking to live Christianly *within* the structures of contemporary society in this place of potent possibility that the community of faith is able to function as illuminating light, preserving salt, and permeating yeast in relation to their near and distant neighbours toward whom God commissions the Church.

As light, salt, and yeast Christians will always wrestle with the tension of residing on earth as citizens of heaven, or to continue with the opening metaphor, as loyal subjects of the Liberator in the midst of occupied territory. Therefore Christians will always to some extent or other be bound up with and required to make use of the resources of whatever culture they reside within. This reality is presupposed as self-evident by the New Testament. For example, the people who came to John the Baptist asked him how, as the people of God under the rule of Rome, they ought to live in light of the imminence of God's kingdom. John answered on the basis of the presupposition I am advocating – they were to live as the people of God *within* the existing political and economic structures as they found them, yet to bear witness to

the kingdom of God in doing so. To the crowd in general he said, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise”, specifically to tax-collectors, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you” and to soldiers, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages” (Lk. 3:10-14). Thus John’s answer presupposes political and economic structures within which food and clothing is produced and consumed, taxation raised to finance political governance, and employment undertaken in exchange for wages earned. Yet his answer also points to his conviction that by their choices and actions as economic agents the people of God can and must seek to bear faithful witness to the covenant of grace as they function within these political and economic structures and institutions. It is highly significant that of all the occupations that might have been specified, Luke selects two especially loathed by those who conceived of the people of God existing as a self-contained theocracy – the soldiers who enforced an alien rule and the tax collectors who expropriated the financial resources from the people thus subjugated to logistically support them. Nevertheless, according to Luke even these, like the tax collector Zacchaeus, may by the grace of God participate in the salvation of the kingdom of God “... because [they] too [are children] of Abraham” (Lk. 19:9). Likewise Jesus’ answer to the question of paying taxes to Caesar was based on the same presupposition. His response, “Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Lk. 20:25) is an extraordinarily imaginative and provocative example of what I am seeking to articulate – namely, that *within the tension and complicity of existing political and economic realities*, the community that is called to bear faithful witness to the covenant of grace must strive to envisage and enact ways in which they may, as a “resistance movement” give to God the things that are God’s while also functioning under the rule of existing political authorities.

Therefore my conception does not seek a Christian expression of economic life that attempts to eliminate the tension and complicity of Christians living as economic agents within existing political and economic structures. Rather it seeks to recognise this reality and to imaginatively explore ways in which Christians may live as economic agents in the midst of these structures so as to bear faithful witness to the covenantal purposes of God while being mindful of the dangers we are exposed to in doing so. In this way Christians, both as individuals and corporately,

are called to act as economic agents that, on the one hand, stand against the destructive potentials within contemporary market capitalism and, on the other, make imaginative use of its beneficial potentials by which we may affirm our creaturely being in the purposes of God by pointing to the light side of God's good creation.

In seeking to authentically and faithfully stand against the destructive potentials within contemporary market capitalism and make imaginative use of its beneficial potentials, it will often be the case that the community of faith is led to recognise and remedy its own short-comings of which it must repent, failures it needs to make good on, and blind-spots of which it has hitherto been ignorant. Therefore theological ethics must assist the community of faith to address, as of first importance, those aspects of economic life in which its witness is most seriously compromised and which most seriously blunts the effectiveness of God's commission to the church. This means that as the community seeks to enact a Christian conception of economic life in different locations it will be activated by different concerns in different contexts. My theological conception of economic life is intended to assist the Church by helping it to identify, in relation to the economic practices of Christians, the sins that the gospel calls us to repent of and the practices it calls us to adopt.⁷ Such repentance and adoption will require resources that are well beyond us. The necessary changes this requires the church to make will not be programmes or techniques that can be implemented by our own native abilities. Rather it will be an invitation to participate in a way of life that can only be enabled by the transforming power of the Spirit of God in the church. Thus the Christian conception of economic life I envisage neither seeks to design some ideal economic system as an alternative to what presently exists nor does it seek to condemn contemporary market capitalism. Rather than seeking to change the behaviour of the wider world of economics that it might be rendered more amenable to Christian preferences it seeks to change the way Christians behave as economic agents in the world that *they* may be rendered more amenable to the preferences of God. Likewise it does not seek to establish a Christian form of economic communal life cut-off from the wider world that avoids the tension and complicity of being *in* the

⁷ Sider provides a powerful example of this process in a North American Christian context as he explores a biblical conception of economic justice. He concludes by saying "If God's Word is true, then the United States today stands in blatant defiance of God's norms for society." Sider, *Just Generosity*, 75.

world but not *of* the world – rather it seeks to enact a Christian form of economic life *in* the midst of the world that bears faithful witness to the one who is lord *of* the world. Therefore it seeks to provide the theological and ethical resources whereby Christians may function as economic agents in the midst of contemporary culture and within the structures and processes of market capitalism such that negatively, like salt, they may resist its degenerating tendencies and positively, like yeast, may enact a form of economic life that productively utilises those aspects that bear witness to the light side of God’s good creation thus seeking to transform both church and society from within.

What I envisage therefore is analogous to the Christian subversion of slavery. The Bible does not specifically condemn the human institution of slavery. Indeed the Bible is full of instructions to both slaves and slave-owners that urge a relative form of justice and responsibility be enacted within the structures and institutions that undergird its practice – all the while never directly confronting its assumed claim to temporal legitimacy. Thus the Bible does not mount a direct attack on slavery as an institution. Nevertheless the whole ethos of the covenantal faithfulness of God as it is enacted in the history of Israel and the Church contains an inner logic and implicit command that remorselessly undermines and subverts the institution such that in its best expression it can only be radically reconceived and in its worst it must wither and die. The God of the covenant is the God who creates human beings *in* freedom and in love *for* freedom and love. This is the God who through Moses rescues his people from the house of slavery in Egypt so that his people may serve him in freedom and gladness in the land he has prepared for them. This is the same God who through both prophets and apostles seeks to shape a holy people who are called to enact a form of life very different to that of the surrounding nations, but who within their midst are intended to be the means by which God purposes to bless these nations. This is the God who in the heart and fullness of time acts in history in covenant-faithfulness in Jesus Christ proclaiming,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk. 4:18-19)

Thus the whole ethos of the mission of God in history as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ is to "proclaim release to the captives" and to "let the oppressed go free". Therefore when this ethos is understood and embodied in the life of the community that is called to participate in the mission of God there is simply no basis upon which the enslavement of individuals by those whom God has liberated can be justified because "... where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

Paul's letter to Philemon contains a beautiful example of how the inner logic of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the implicit command it contains is able – while operating *within* the structures of the institution – to remorselessly undermine and subvert slavery such that in its best expression it can only be radically reconceived and in its worst must wither and die. In what must be an epistolary masterpiece, Paul uses the experience of the slave Onesimus – who rebelled against the will of his Christian master Philemon by stealing from him so as to obtain the resources he needed to make good his escape yet was reconciled to God through Paul's ministry while on the run – to paint a picture for Philemon that invites him to recognise that in essence his condition before God is identical to that of his slave. Both have used resources stolen from their master to maintain a futile rebellion against him yet both have found the mercy of God through the ministry of Paul who, as a slave of Jesus Christ, has found freedom before God, freedom in fellowship, and freedom for life in limitation. On this basis Philemon and Onesimus are *both* slaves of one heavenly master saved by grace and therefore free brothers together in the service of their lord. Yet there is no direct imperative! Paul invites Philemon to reflect on the goodness of God as an indicative and then in freedom and good conscience before God to enact responsibly a form of life that bears faithful witness to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. He says, "I ... appeal to you on the basis of love ... in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced ... so that you might have [Onesimus] back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother ... knowing that you will do even more than I say." (Phlm. 9,14, 15-16, and 21).

An idealistic telling of the story of the Christian subversion of slavery from within the existing political and economic structures of the day would be that, as the community of faith allowed its self-understanding to be radically informed by the

Spirit of the living Christ and sought in faithful obedience to hear and enact the will of God in the historical context in which it found itself, it came to recognise that for it to persist in this practice was fundamentally incompatible with its calling to bear witness to the covenant of grace. Therefore as the community of faith embarked upon its great work of reflection on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which God obliterates and renders obsolete every social distinction and human power relationship in bestowing his gracious favour upon humanity, the church was led to recognise and reject those practices that are incompatible with this reality and enacted practices that bear positive witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Sadly the actual history of the church is that it has frequently resisted this process and often prolonged practices that are incongruent with its calling. In reality it has often been the case that God has brought judgement upon the church and used the instinctive sense of “what the law requires” (Rom. 2:14) that God providentially causes to reside in the outside world to judge and humble the community of faith and to point it again to its proper purpose and calling. Nevertheless, and only by the gracious enabling of God, the community of faith has come to recognise the fundamental incompatibility between the institution of slavery and the faithful witness of the church and has thus repudiated the practice. The Christian conception of economic life I envisage is a call to the church to continue to engage in this process of reflection so as to radically transform its self-understanding in relation to how Christians, both individually and corporately, are called to live as economic agents in the midst of contemporary culture in service of the mission of God.

This great work of reflection in which the church seeks the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus to seek a true and faithful understanding of the will of God and the enabling to enact it in the midst of contemporary culture is really what Jesus calls performing the works of God – “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:29). This is the question that continually confronts the community of people who claim that Jesus is their saviour and lord. If it really is true that God has acted in faithfulness to the covenant of grace by *sending* Jesus Christ to reconcile and redeem humanity so that God’s human creatures may live before him in freedom and love and with one another in the freedom of fellowship, what then is the form of life that the community of faith must enact in the midst of contemporary culture that faithfully conforms with this *belief*? And for my purposes, what are the specifically economic dimensions of this form of life? This is, in essence, the question the

church is confronted with, “Does the Christian community genuinely believe that Jesus is the one upon whom God has set his seal and sent; does it genuinely believe in what God has done and seeks to do in Jesus Christ; and is it willing to enact in the midst of contemporary culture a form of life that faithfully corresponds to this belief?” To even contemplate this question requires resources that only God can supply. Therefore this process must begin in repentance and supplication, for the work of God – even the work of faith that God requires of his church – is a work that God alone can do. It is a work that requires of the church a response of faithfulness that corresponds to the faithfulness of God and thus it is a work that can only begin with and be sustained by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, despite the inadequacy of the church in and of itself to faithfully fulfill this task, by the gracious enabling of God it is a possibility that has the potential to be genuinely subversive and radical. Firstly and primarily in relation to the life of the church itself this cannot fail to be subversive and radical as the community of faith seeks to “believe in him whom God has sent”. As the fruit of this belief is enacted in the life of the church in the midst of contemporary culture it, secondly, cannot fail to be genuinely subversive and radical in relation to the watching world. It is in this way I envisage this process, as a resistance movement, permeating, like yeast, subverting and transforming both the *praxis* of the church and that of wider culture. Kathryn Tanner expresses this idea beautifully saying,

Theological economy encroaches on and enters within the territory of the economy it opposes for the purpose of transforming the operations of that field. ... it comes to life from within the belly of the beast so to speak ... generating a radically new form of economy from capitalism’s own blood and breath.⁸

There are historical precedents that should encourage us in this respect. For example, the vision of universally accessible and publicly provided schools, hospitals, cemeteries, orphanages, and welfare provisions all have their origins in Christian practices enacted in the life of the community of faith as it sought in service to orientate itself to the needs of the wider world. The humanitarian worth of these things has been recognised and adopted by the watching world thus serving

⁸ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 89.

to transform contemporary culture for the better and bear witness (always imperfectly) to the kingdom of God.

6.2 God's one command and the economic agency of Christians

The great work of reflection that God calls the Christian community to engage in whereby it must allow its self-understanding to be radically transformed by the covenant of grace requires Christians to reflect upon the totality of their behaviour as economic agents. This involves Christians reflecting deeply upon the different aspects of their activity as economic agents and seeking ways within the structures of contemporary market capitalism whereby their lives may faithfully bear witness to their faith that Jesus Christ is the one upon whom God has set his seal and who he has sent into the world. The constraints of this thesis do not allow an exhaustive treatment of this; therefore what follows is indicative of how this process of reflection might proceed in relation to three typical aspects of individual economic agency – consumption expenditure, earning an income, and investment activity.

Consumption expenditure typically does three things. Firstly, it generates individual private utility thus meeting legitimate creaturely needs. Individuals are constrained by finite resources and therefore motivated to expend their resources prudently so as to maximise private utility.⁹ This need to “economise” serves a worthy social purpose in that it encourages careful stewardship of resources so as to maximise the value that may be derived from them whilst minimising the cost and waste from doing so. But this self-interested utility maximising behaviour exposes individual consumers to the risk of allowing legitimate consumption expenditure to degenerate into an unbounded and insatiable greed for more. Therefore from the outset the economic function of consumption points us to both the light side of God's good creation that God has provisioned his world to meet our creaturely needs, but also to the shadow side that as individuals we are exposed to the threat and possibility of actualising the evil of nothingness in the creaturely realm should we elect as consumers to exercise this economic function outside of the grace of God. Consequently Christians must undertake consumption expenditure in fear and trembling knowing that in doing so we hold in our hands the capacity to expose

⁹ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 84ff.

ourselves to this threat. Therefore it is especially apt that as Christians pray “Give us this day our daily bread” we also fervently pray “And do not lead us into temptation” (Matt. 6:11 and 13)¹⁰ – particularly those Christians Kathryn Tanner so evocatively describes as “... advantaged beyond all decent proportions by the present system.”¹¹ Living as creaturely beings in the purposes of God means that we have legitimate creaturely needs for the necessities of life and legitimate desires for an appropriate level of material comfort and creaturely enjoyment. But the key question the one command of God confronts Christians with is, “What is genuinely needful?”¹² Unless the specific command of God to an individual is “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor ... then come, follow me” (Lk. 18:22), there is no direct imperative that confronts Christians in relation to consumption expenditure. The Bible does not reduce this or any other question to a casuistic code specifying precise amounts or proportions. Rather God calls Christians to act responsibly before God, one another, and the watching world in good conscience in the freedom that God has called us into.¹³ “What is genuinely needful?” cannot be answered simply on the basis of what a specific consumer item is in itself. It must be answered in terms of the form of life its ownership and consumption bears witness to. If Christians, as consumers in the midst of contemporary capitalism, enact lives that are indistinguishable from the consumerist culture that surrounds them they are clearly *not* allowing their self-understanding to be radically transformed by the inner logic of the covenant of grace and thus not being light, salt, and yeast in the world.

The second function of our consumption expenditure is that it reveals and signals to the watching world, to God, and to ourselves (if we pause to reflect upon it) what our preferences are. It can reveal our anxieties, aspirations, and desires and the things we consider we can and cannot do without.¹⁴ It provides clues as to whether or not “... I have learned to be content with whatever I have” (Phil. 4:11) and whether we really do “... strive first for the kingdom of God ...” confident that God will provide us with “all these things” (Matt. 6:32-33) God knows we need for

¹⁰ In verse 13 I take the footnote alternative “temptation” in preference to “the time of trial”.

¹¹ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 141.

¹² For further discussion of human needfulness in the face of the assumption of insatiability see M Meeks, *God the Economist*, 157ff and John V. Taylor, *Enough is Enough* (London: SCM Press, 1975).

¹³ The practical dimensions of this issue are explored in depth in Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), 189ff.

¹⁴ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 48-49.

creaturely life in his service, or whether in reality we merely “... work for the food that perishes ...” (Jn. 6:27). With the use of sophisticated technology, marketing companies are able to analyse the purchasing decisions of individuals and construct remarkably astute psychographic profiles that give insight into the activities we engage in, the interests that motivate us, the attitudes we hold, and the things we value. Therefore in addition to the question “What is genuinely needful?” Christians as we reflect on our consumption expenditure, need to also ask, “What underlying convictions and values does my expenditure reveal and what kind of psychographic profile does this expenditure bear witness to on my behalf?” Sider puts it quite bluntly – “Affluence is the god of twentieth-century North Americans, and the adman is his prophet.”¹⁵

A third function of consumption expenditure is that it constitutes income for those who sell the things we purchase. Thus our consumption expenditure provides the financial resources that enable others to earn a livelihood and sustain a way of life in the face of the economic necessity that confronts them.¹⁶ In this way our consumption expenditure represents an endorsement, approval, and enabling of the production of others and the form of life that their production allows them to sustain. For example, the egotistical cult of the celebrity sport, movie, fashion, or music “idol” is only possible on account of the consumption expenditure of devoted “fans” that sustain the economic viability of the media events in which this lifestyle is enacted and celebrated. Likewise small entrepreneurial business ventures that seek to provide their owners, employees, and communities with a viable alternative to poverty can only be sustained by the decisions of consumers to buy the goods and services they produce. Thus by our consumption expenditure choices we have the capacity to direct resources toward or away from specific communities, businesses, and individuals. Therefore in seeking to embody a vision of economic life that bears witness to the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ, individuals within the community of faith must put to themselves the question, “Are the activities, industries, and livelihoods I am endorsing and resourcing as a consequence of my consumption expenditure decisions compatible with God’s

¹⁵ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 191.

¹⁶ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 26-30.

covenantal purposes for the world?”¹⁷ This is an especially difficult question in relation to the purchase of low-wage goods produced in alleged “sweat-shops” in countries such as China and India where conditions of employment are often very poor. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore a Christian response to this issue in detail. However, providing the employment relationship is genuinely free and not some form of coerced slavery – and this is an issue that must be honestly investigated – then it must be presumed that for Chinese or Indian workers to accept employment under conditions distasteful to our western expectations nevertheless must represent an improvement in their circumstances otherwise they would have refused the offer in favour of a better alternative. Thus for Christians to suppose that by refusing to buy such goods is somehow helping these low-wage workers is erroneous thinking. If such a refusal succeeds in reducing the demand for low-wage labour in these countries this simply means that these workers will be driven to even less desirable alternatives elsewhere.

As Christians engage in the great work of reflection that God calls them to participate in they must also consider that all consumption expenditure has an opportunity cost.¹⁸ This means that the time, money, and energy devoted to generating, maintaining, and enjoying a particular lifestyle are resources that are consumed and destroyed in this process and thus no longer available for other possibilities. Therefore as individual Christians wrestle with the question “What is genuinely needful?” this can never simply be reduced to an individualistic – “What is genuinely needful for *me* and me alone?” It has to take seriously the economic and moral reality that the more time, money, and energy any individual spends on their own private consumption the less they have available with which to assist others. Therefore “Give us this day our daily bread” can never be reduced to a private and individualistic request independent of how one person’s consumption impacts upon another’s. In reflecting on economic agency the Christian community, as Barth points out, must take seriously that we are to pray “Give *us* this day *our* daily bread.”¹⁹ In other words we are to be concerned about the legitimate creaturely needs of a *community* of people and therefore that private consumption is in reality an ethical activity that has communal implications. It is part of the

¹⁷ Wallis documents how the deliberate consumption decisions of people in Detroit are supporting local entrepreneurial initiatives that are helping to rejuvenate impoverished parts of this city. Wallis, *Rediscovering Values*, 208ff.

¹⁸ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 13 and 137ff.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD III/4*, 537. The emphasis is Barth’s.

responsible exercise of the freedom God grants us to recognise that our consumption decisions impact on the ability of others to obtain the bread they also need for life and health. It is in on this basis we are to understand Jesus' request to his disciples, "You give them something to eat" (Lk. 9:13). Relatively small diminutions in the consumption expenditure of those Christians "advantaged beyond all decent proportions by the present system" are able to release resources that when wisely deployed to others have the capacity to make a huge difference in terms of their access to clean water, basic education, health care, the means to begin a small business, and so on that crucially impact on their ability to enjoy life and health as a prerequisite for service.²⁰ This theme has been powerfully explored from a non-Christian philosophical perspective by Princeton bioethicist Peter Singer who compellingly argues that relatively modest charitable giving of US\$200 per annum by each of the world's wealthiest 855 million citizens would be sufficient to meet the United Nation's 2015 Millennium Development Goals.²¹ His "fair share" argument is, in essence, an application of the economic principle of the diminishing marginal utility of income in which the value to an individual of an additional dollar of income received by a very poor person is far greater than the loss in value to a wealthy person who gives it.²² Consequently Singer argues that "If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so."²³

Turning now to the second typical aspect of individual economic agency – earning an income – this likewise may be thought of from three points of view. Firstly, it is usually the case that earning an income necessitates the choice of a job or occupation. The follower of Jesus must recognise that their occupational choice can never be reduced to electing a self-determined role that seeks to maintain itself in autonomous independence from the call of God. Every Christian is a person who in response to the call of God has pledged themselves to be obedient to the one command of God as they hold themselves in readiness to hear and obey the specific command of God as and when it may come to them. As each individual holds themselves in readiness they will generally be under economic necessity to earn an

²⁰ For further discussion on this point see Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 189ff and Sider, *Just Generosity*, 99ff.

²¹ Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2009), 140ff.

²² Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 208-209.

²³ Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 15.

income and to do so will seek to enter a job or occupation. In desiring a means of livelihood they will seek the will of God as they consider their own circumstances, opportunities, and aptitudes. But as Barth emphasises, their own circumstances, opportunities, and aptitudes must never be regarded as absolutes that determine a person and thus place a limit upon what one may or may not be or become by the gracious will of God.²⁴ While it is clearly the case that there are some means by which a person may earn an income that are unambiguously incompatible with God's covenantal purposes for humanity such as contract killing, pimping, and trafficking – it is not so much the case that the one command of God requires us to ask whether a particular occupation lies within the will of God as though some occupations are sanctified and others are not, rather the question must be, “Within *this* particular position how best can I bear witness to the covenantal purposes of God?”²⁵ It is often the case that a person has little choice concerning the means by which they may earn an income and the advice John the Baptist gave tax-gatherers and soldiers should cause us to recognise that even in seemingly dubious occupational choices the grace of God is operative providing opportunity to those within them to bear faithful witness to God. It may be for some that the specific command of God is “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile” (Jer. 29:7), thus for Christians to diligently occupy positions that appear very “secular” may be entirely compatible with the will of God. Again these things cannot be casuistically codified – each individual is called in responsibility and freedom before God for obedience to the command of God in good conscience. Miroslav Volf helpfully understands work as “cooperation with God in the *transformatio mundi*” and thus brings a strong eschatological dimension to bear upon our thinking about work. This has two aspects: first, it means that our work is to be “patterned according to the values of the new creation” and so is to be done in hope that it “has meaning in spite of the transitoriness of the world”.²⁶ But secondly, our work stands under the eschatological judgement of God that, like fire, “will test what sort of work each has done” (1 Cor. 3:13) and so is to be done in humility that it may never amount to an “ideological glorification of work”.²⁷

²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 620.

²⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 533.

²⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 120-21.

²⁷ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 121.

The second dimension of the function of earning an income is that it almost always involves producing some product or service that is sold to customers who expect to derive a benefit for which they are willingly to pay – this payment constituting the revenue stream out of which wages and other expenses are paid.²⁸ Barth has a number of useful criteria that the Christian worker ought to reflect on in this regard. Christian workers must give their best effort and skill to the task at hand. Thus their work must be “righteous” work.²⁹ But it is not just a case of doing *any* task well. In so far as it is possible within the constraints and choices that Christians confront in the face of economic necessity we must endeavour to produce those things that are of genuine human worth that contribute to the goal of securing life and health so as to enable service – it is to be “honest” work.³⁰ Furthermore, in working Christians must recognise the communal nature of work. The work that bears faithful witness to the covenantal purposes of God will be work that affirms that God has created human beings to live in co-existence, co-operation, and peace, not in isolation, opposition, and alienation – as Barth puts it; it is to be “human” work.³¹ But our work must not simply be regarded as an external thing – that which we do simply to earn the means of subsistence. Barth emphasises that in working in the external world we must first work upon ourselves internally so as to prevent ourselves degenerating into a vegetative state due to the monotony of work.³² Likewise we are not to lose ourselves in the apparent excitement and importance that a career may afford. Each task is to be preceded by an internal “active affirmation of life” as a counterpart to the external task – thus it is to be “reflective” work.³³ In conclusion Barth observes that our work is to have as its aim the freedom of the whole person for the existence that God calls him or her to.³⁴ “[A person’s work] must not overwhelm him, neither must he be overwhelmed and enslaved by it. It must not become absolute, wholly engulfing and mastering him” – our work must have a “limitation”.³⁵ Therefore in seeking to embody a vision of economic life that bears witness to the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ, individual Christians must put to themselves the question, “Is the work I am doing righteous, honest, and human, and as I work upon this external task am I working reflectively

²⁸ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 26-30.

²⁹ Barth, *CD III/4*, 529.

³⁰ Barth, *CD III/4*, 530.

³¹ Barth, *CD III/4*, 536.

³² Barth, *CD III/4*, 546.

³³ Barth, *CD III/4*, 546.

³⁴ Barth, *CD III/4*, 550.

³⁵ Barth, *CD III/4*, 551.

upon myself so as to actively affirm my life and am I placing a limit upon my economic agency in order that I remain free for obedience to God?”

A third aspect of earning an income, especially in contemporary market capitalism, involves placing a dollar value upon the economic worth of a human being so as to determine their remuneration from work performed.³⁶ It is from this dollar value that a worker’s cost to their employer is calculated, their income by which they may sustain their life and health is derived, and to a very large extent their status in the eyes of others established. It is for this reason that the employment relationship places both those who employ and those who are employed in an extraordinarily precarious position. The necessity with which capitalism compels us to assign a dollar value upon the economic worth of human beings risks treating them as commodities to be bought and sold and thus to dehumanise them. As previously emphasised, the dehumanisation of economic agency as a result of self-interest degenerating into greed is one of the ways that the evil of nothingness may be actualised in the creaturely realm. For Christians this tendency toward the commodification and dehumanisation of others is to be strenuously resisted. Those who are employed must actively work upon themselves to internally affirm that their status and value is determined by God in Jesus Christ in whom their humanity is constituted and safeguarded. Therefore irrespective of one’s experience as an employee we must never allow our worth as a human being to be undermined. Likewise Christians who are employers must never allow their role to undermine the humanity of others. The Christian employer is to realise that the remuneration aspect of the employment relationship involves more than simply determining the economic value of a specific instantiation of “human capital” – it involves assisting and resourcing a fellow human being with the means to actively affirm their creaturely existence so as to be available to God and others in the freedom of obedience. Therefore in relation to this aspect of economic agency Christian workers and employers must ask themselves. “How can I resist the dehumanising tendency the employment relationship exposes me to and how best may I, in my role, affirm the dignity and worth of each human being, including myself, within the sphere of influence I inhabit?”³⁷

³⁶ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 243ff.

³⁷ For further discussion of the relationship between labour and the means of life see Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom*, 59ff.

I turn now to a third typical aspect of individual economic agency – investment activity. This also may be thought of from three points of view. Firstly, investment generally involves the pooling of financial and physical resources to produce and market some product or service. Within the structures of contemporary market capitalism the modern corporation is able to pool resources on a prodigious scale and as a consequence undertake massive investment projects that may literally span the globe. It is especially in this way that human beings as economic agents stand nearest to the command of God to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion over” the living creatures (Gen. 1:28). But as Barth warns, this engages in a God-like activity that “... assumes a dangerous proximity to God’s activity as Creator in which it may be both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective.”³⁸ Depending upon the nature of the project and the manner it is undertaken, investment has, as explained in chapter 4, the capacity to generate genuinely worthy outcomes that bear witness to the light side of God’s creation. But it also has the capacity to unleash the lordless powers, become the means by which human material aspirations are absolutised, and give rise to a limitless desire for economic power and wealth that risks crossing the boundary that separates God’s good creation from the realm of nothingness. Therefore those Christians who have the means to engage in this activity, either directly as decision-makers or indirectly as those who allow their savings to be pooled, hold a great responsibility in their hands. Therefore we must ask ourselves, “Will this project I am enabling and approving generate outcomes that are genuinely needful and can I reasonably expect it to participate in the blessing of God by which we are commanded to subdue the earth and have dominion over the living creatures in order that human beings may be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, or will it be supremely insolent and wholly ineffective and risk nothingness being actualised in the creaturely realm?” In order to answer this question honestly, particularly in relation to how any investment may impact on the ability of people to live “fruitful” lives, Christian investors must take responsible action to become aware regarding the true economic, social, and environmental costs of the investment; who specifically will bear these costs; whose interests are being served in this project; what will its ultimate benefits be; and how will they be distributed.

Secondly, investment projects are intended to generate wealth. The expected future income stream that flows out of an investment project enables investors to gain a

³⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 188.

return. It is on this basis that investors are encouraged to allow their savings to be pooled with others and in this way are able to transfer income into the future so as to enable consumption during their latter years when they may be unable to work. Thus investment is an effective and legitimate means by which wealth may be stored with a view to future consumption. But this creates risks for the Christian. On the one hand this may represent a prudent provision which rightly recognises the instability of life in the present age. But on the other hand, as with all aspects of economic agency, it conceals a potent possibility that can only be undertaken in fear and trembling. What may begin as a humanly inspired legitimate provision for the future can, by degrees, unleash the lordless powers and slide into a disordered desire for a kind of security that is no longer content to trust in the provision of God but which simply lusts for more. Christian investors who are motivated by a legitimate desire to grow their wealth for the future must examine themselves in all good conscience before God in light of the warning of Jesus and put to themselves the questions his words compel us to ask.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matt. 6:19-21 and 24)

The third decisive aspect of investment activity is that it involves a present outlay of resources with a view to a future *expected* return of value. And it is precisely for this reason that all investment activity involves risk-taking.³⁹ It is therefore analogous to a “sower [who goes] out to sow” whose efforts may fall on barren soil or alternatively yield a “thirty”, “sixty”, or “hundredfold” return (Matt.13:3ff). There is a legitimate *expectation* of a return that human forecasting skill may be able to quantify, but this can never be known with certainty. All manner of factors, foreseeable and unforeseeable, may jeopardise or favour the project such that no prudent investor will ever regard a projected outcome as being certain. Therefore every investment decision involves a step of faith – every investor who undertakes

³⁹ For a typical treatment of risk and return in financial investment see Lawrence J. Gitman, *Principles of Managerial Finance*, 12th ed. (Boston: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 228ff.

risk either wittingly or unwittingly, and openly or secretly, puts their confidence in something or someone and entrusts themselves to that thing or person. So yet again human beings in the exercise of their economic agency put themselves in a perilous place of potent possibility. When it comes to questions of confidence and trust, human beings have a fearful capacity to create idols of their own devising in which we put our faith, hope, and love. Contemporary market capitalism provides analysts, forecasting methodologies, and successful human exemplars to which people may openly or secretly entrust themselves as they seek to secure and grow their wealth through the inherently risky process of investment. Christians need to reflect honestly on this possibility, if and when we elect to take this step as economic agents in the contemporary world, and ask ourselves, “As I step into an unknown future outcome with this investment decision, who or what am I putting my faith, confidence, and trust in, and is this compatible with my claim to serve the God who commands that I am to have “no other god’s before [him]” (Ex. 20:3)?”

Undergirding all theological reflection on individual economic agency must be the recognition that God calls every Christian into obedient service to follow Jesus. Christians are people who have publicly proclaimed in their baptism that following Jesus is the governing centre that rules the serving circumference of their lives. Therefore a Christian is always firstly and centrally a follower of Jesus and only secondly and peripherally someone who functions in certain specific ways in relation to consumption lifestyle, career choice, and investment activity. Economic agency can only ever have a secondary and peripheral significance that derives from and serves this primary and central commitment and so can never be elevated to an absolutised status that presumes the right to maintain itself in autonomous independence irrespective of the call of God upon one’s life. Therefore for Christians to resist the call of God upon their lives so as to give priority to a particular lifestyle that their consumption expenditure allows or to give priority to a self-chosen career or investment opportunity is to reverse the order of centre and circumference and to enact a disordered life in which economic function becomes the ruling centre and the covenant of grace the serving circumference thus risking the threat of nothingness being actualised in the creaturely realm. But as Christians engage in the process of reflecting deeply upon their functioning as economic agents in the midst of contemporary culture and as they put to themselves and strive to answer in all honesty and good conscience the questions that the covenant of grace

implicitly compels, it is possible by the enabling of God for them to enact a form of economic life in which ruling covenantal centre and serving economic circumference are brought together in proper order and unity. In their consumption they will seek to tangibly demonstrate that they do not live by bread alone and nor do their lives consist in the abundance of the things possessed. Rather they will strive to enact a pattern of expenditure that affirms the legitimate aspirations of both themselves and others for health and life for the sake of service and place a limit upon their desires so as to generously contribute to initiatives that seek economic outcomes for others that recognise God's desire to give *us* (all) *our* (communal) daily bread. Likewise Christians, as workers earning an income and as employers running a business, will regard themselves firstly and centrally as those who hold themselves in readiness for the command of God and secondly and peripherally as those who hold a particular occupational role. Furthermore they will strive to do all that they do in a God-honouring way and for a God-honouring outcome all the while endeavouring to affirm and uphold the humanity of every person touched by the income earning relationship. And in relation to their investment activity Christians will seek to satisfy themselves in all good conscience that the projects they fund will exercise economic dominion over the earth in ways that genuinely serve the fruitfulness of human life and which generate and distribute wealth with justice and compassion. Moreover they will seek to satisfy themselves in all good conscience that in seeking wealth through investment they are not transferring their faith to an alien something or someone.

6.3 God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ and the potent possibilities of contemporary market capitalism

In the last section of chapter 5 I quote Barth saying, the "... basic form of the active life of obedience understood and affirmed as service of the cause of God [consists of] man's direct or indirect co-operation in the fulfilment of the task of the Christian community."⁴⁰ I also draw attention to Barth's provocative claim that in this service, God calls the Christian community to exercise a prayer-prepared "will for power" such that it is to

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 483.

... make use of [human] capacity, to come to grips with the advancements and hindrances of life which impinge upon [humankind] from without, exploiting the former and resisting or at least enduring the latter.⁴¹

The prodigious capabilities for realising economic outcomes that may be activated within the potent possibilities of market capitalism are indeed good reason to cause Christians to exercise this power with great care so as to avoid doing so in ways that may prove to be “supremely insolent and wholly ineffective”. Nevertheless, this legitimate caution must not deter Christians from “utilising human capacity to exploit the advancements of life” by taking economic action in the world. Therefore in this section I argue that in its outer work of service in the world the Christian community must utilise the economic power that is placed within its reach by the enabling possibilities of contemporary market capitalism. But as Barth emphasises, in utilising this power it must derive from God, be necessary for service, and remain in the hands of God.⁴²

The first thing that must be said is that human service must be “service of the cause of God” not service of our own cause. But as Barth emphasises, “The cause of God in all its austere deity is from all eternity and in its historical fulfilment the cause of man.”⁴³ This is because in “...His specific coming, acting and speaking in the creaturely world with the intention of asserting, protecting and restoring His right to the creature [He thereby accomplishes] the creature’s own right and honour.”⁴⁴

Therefore God’s calling of the community of faith in service of the realisation of *God’s* cause is also a call to serve in *our own* cause – our own true interests fulfilled in the covenantal purposes of God. But no human being can fulfil either their own cause or the cause of another. God alone can secure and fulfil the cause of humankind. Thus we are incapable of directly, by our own efforts, fulfilling either our own cause or the cause of another. Thus the task of the Christian community that God commissions it to obey is not to seek to *fulfil* the cause of humankind, but to *proclaim* to the world the fact that it is God alone in Jesus Christ who “fulfils the cause of man”. Therefore every activity the church engages in must prepare for this proclamation, sustain itself for the sake of this proclamation, prayerfully endeavour to achieve a receptive hearing of this proclamation, humbly and boldly make this

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 390.

⁴² Barth, *CD* III/4, 392-97.

⁴³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 481.

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 480.

proclamation, and by its life bear witness to the truth of this proclamation. Anything the church does that does not serve this proclamation is of secondary significance.

As Barth so forcefully puts it,

No other task is so urgent as that of spreading this news on earth, of making it known to all people that all may conform to it, of publishing it indeed to every creature. Everything else that man might will or do or accomplish fades beside this, moving out to the circumference and becoming a [secondary task].⁴⁵

It is to this end and to this end alone that Christian economic action in the world must be directed, for it is only in this way that Christian use of economic power may hope to come from God, be used for service, and remain in the hands of God.

The reason the Christian community is called to sustain itself through its inner life of worship is for the sake of its external commission to bear witness to the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. As Barth expresses it,

What the community owes to the world, and each individual within it, is basically that in its life, and in the lives of all its members, there should be attempted an imitation and representation of the love with which God loved the world.⁴⁶

For Barth, this attempted imitation of the love of God for the world consists of practical service to others that endeavours to

... grant to and secure for this other as much of the freedom physically and spiritually necessary for his life in service as a creature, as one man can grant to and secure for another, and he specifically to and for this other. No man, not even the Christian, can give another the freedom of the children of God, the freedom of the Spirit. But for the life of service there is also needed a measure of creaturely freedom, of psychophysical freedom, of space to breathe and move, of joy, of opportunity for expression and development.⁴⁷

Barth's description of the "measure of creaturely psychophysical freedom" that approximates to the love of God resonates strongly with God's kingdom mission that Jesus announces at the beginning of his ministry.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 487.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 502.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 500.

because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk. 4:18-19)

Only God in Christ through the power of the Spirit is able to accomplish these things in all their fullness so as to consummate the cause of God for humankind by fulfilling our cause. Nevertheless as faithful human action that responds to and corresponds to the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ, this programmatic statement of Jesus may be used as a template by which the Christian community conceives its work of service in correspondence to the work of God so as to constitute an appropriate creaturely action that bears witness to the action of God. Therefore the Christian conception of economic life I envisage is an economic form of life enacted by the community of faith that seeks to pattern itself upon the kingdom mission of God in Jesus Christ. That is, it consists of the active "will for power" the Christian community is called to exercise that "utilises human capacity to exploit the advancements of life" as it seeks to act in faithful obedience "in the fulfilment of the task of the Christian community" to "imitate the love with which God loved the world" by securing for others a "measure of creaturely psychophysical freedom" in order that they may hear and obey the proclamation of the good news that God has acted in Jesus Christ to secure "his right to the creature", and therefore "the creature's own right and honour". In doing so the Christian community must seek to exploit the positive potentials within contemporary market capitalism in order to "bring good news to the poor", "proclaim release to captives", "recovery of sight to the blind", "let the oppressed go free", and "proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". The freedom God grants the Christian community whereby it may realise this conception of economic life means there is great scope for human imagination and enterprise to use the capacities of capitalism in service of this conception.

Luke introduces God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ with the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me". For the Christian community to construct and enact a viable theological conception of economic life in correspondence to God's kingdom mission, this statement makes it clear that it must begin from a position of absolute dependency upon the power of the Spirit of God as

the one who anoints, ordains, commissions, and enables the community to act in faithful correspondence to the action of God. Outside of this anointing, the enactment of any Christian conception of economic life simply risks finding power within our own resources, using it in service of our own religiously inspired ambitions, and retaining this economic power in our own hands. Therefore it risks initiating well-intended programmes that begin with worthy ideals and aspirations that by degrees slip from our control thus unleashing “the lordless powers” that risks becoming something that is “both supremely insolent and wholly ineffective”. Thus a Christian conception of economic life and any specific initiative enacted in conformity with such a conception, like God’s good creation itself, can never be for its own sake – it can only hope to participate in partnership with God. In other words it can only ever hope faithfully to point to and affirm the central covenantal fact that God wills to be gracious to us in Jesus Christ.

Luke continues by saying that God’s missionary purpose to the world for which Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit of God is in order “to bring good news to the poor”. The central focus here is not the alleviation of poverty as such as an end goal in itself whereby the materially poor may become materially rich. The biblical witness is full of warnings that wealth can easily become a means of idolatrous false hope that renders its possessors unwilling or unable to hear and respond to the good news of God. The central focus is upon God’s *favour* to the poor and God’s preferential will that God’s good news be brought to those who live in poverty. Sider astutely notes that God is especially concerned about the poor, not because God is biased toward the poor, but precisely because God is *unbiased*.⁴⁸ It is precisely because it is God’s desire that *all* his human creatures share in the bounty of his covenantal purposes and because the justice that God seeks has a positive restorative character that God is especially concerned to resist the encroachments of the rich against people that expropriate economic resources from them thus rendering them poor and as a consequence threatens to disenfranchise them from the bounty of God.⁴⁹ Therefore it is, as Barth puts it, about assisting people to possess the material means of creaturely life such that they may be enabled to enjoy, “... the psychophysical freedom, of space to breathe and move, of joy, of opportunity for expression and development”,⁵⁰ that they may be genuinely able in the integrity of

⁴⁸ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 59.

⁴⁹ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 59.

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD III/4*, 500.

their creaturely being to receive, hear, and respond to the good news of God. God's good news in Jesus Christ has a serving material circumference to its governing spiritual centre. Therefore Christian action in the world that seeks to support its proclamation and bear witness to the fact that the news of God is good news to the poor will have a serving economic component that seeks the alleviation of poverty as an appropriate material counterpart to the good news concerning the covenantal faithfulness of God.⁵¹ As already noted from Barth, it will have in view, not wealth creation as such as its central goal, but the alleviation of poverty as the serving enabling means whereby people may have healthy lives so as to participate in service. Thus Christian economic initiatives in service of the proclamation of the gospel will incorporate economic factors that relate to such things as living conditions, housing, nutrition, public services, incomes, living standards, access to health care and education, personal freedoms, and protection from harm so that people may enjoy, as Barth puts it, "... vigour, strength, and freedom for human life."⁵²

In chapter 4 I explored the degenerating tendencies we are exposed to as economic agents within the enabling potentialities of contemporary global capitalism that risk the manifestation of the evil of nothingness in economic life. This degeneration produces a myriad of woes that generate appalling human suffering, the chief of which must surely be poverty. In particular the material poverty that incarnates the misery of a social and economic conception of human life that condemns vast numbers of the human family to disease, illiteracy, appalling living and working conditions, despair, starvation, and premature death. Sider in his investigation into the causes of human poverty between nations, while acknowledging the important role that personal choices and natural disasters play in poverty, is especially concerned to emphasise the far greater role of social evil embedded in unjust political and economic structures.⁵³ Writing against a background where many Christians from the affluent West over-emphasise the efficacy of free market capitalism and the freedom of individual economic agency, Sider explores the structural injustices that cause extreme poverty in different countries. He highlights the extremely unequal and unjust global distribution of productive resources that

⁵¹ This is a vision that Sider describes as "Incarnational Kingdom Christianity". Sider, *One-sided Christianity*, 159ff.

⁵² Barth, *CD III/4*, 356 and 363.

⁵³ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 123ff.

effectively prevents “... at least a quarter of the world’s people ... participat[ing] in any major way in the global market economy”;⁵⁴ the manifestly unjust international trade rules that progressively have lowered the returns poor countries receive from their commodity exports relative to the price they pay for manufactured imports from wealthy countries;⁵⁵ the crippling burden of international debt upon poor countries that is literally killing children in these countries due to the proportions of the earnings of these countries that are being directed away from primary health care in order to meet debt repayment schedules;⁵⁶ the environmental degradation that unrestricted industrialisation causes and the way much of the cost of this is borne by the poor whose food producing land is often destroyed or expropriated in this process;⁵⁷ and the way in which international trade structures, the ownership of resources, market forces, and demand patterns in wealthy countries means that “... nations with large numbers of malnourished and even starving people nevertheless have exported substantial amounts of food to wealthy nations.”⁵⁸ In turning his attention to the scandal of poverty in the world’s richest country, the United States of America, Sider argues there are three broad causes of poverty in that country: (1) structural causes such as decreasing numbers of low-skill well paid jobs, falling wage rates, falling real value of welfare assistance, weakened trade unions, and racial discrimination; (2) behavioural causes such as teenage pregnancies and single parent families, severely diminished opportunities available to people in impoverished neighbourhoods, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal life-styles; and (3) sudden catastrophes or permanent disabilities that undermine a person’s ability to earn.⁵⁹

However it is not simply the problem of many poor countries having low average levels of wealth and other rich countries having much higher average levels of wealth – the way these averages are *distributed* within both rich and poor countries has a decisive bearing upon the wellbeing of both rich and poor individuals. Epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett recognise that although happiness and health increase significantly as people and countries move out of poverty nevertheless beyond a basic threshold, increasing material prosperity adds

⁵⁴ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 141.

⁵⁵ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 147ff.

⁵⁶ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 153ff.

⁵⁷ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 157ff.

⁵⁸ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 166ff.

⁵⁹ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 34ff.

little to wellbeing.⁶⁰ They argue there are strong and consistent linkages between economic inequality within countries and a plethora of social ills destructive of human flourishing. They find strong correlations between increased economic inequality within countries and the severity of social ills. But they are at pains to emphasise that this issue, while including poverty, goes well beyond it – it is an issue of equality of distribution. While it is clear that the poor suffer the most from impoverishment, they argue that economic inequality hurts *all* people – both the poor and the rich. This is because, beyond a basic threshold, a wealthier country with a more unequal distribution of wealth will have both greater disparities between the rich and the poor within that country and a greater absolute rate of social ill compared to a poorer country with a more equal distribution of wealth. They report that very unequal countries such as the USA and the UK have five times the rate of mental illness and imprisonment and more than five times the rate of obesity and homicides than more equal countries such as Japan and Sweden – and these are right across the social gradient within these countries.⁶¹ All these things increase stress and anxiety, undermine health, increase the risk of resentment and violence, increase alienation and friendlessness, exacerbate hopelessness and despair, and contribute to a plethora of social ills culminating in premature death.

But as noted earlier, before engaging in its outer work of economic action in the world in support of God’s mission to bring good news to the poor, the Christian community must engage in its inner work of reflection and put to itself the question, “To what extent has our own economic practices and action in the world contributed to the impoverishment of others such that they have been unable to hear the good news of God or can only perceive the Christian proclamation as “bad news?” And likewise “To what extent has our indifference to or willing ignorance of economic practices that we should speak out against contributed to our own hardness of heart and lack of compassion such that we do not hear the cries of the poor?” In its reflection the Christian community has to take seriously the possibility that the behaviour of the community in its economic agency, both corporately as the proclaiming church and individually as professing Christians, has caused “The name of God [to be] blasphemed among the Gentiles because of [us]” (Rom 2:24). Therefore the Christian conception of economic life I envisage includes the

⁶⁰ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin, 2010), 5ff.

⁶¹ Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, 176 and 79ff.

community not only enacting incarnational economic practices that will enable its proclamation to be heard as good news but also identifying and repenting of those economic practices that cause its proclamation to be heard as bad news. In particular the Christian community has to consider the ways we have sought to gain, secure, and use wealth in terms of how this has adversely impacted upon the needs and aspirations of others, and to repent of the ways in which our non-compassionate gaining and disposing of wealth has undermined the integrity of the church's proclamation in the eyes of others such that God's name is blasphemed.

There are three key ways in which the Christian community may enact an economic form of life in which good news may be brought to the poor. Firstly Christian economic agency must be characterised by generosity. That is, the willingness and extent to which Christians give of their material wealth to others with a view to resourcing Christian economic action in the world as a tangible expression of communal solidarity with those who are poor such that the proclamation of the gospel may be heard by them as good news.⁶² I have already noted in chapter 3 in relation to the counterintuitive nature of much of Christian ethics the apostle Paul's concern for the Corinthian church to practice generous giving so as to ensure a "... fair balance between your present abundance and their need ..." (2 Cor. 8:14). Those Christians who are, to again use Tanner's evocative expression, "... advantaged beyond all decent proportions by the present system"⁶³ must consider the poverty of their near and distant neighbours in the context of what ought to constitute a "fair balance" and generously contribute accordingly. Sider laments the materialism and lack of generosity among so many North American Christians and pleads for and provides practical means by which wealthy western Christians can and should live more simply and thus contribute more generously to programmes and initiatives that can genuinely make a difference in the lives of the poor.⁶⁴

The second way in which Christian economic action may bring good news to the poor is through the conscious use of economic initiatives that are specifically designed to use economic mechanisms such as micro enterprise, trade, and

⁶² This is a major emphasis in Sider who argues for the practice of a "just generosity" from the Christian church and recommends a "graduated tithe" as a means to increase the levels of financial resources flowing from the Christian community into projects that may bring good news to the poor. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 193ff.

⁶³ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 141.

⁶⁴ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 191ff.

employment creation in a targeted way so as to benefit the poor. Sider makes an excellent case for holistic comprehensive strategies that engage with people and communities as physical/material beings that combine material interventions that provide the physical means whereby people can begin to overcome the worst aspects of poverty. These economic interventions provide the material circumference that forms the basis whereby Christian communities may provide friendship, communal solidarity, and ongoing support and encouragement that serves the ruling covenantal centre whereby specifically spiritual interventions may be enacted that confront people with the need to seek and accept the transformational change in their lives that God alone can provide.⁶⁵ Jim Wallace describes how specifically Christian holistic interventions in partnership with concerned others are able to make positive changes in communities blighted by poverty. He gives the example of urban Detroit that has lost vast numbers of automobile jobs, witnessed massive population outflow, and become a post-industrial wasteland with one of the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the United States. Yet in recent years it has seen vacant lots planted in community flower and vegetable gardens because

The Capuchin friars now give away a hundred thousand plants every year to community members. Each garden not only provides locally grown food for those who need it, but opportunities for work for the unemployed and centres for the community to gather around.⁶⁶

An excellent example micro-enterprise as an economic mechanism to alleviate poverty in the world's poorest countries is the Grameen or "Village" Bank developed by economist and Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh in 1976 that makes micro-loans especially to poor women to begin small entrepreneurial ventures as a means toward economic self-sufficiency, employment of others, and community development.⁶⁷

The inability of poor people, through their poverty, to enjoy "the psychophysical freedom, of space to breathe and move, of joy, of opportunity for expression and development" represents far more than an economic crisis for any individual or community – it represents a menacing spiritual threat that jeopardises the viability of their being able to live responsibly in all the relationships in which their humanity is to be enacted. But even more so, the unwillingness of affluent western Christians,

⁶⁵ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 77ff.

⁶⁶ Wallis, *Rediscovering Values*, 208.

⁶⁷ Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 90ff.

through our apathy and complicity in materialistic consumerism, to alleviate the poverty of our fellows represents more than an economic crisis – it also represents a menacing spiritual threat that jeopardises the viability of *our* being able to live responsibly in all the relationships in which our humanity is to be enacted. The apathy of affluent Christians bears witness to a profoundly disordered and idolatrous perversion of humanity and Christian faith that must surely receive the divine judgement that “... you say ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.’” (Rev. 3:17). In different, though very significant ways, poverty undermines the humanity of *both* the poor who suffer *and* the rich who have the capacity to alleviate their poverty and suffering yet harden their hearts against them. Sider provides the profoundly striking example of affluent churches in the USA that have been long divided by historical denominational boundary lines and schisms in relation to conservative and liberal theologies that find that *they* are the ones who are blessed when they hear and respond in meaningful ways to the cries of the poor. He quotes Jim Wallis who says “Wonderfully, the poor are bringing the churches back together.”⁶⁸ Moreover Wallis observes,

When you actually have poor people as friends and know their situations, you can’t stereotype them and justify yourself by writing them off. Seeing, feeling, and knowing people in difficult straits is what creates empathy.⁶⁹

Acting compassionately toward the poor through the meaningful use of economic applications that seek genuinely just redistributions brings good news not only to the poor but also to the rich. In the two examples given it has helped heal their divisions and soften their hearts. In other words it has served to help restore their God-given and Christ-constituted humanity.

The third way in which Christian economic action may bring good news to the poor is through active initiatives through the political process in which a Christian voice supports Government initiatives to alleviate poverty, seeks to provide well researched information to Government agencies concerning how it may fulfil this role more effectively, and lobbies Government in relation to initiatives it ought to be pursuing but is thus far ignorant of or actively resisting. In relation to issues in which unjust social, legal, and political structures are the contributing reason for

⁶⁸ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 217.

⁶⁹ Wallis, *Rediscovering Values*, 121-122.

ongoing poverty that robs people of the “the psychophysical freedom of space to breathe and move [so as to have] opportunity for expression and development” that they may “enjoy vigour, strength, and freedom for human life”, the Christian community must first examine and repent of the extent to which its own practices represent a contributing factor. Moreover rather than simply offering prescriptions to Government from a distance concerning what it may do in relation to these issues, the Christian community must explore ways in which it may act to undermine and subvert the various structural impediments that hold people in poverty thus preventing them hearing and responding to the good news of God. In this way prescriptions that are brought to Government will be informed and supported by a credible and well researched track-record of service. Therefore this will be a humble initiate rather than a grand scheme.

The kingdom mission of God in Jesus Christ continues with “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and ... to let the oppressed go free”. For this to inform a pattern for a Christian conception of economic life requires the Christian community to reflect on the ways in which people are held in bondage and oppressed such that they are denied the psychophysical freedom of which Barth speaks and are therefore prevented from living in the active affirmation of their creaturely being in responsibility before God and their fellow humans. This will comprise a whole range of issues that include psychological, physiological, political, social, and economic factors that hold people in bondage. Again the Christian community must reflect deeply on its own practices and enquire concerning the extent to which in its own activities it has behaved in ways in relation to its exercise of economic agency that may have contributed to the bondage and oppression of others. This is a very real possibility in a complex global economy in which Christians may find themselves consuming products and financing activities that have the effect of depriving unknown and invisible others of their livelihoods, their cultural resources, or their very lives. Christians have the responsibility and the means whereby we must make this enquiry with a view to acting in our capacity as economic agents to put an end to our own culpability with respect to these things and to using our influence with a view to ending the bondage and oppression of others.

One of the most obvious forms of economic bondage in which many people exist in contemporary consumer culture is crippling indebtedness of a kind that creates impoverishment, erodes hope, and renders the raising of children and the establishment of viable community precarious. It is often indebtedness that is instrumental in driving people into other forms of bondage, for example, gambling, prostitution, drug dependency, various forms of slavery, crime, and gang membership. Many of these forms of bondage and oppression exist as a consequence of an economic market for a product or service in which a (more or less) willing buyer and seller transact but in ways that represent a perversion of genuine freedom of transactional agency. In chapter 4 this was alluded to in relation to the legitimate entrepreneurial spirit degenerating into “depraved entrepreneurship” as it seeks to exploit the financial opportunities available within the structures and processes of market capitalism that corrupted human desire is able to actualise. Peter Selby provides a moving account of the prodigious proliferation of consumer debt in the late twentieth century and the suffering it drags in its wake. He outlines how so much of this becomes an impossible burden upon the backs of the poor to the great financial advantage of the rich.⁷⁰ He quotes a 1995 article in the financial pages of the British newspaper *The Independent* that reports enthusiastically and openly, without any sense of shame or moral self-awareness, on the profitability of Provident Financial which notes

Because Provident serves low income groups avoided by banks and building societies, it is able to charge interest rates of more than 100%. Provident said demand was growing ‘among lower income groups, which represent a growing proportion of the population’.⁷¹

What makes this well-respected financial corporation “able” to charge such high interest rates is the desperation of its low income customers who are unable to pay their way in contemporary culture nor obtain short term finance from any other source, an institutional framework within the structures and mechanisms of the free market economy that allows this kind of lending and indebtedness, and wealthy depositors who provide the financial resources to Provident and who are happy to earn a good return from their investment. In other words what makes Provident “able” to charge such high interest rates is the market forces of supply and demand within the enabling possibilities of contemporary market capitalism. But what is not

⁷⁰ Peter Selby, *Grace and Mortgage: The Language of Faith and the Debt of the World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), 48 and 56.

⁷¹ Selby, *Grace and Mortgage*, 56.

given prominence in this self-congratulatory report is the suffering, poverty, and hopelessness of the invisible millions of desperate borrowers who lurch precariously from week to week and who by degrees are sinking into the other forms of bondage that this kind of indebtedness renders inevitable. Moreover there are lenders lower down the market than Provident. The New Zealand Law Society reports on “third-tier” lenders charging effective interest rates of 624 per cent with additional penalty rates of 104 per cent such that a \$250 two week “payday” loan had rolled over to \$1500 after three months following partial but insufficient repayments.⁷²

In the present context of the economic dimensions of bondage and oppression, Christian economic action in the world has the capacity to correspond to God’s missionary purpose in Jesus Christ in three ways. Firstly, Christians must ensure that in our economic agency we do not contribute to such markets either on the demand side as consumers or on the supply side as producers or investors. For example, prostitution is a thriving industry that leads to the enslavement of countless people, particularly girls and women, who are trafficked into the industry, held in bondage, and oppressed against their will precisely because there is such a high demand for the services this activity provides. For Christians to recognise that it is wrong to hire the services of prostitutes because, as the apostle puts it, “Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?” (1 Cor.6:16) is a necessary but insufficient awareness – it only addresses part of the issue. Not only do Christians who use prostitutes degrade themselves and the witness of the Christian community because they “... take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute ...” (1 Cor.6:15) but in doing so they also contribute to the revenue stream that makes it highly profitable for pimps and traffickers to press more and more people created in the image of God into bondage, oppression, and abuse.

The second way in which Christian economic action in the world is able to bear concrete tangible witness to the God who in Jesus Christ proclaims release to the captives and lets the oppressed go free is by the use of creatively conceived initiatives that make direct use of economic mechanisms. For example: Christian resourced zero or very low interest loans and supportive educational fellowship to

⁷² New Zealand Law Society, “Payday Lending Under Spotlight,” LawTalk 780, 9 September 2011, 4.

free people who have become hopelessly ensnared by high cost consumer debt; business ventures that create viable employment alternatives for those who would otherwise be at risk of being caught up in prostitution; ministries that provide employment opportunities training, and supportive community to those who have been stigmatised by imprisonment, drug abuse, and mental ill-health, are all ways in which economic mechanisms may be employed to provide release to captives and freedom to those who are oppressed. Again Christian generosity in giving so as to provide the resources to initiate such ventures and the coordinated pooling of Christian purchasing power to make them as economically viable as possible once they are operational are necessary prerequisites undergirding such initiatives.

Again, thirdly, Christians must use our influence to engage actively in social and political processes so as to be supportive of initiatives designed to alleviate various forms of bondage and oppression, provide well researched and credible information to Government and other agencies concerning how this role may be fulfilled more effectively, and lobby Government in relation to initiatives it ought to be pursuing but is thus far ignorant of or actively resisting. In relation to the economic dimensions of this issue Christians ought to be advocates of free markets. Not freedom in the modern sense of the term in which it is imagined that a *free* market is a market in which supposedly sovereign buyers and sellers may engage in *any* mutually agreeable transaction without impediment, restriction, or moral critique. Rather markets, in so far as it is possible, must be free of elements that degrade the humanity of those who participate in them and which threaten to reduce people to bondage. As economist C. T. Kurien is at pains to emphasise, for markets to be genuinely *free* markets there must be genuine equality of power between participants. However, as he points out, the language used to describe markets and trade “... are ideological doctrines of those who have and wield power, but couched in the terminologies of liberty and equality.”⁷³

Such measures to increase the genuine freedom with which people are enabled to participate in markets will include curbing the seductive and unconscionable advertising and easy availability of products and activities in which it is clearly the case that people with addictive vulnerabilities may be ruined: such as tobacco,

⁷³ C. T. Kurien, “Globalization: An Economist’s Perspective,” in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, 195-212 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 199.

alcohol, gambling, junk food, and consumer debt products. It will also include seeking to ensure that commercial practices both domestically and internationally are not conducted in ways that exploit and oppress those whose bargaining positions are weak and vulnerable. For Barth, the command of God

... is self-evidently and in all circumstances a call for counter-movements on behalf of humanity and against its denial in any form, and therefore a call for the championing of the weak against every kind of encroachment on the part of the strong.⁷⁴

On this basis Christian economic action in the world must, whatever form it takes, be action that, negatively, stands against the dehumanisation of people and, positively, is action that seeks the affirmation of the true God-given and Christ-constituted humanity of all people – and in particular as this is threatened by the encroachments of the strong against the weak. Too often the instinct of the Christian church has been to side with the forces of economic, social, and political conservatism with the effect that it has championed the strong in favour of their encroachment upon the weak. The Christian community must recognise and name this instinct as an alien spirit that stands in opposition to the Spirit of the Lord that has anointed the body of Christ to bring good news to the poor and sent it to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Clearly however there are many forms of bondage and oppression that while including economic dimensions also go well beyond them. These, like "recovery of sight to the blind" require the best efforts of medical, psychiatric, and social intervention and care. It will often be the case that, despite these best efforts, bondage and oppression remains. Nevertheless Christians ought to be financially supportive of Government initiatives through its health, education, and social policy programmes that seek better outcomes for affected people through being willing to pay our taxes. Moreover Christians ought also to be financially supportive of other programmes and agencies that seek to deal with the various forms of bondage and oppression people suffer from that are not adequately addressed by the policy initiatives of Government. But no Christian initiative, economic or otherwise, can usher in the kingdom of God. These things can only point to and anticipate the kingdom of God. To the extent they bear positive fruit they may be permitted by the

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 544.

grace of God to bear witness to the light side of God's good creation that is reconciled and redeemed in Jesus Christ. And to the extent they fail to give freedom to captives, sight to the blind, and release to the oppressed these nevertheless by the grace of God may still be permitted to bear witness to the shadow side of God's good creation and our great need to be reconciled and redeemed in Jesus Christ.

Luke concludes the mission address of Jesus by quoting his purpose "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". This is the governing covenantal centre around which the serving economic circumference of Christian witness in the world must revolve. Because God is for the world and not against it and conducts his mission in the world in order that the world may hear and obey the message of God's favour, the Christian community as it seeks to act in correspondence to the action of God in the world must also be for the world and not against it. Consequently in all that it does, as Barth points out, the Christian community must ensure that it bears witness to God's affirmation and love of the world in Jesus Christ and not confront the world, with an accusation or as bearers of a message of divine condemnation.⁷⁵ The church has no commission from God to provide the world with programmes and techniques that might allow it to live alienated from God somewhat more viably than has hitherto been the case. Nor is the church to point to itself as an exemplar of those who can by our own teachings and programmes successfully return to God and with his blessing enact lives of piety that enable us to "... escape the confusion and sorrow of the world."⁷⁶ The church can never proclaim the year of its own favour – it can only ever proclaim "the year of *the Lord's* favour". Therefore although it will prayerfully strive to exert an active "will for power" that "utilises human capacity to exploit the advancements of life" as it seeks to act in faithful obedience "in the fulfilment of the task of the Christian community" it will never put its hope in these things – it will never allow itself to believe that it is for this reason that it is called to act in the world. It will always recognise that these things, no matter how blessed and apparently successful they may appear to be, will always occupy the serving circumference of God's ruling covenantal centre.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 501ff.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 507.

Conclusion

The title of my thesis is “Exploring a Christian conception of economic life from within Karl Barth’s doctrine of creation.” As noted in my introduction, I have not attempted to develop a Christian conception of economic life that I think Barth may necessarily have approved of or been willing to endorse. My concern has been to be, as Webster puts it, a “good reader” of Barth and thus to “... put [my]self in a place where [my] conventions can be quite seriously undermined or relativised, and where as a consequence [I] can begin to think afresh.”¹ Although I have drawn more widely from Barth than just volume III of the *Church Dogmatics*, my primary focus has been to explore his “Doctrine of Creation” as a resource whereby I might think Christianly about economic life. I have attempted to demonstrate that Barth’s doctrine of creation is indeed a rich resource from which to develop a Christian conception of economic life. The central advantage that Barth has provided is the potential to do this on the basis of God’s covenantal *relationship* with humanity rather than on the basis of the application of biblical *principles* – a methodology which, as I have argued, risks becoming arbitrary, abstract, and prone to subversion. The central insight of Barth I have sought to exploit is that God’s covenant of grace is the inner reason and basis for the creation of all that exists distinct from God. This means that God wills to be in covenantal relationship with his human creatures, creates an external world that is serviceable for the enactment of this relationship, acts in history in Jesus Christ to fulfil this relationship, and wills that the ethical content of this relationship consist of a human response of faithfulness that corresponds to the faithfulness of God in obedience to the command of God.

As I read Barth’s doctrine of creation in light of my interest, there are three key corollaries that derive from this central insight I have attempted to structure my thesis around. The first is that covenant and creation exist in an irreversible order and an unbreakable unity. This means that creation exists for the sake of the covenant and the covenant determines the shape creation takes – they exist in this *order*, never the reverse! Yet the covenant requires the creation as the theatre for its enactment and it is only within the material structures of created reality that the covenant has its history – they exist in this *unity*, never one without the other! Because the covenant is the internal basis that provides the motivating reason for

¹ Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 7.

creation and the inner logic determining its shape, it lies at the *ruling centre* of God's purposes. Contrariwise the creation, because it is the enabling possibility for the enactment of the covenant, lies at the *serving circumference* of God's purposes. For this reason and to this end human beings are created by God as psychosomatic beings constituted also in an irreversible order and unbreakable unity. As the ruling *souls* of our serving bodies we are orientated toward the covenantal centre of the work of God. In this way we stand in relation to God and in relation to fellow-humanity that we may know God and recognise our fellows. But to actualise this relatedness God constitutes us the serving *bodies* of our ruling souls and as such we are orientated toward the created circumference of the work of God. In this way we stand in relation to the created environment that we may act responsibly before God and our fellows upon the earth.

The fact that God creates a *substantial* world to be the external basis for the enactment of the covenant and creates human beings as the physical *bodies* of their souls to participate in a *material* creaturely existence, immediately and necessarily generates an economic necessity – we must act in the world to sustain our creaturely beings. Yet this necessity must be understood within the context that *everything* God creates and brings to pass in his providential lordship of creation has the fulfilment of God's covenantal purposes in view. All things only have meaning in light of this – or none at all. Corresponding to this covenantal will and work of God, our lives also have a centre and circumference. At the ruling centre of our lives is our work of worship and service that corresponds to the reconciling and redeeming activity of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ – its goal: fellowship with God and with fellow humanity. At the serving circumference of this ruling centre is our work of creaturely sustenance through economic activity that corresponds to the providential activity of God that sustains and upholds the created environment for the sake of the covenant – its goal: the flourishing of our creaturely lives that we may be fit for our covenantal service. Therefore our covenantal service and economic activity must stand in irreversible order and unbreakable unity. The meeting of our genuine and legitimate creaturely needs through economic activity is for the sake of our covenantal service – never the reverse. Yet our covenantal service embraces and includes the creaturely integrity of our lives and those of our fellows in the face of the economic necessity we all confront – never one without the other. It is on this basis, I argue, that a Christian conception of economic life that serves its proper

function in the economy of God will be recognisable. First, it will uphold the *unity* of covenant and creation and thus regard both Christian service *and* economic agency as integrated in unbreakable oneness. Thus it will avoid a form of life in which these exist independent of each other. It will neither conceive of Christian service as constituting the totality of a spiritualistic vision concerned only with the saving of souls that has no concern for the bodies of whose souls they are; nor will it conceive of economic agency as constituting the totality of a materialistic vision concerned only with the betterment of bodies that has no concern for the souls of whose bodies they are. Second, it will uphold the *order* of covenant and creation and thus put love of God and service to neighbour at the ruling centre and the work of economic agency at the serving circumference. Thus it will reject a form of life in which Christian faith becomes a tool serving economic advantage. It will not annex the glory of God to sanctify our material aspirations; rather it will seek to annex our functioning as economic agents in service of the glory of God.

The second key corollary that derives from Barth's central insight is that the "goodness" of creation must be understood in light of the covenant rather than in terms of some abstract, intrinsic, or idealistic conception of goodness. Thus the environment created for the enactment of the covenant is "good" in that it is serviceable for the fulfilment of God's good covenantal purpose to be gracious toward us in Jesus Christ. Therefore God has not created a world in which we can establish a viable ontology independent of God's grace or enjoy a blissful autonomous existence on the basis of our own independent resources. Nor has God created a world that is "perfect" so as to require no fatherly providential maintenance by God. The reality God has created is the location for the enactment of the covenant and thus bears witness to the fact God has prepared and equipped us to be reconciled and redeemed by grace in Jesus Christ. To this end the good world God creates is constituted with both a positive light and a negative shadow side that together bear witness to the reality of our *telos*. Yet *both* aspects derive from God's positive covenantal will to save us by grace through Jesus Christ and are therefore good. The light side of creation bears positive witness to and reminds us of the security and nurturing that God's good creation affords human beings and the shadow side bears negative witness to and reminds us of the jeopardy and menace God's good creation represents to human beings outside the grace of God. On this basis I argue that market capitalism does a remarkably good job of bearing witness

to the light side of creation. It channels self-interest to serve the benefit of others by producing and distributing goods and services that meet genuine need for the well-being of large segments of humankind and provides the prosperity and resources whereby people may take responsibility for their lives. But there is a shadow side to capitalism. Its inherent instabilities cause industries to go into decline resulting in unemployment and shattered life-aspirations generating loss and poverty for some while also causing growth and prosperity for others. Moreover human efforts to “subdue the earth” frequently cause unintended outcomes as our God-given powers slip from our hands becoming “lordless” thus bearing witness to the fact that we are not the masters of creation. But these aspects of capitalism are serviceable to God’s covenantal purposes. They bear witness to the fact that God provides for our creaturely sustenance in his good world but that we have not been created by material processes to find ultimate fulfilment in the material outcomes generated by economic activity. They point to our *telos* that we have been created by the God of the covenant to flourish in our creaturely beings upon earth, yet may only find our fulfilment in God.

But within the covenantal will of God for creation there lies the bewildering fact that God has allowed a fragmentary reality to have the capacity to overwhelm us – the evil of nothingness. Nothingness is not simply or only human sin. For Barth, nothingness is constituted in the structures of reality that stand in fundamental hostile opposition to the covenantal will of God and which human beings, in their sin, may align themselves with. Thus nothingness transcends human sin while also being manifested in it. For Barth, one of the functions of the shadow side is to warn us of the peril we expose ourselves to when we welcome and accept that which God has condemned and rejected. In relation to economic life, I argue the threat of nothingness achieving actuality in creaturely life is realised when human beings as economic agents will and act so as to reverse the order or break the unity between covenant and creation. This means we either allow economic function to *rule* at the centre of our lives by prioritising economic advantage above all other considerations – everything else serving this *central* ambition. Or we allow economic function to constitute the *totality* of our lives as we devote ourselves to materialistic pursuit as our singular consideration – nothing else existing outside this *sole* obsession. I argue the risk of economic function becoming the primary or only reality ruling or constituting our lives is especially prone to being actualised in human life because of

the one central vulnerability that all economic systems are threatened by, but which contemporary market capitalism is especially prone to actualising in economic agents – *self-interest degenerating into greed!* Nevertheless, I argue that there is nothing inherent within capitalism itself that ensures it will *necessarily, inevitably*, or *certainly* point to the light side of God’s good creation, or the shadow side, or in fact actualise the evil of nothingness in the human realm. Whether it does these things or not and to what extent is *not* primarily an economic question in relation to the sort of *system* that it is. Rather it is an ethical question in relation to the sorts of *decisions* and *values* people who live within the system make and have in relation to the form of economic life they seek to enact and how they choose to utilise the potentialities capitalism makes possible. As economic agents we stand in a powerful place of potency and peril. Our economic choices may bear witness to a life of trust in the God who provides, alternatively they may bear witness to a life given over to materialistic self-gratification and activity that is exploitative of others and hostile to the purposes of God. This means that the key issue we face is not primarily the different sorts of economic systems, policies, or programmes we might choose between which may render the world a better approximation to the kingdom of God. Rather it is the sorts of choices we make as economic agents and the kinds of lives we choose to enact within the economic systems God has placed us in whereby *our* lives may be rendered better approximations to the activity of God as those called to bear faithful witness to the kingdom of God.

The third key corollary that derives from Barth’s central insight is that good human action is action that corresponds to the goodness of God. Thus Christian ethics seeks to make explicit, in relation to human action and abstention, that which is already implicit in the being and activity of the God who graciously creates, reconciles, and redeems us in Jesus Christ. For Barth, Christian ethics is special ethics (the specific command of God that comes to specific individuals in time and space) that derives from general ethics (the goodness of God as this is revealed in his saving activity in history). On this basis Christian ethics can neither be elevated to abstract universals that hover above us as general or timeless principles, nor can it be casuistically reduced to a comprehensive code. Rather, the command of God comes to us specifically, concretely, and individually in the density of our historical existence as it so pleases God and therefore takes many different and specific forms. But for all its specificity the command of God really only consists of one thing, aims

at one thing, and seeks only one outcome – the affirmation of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ that accomplishes the sanctification of our creaturely being, which is our life, our freedom, and our good. This is because the God who commands us is the God of the covenant and so God does not create us for one purpose then commands us to accomplish another. Therefore Christian ethics is not primarily concerned with knowledge of specific actions and abstentions that might be deemed “good” or “bad”. Rather it is primarily concerned with knowledge of who the God is who commands, the human creature who is commanded, the nature of the history of this ethical encounter, and the form of life the community of faith must enact in the concrete specificity of historical existence to faithfully respond to this encounter. For Barth this means the enactment of a form of life that cultivates attitudes, dispositions, and behaviours that prepare for a faithful hearing and obeying of the specific command of God as and when it may come in the ethical event. As the community of faith prepares and readies itself for participation in this event it must seek ways of being obedient to the one command that lies at the heart of God’s covenantal purposes.

Therefore God does not simply call us to act in certain ways so as to be well pleased by mere external conformity to a moral code while our hearts may be far from him. God’s concern is that we be in *relationship* with him as loving parent and trusting child. Thus obedience to the one command of God is the obedience of love and is therefore the true obedience of a heart that is trusting, joyful, and glad. Thus the command of God is an appeal to our freedom to choose the choice of God. Thus it is a call to genuine and joyful inner agreement and therefore is always an invitation to the human subject to act in good conscience. God’s one command is that by the grace of God in Jesus Christ we actively affirm our creaturely being in the covenantal purposes of God that we may become and be the true and good human creatures God created and ordained for fellowship with God and fellow-humanity. In calling us to obey this one command, the God who has created us *in* freedom and love *for* freedom and love grants us considerable relative freedom in terms of how we may set about obeying it as we hold ourselves in readiness to hear and obey his specific command as and when in the sovereign good pleasure of God it may come to us. And especially as we explore the economic implications of obedience to the one command of God, both as individual Christians and corporately as the community of faith, the freedom of God grants great scope for human imagination

and industry to conceive and implement initiatives that may bear faithful correspondence to the goodness of God.

I see this process as having two key orientations. Negatively the first seeks to *resist* the degenerating tendencies within capitalism that expose Christians as economic agents to the perilous possibility of actualising the threat of nothingness through reversing the order or severing the unity of ruling covenantal centre and serving created circumference. I argue the resources to accomplish this may be found through making explicit the economic implications contained in the three integrating rituals of Christian life and worship that orientates the community of faith to its inner work of sustaining itself – Sabbath, Lord’s Supper, and Baptism. In this way the covenant of grace fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ attested in the lives of Christians as economic agents in conscious human enactment that corresponds to the activity of God. The Sabbath rest reveals God’s freedom and love. Neither God nor his creature is bound by the necessity of some relentless principle that imposes its will from the outside that drives forever onward. Because God has found the object of his love he ceases his creative activity for he has no need of further works. Thus the Sabbath signals God’s priority in terms of what God wills for creation and implicitly commands the *relativisation* of all human work and all human constructs and thus forbids the absolutisation of economic function. Thus for Christians, economic function must stand under the lordship of God. The Lord’s Supper reveals God’s desire for fellowship with his human creatures and that his human creatures are created, reconciled, and redeemed in Jesus Christ for a form of fellowship with one another that embraces every aspect of life including the economic. The supper points to the humanity of God in Christ that in Jesus Christ God’s living Word became flesh to be with us and for us for the sake of fellowship. Thus the supper signals God’s purpose in terms of what God wills for creation and implicitly commands the *humanisation* of all human work and all human constructs and thus forbids the dehumanisation of economic agency. Thus for Christians, economic agency must serve human fellowship. Baptism has its inner basis in Holy Spirit Baptism by God and its human confirmation in water Baptism by the community of faith and reveals God’s transforming power in our lives and that it is God’s will to deliver us from the corrupting power of a life alienated from God. Baptism points to the death of an old way of life characterised by disordered desire and birth into a new life characterised by correspondence to God. It is enacted in identification with

the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit of God. Thus Baptism signals God's power to accomplish his priority and purpose for creation and implicitly commands the *limitation* and *redirection* of all human work and all human constructs and thus forbids the limitless pursuit of economic desire heedless of the will of God. Thus for Christians, economic priority and purpose must be transformed by the life-changing Spirit of God.

However resisting the negative aspects of market capitalism can never be made an end in itself. The church is called by Jesus Christ, to active service in the world for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel. Therefore the conception of economic life I envisage involves, positively and secondly, the Christian community boldly and imaginatively *utilising* the positive potentialities of market capitalism as a serving material circumference to a ruling covenantal centre. I argue this may be done through making explicit the economic implications that are contained in God's kingdom mission in Jesus Christ. In this way the Christian community may initiate economic projects that hold out the hope of pointing to the light side of God's good creation through holding in proper order and unity God's ruling covenantal centre and serving created circumference. Integrating Christian gospel proclamation and Christian economic agency in proper order and unity requires that Christian economic agency serves but is never separated from Christian gospel proclamation. This calls the Christian community to generosity of giving so as to provide economic resources which may be put in service of this mission. But this mission provides astonishing freedom to Christian imagination and entrepreneurial acumen to conceive of economic initiatives and ways of living that may in tangible and meaningful ways bring good news to the poor, release from bondage and captivity, and recovery of sight to the blind, and in this way serve at the circumference of God's ruling covenantal centre to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

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