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**The God of All Comfort: Karl Barth’s
Pastoral Theology of the Cross**

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Introduction

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,⁴ who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

II Corinthians 1:3–5, NRSV

Pastoral ministry entails entering into and sharing the suffering of those to whom we minister. Yet, pastors are not simply fellow-sufferers. Our ministry to those in affliction displays a specific ordering, direction, and shape determined by our call to point to the one who bore all suffering on the cross, sets us free from affliction-causing sin, and invites us to join him in his ministry of consolation. In pastoral ministry, we learn that the cross and the counseling room, the death of Christ and the liberation of the sin-scarred soul, reconciliation with God and a future of service for us all, are not separate motifs in the great story of our faith. Rather, they are deeply interrelated and inseparably united in a dynamic event completed once for all on the cross of Jesus Christ, yet encountered anew and afresh in the lives of those who follow Him.²

Karl Barth's theology demonstrates this unity by tracing the interconnection between two pastoral tasks often regarded as functionally separate: the proclamation of Christ's atoning work and the consolation of those who suffer. The first task addresses the spiritual plight of humankind, the relational rupture caused by sin, and the reconciliation with God achieved through Christ's victory over sin and death on the cross. The second task engages the existential crises endured by all people and offers God's peace and hope in the midst of affliction. Here I suggest that Karl Barth's theology of the cross aligns to the character, ordering, and structure of pastoral ministry described in 2 Corinthians 1:3–5. Put another way, II Corinthians 1:3-5 encapsulates, in broad brush strokes, the main contours of Barth's theology of reconciliation and its outworking in the life of the church. Reading this Scripture passage alongside Barth's theology of the cross highlights the practical, pastoral dimension of his thought, and his

² George Hunsinger examines the "once for all" and "again and again" dimensions of sanctification in "A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Luther, Calvin, and Barth," in *Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 189–215.

deep ministerial sensitivity toward those who suffer. Even though Barth's doctrine of reconciliation offers more than this in its sweeping account of Christ's incarnation, ministry, and death in relation to his prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices, Barth's theology of the cross is never less than a pastoral response to human affliction. Barth demonstrates how pastoral ministries of consolation find their basis within the doctrine of atonement, and the atonement finds its outworking in ministries of consolation.³

A. God's Mercy and Compassion

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation ..." – 2 Corinthians 1:3

God's response to human suffering begins with the mercy and compassion eternally present within Godself and revealed to us in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Barth examines these themes when he considers God's eternal perfections in "The Mercy and Righteousness of God" (*Church Dogmatics* II/1), and Christ's ministry of compassion to the afflicted masses in "The Royal Man," (*Church Dogmatics* IV/2). Indeed, the two cannot be separated, for Christ's ministry to the poor and needy reveals God's compassion to us, and the eternal mercy of God provides the ground and basis of Christ's earthly ministry. I will first sketch Barth's view of God's mercy, and then examine his treatment of Christ's ministry of compassion.

In *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Barth discusses "The Perfections of the Divine Loving" expressed in the pairings of grace and holiness, mercy and righteousness, and patience and wisdom.⁴ Each of these divine perfections coinheres inseparably and indivisibly within the unity of God, "the One who loves in freedom."⁵ Yet, God's unitary being "is lived out by Him, and therefore identical with a multitude of various and distinct types of perfection."⁶ God's diverse perfections

³ In this article, I extend in new directions the arguments that I presented in *Christ Crucified in a Suffering World: The Unity of Atonement and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

⁴ Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* II/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. W. B. Johnston, T. H. L. Parker, Harold Knight, J. L. M. Haire (New York: T & T Clark, 1957), 351–439. Immediately after this discussion, Barth outlines "The Perfections of the Divine Freedom," which include God's unity and omnipresence, constancy and omnipotence, and eternity and glory. See *CD* II/1, 440–677.

⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 322–323.

⁶ Barth, 322.

remain indivisibly joined in perichoretic unity within God's being. They intertwine with and elucidate each other. Yet, they each also attest to unique facets of the diversity of God's unitary being.⁷

In Barth's discussion of God's love, grace, and mercy in "The Mercy and Righteousness of God" (*Church Dogmatics* II/1), we find striking evidence of God's compassion upon those in need. God's love expresses itself in God's decision to enter into relationship with us. God's grace is an aspect of God's love characterized by "the free inclination of an unconditionally superior towards one who is unconditionally subordinate."⁸ God's mercy is God's choice to enter into, experience, and remove "the distress of another."⁹ Barth underscores the close association among these concepts when he claims that divine mercy relates to "the very centre of the concept of divine love and its specific determination as grace." Furthermore, "Divine love bears necessarily the character of mercy."¹⁰

God expresses His mercy by entering into, sharing, and removing human suffering. Indeed, Barth claims that God bears humanity's suffering within God's own heart. Barth therefore rejects divine impassibility, the claim that God cannot suffer, for this would reduce the personal God revealed in Jesus Christ to an "impersonal absolute" whose interactions with the world are "mathematical or mechanical."¹¹ God's merciful love prompts God to bear our suffering in Godself.¹² God turns to us in mercy, makes our sin God's "own intimate concern,"¹³ and chooses to bear both our sin and the suffering it entails. In doing so, God experiences the full depth and magnitude of sin, which we are incapable of experiencing. Barth

⁷ Barth, 368. Barth describes both the unity and diversity of God's being: "the being of God in itself is really one in real plenitude."

⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 369.

⁹ Barth, 377.

¹⁰ Barth, 369.

¹¹ Barth, 370.

¹² Barth has Schleiermacher in mind when he writes, "The source of the feeling of sheer dependence has no heart. But the personal God has a heart. He can feel and be affected. He is not impassible." Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 370. See also Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 201–202.

¹³ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1 (Zürich: Theologischer, 1980), 456.

argues that, “Our suffering for sin has not touched us, and cannot touch us, as it touches Him.”¹⁴

Christ’s earthly ministry consistently reveals the mercy and compassion within God’s heart.¹⁵ Even before Christ bears and removes humanity’s sin and sin-caused suffering on the cross, Christ turns to those who suffer, feels profound compassion for them, and alleviates their distress. In *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, Barth reminds us that when Jesus sees the shepherdless masses, he is filled with compassion for them (ἐσπλαγγνίσθη).¹⁶ Barth writes, “[Jesus] was not only affected to the heart by the misery which surrounded Him—sympathy in our modern sense is far too feeble a word—but it went right into His heart, into Himself, so that it was now His misery.”¹⁷ Jesus bears human misery in its true depth and intensity, which are beyond our capacities to bear, causing all other instances of suffering to exist as reflections of his own.¹⁸ In this way, Barth’s interpretation of human suffering is thoroughly Christocentric. Christ takes up and bears human suffering so completely that humanity may no longer understand its own suffering apart from God’s merciful love revealed in Christ’s incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection. As he takes up and bears humanity’s affliction in compassionate love, Christ also acts decisively to relieve it. In his miracles, Jesus addresses people “with whom things are going badly,” people in desperate need of consolation in their suffering. These miracles unmask humanity’s actual situation of profound need, which is “like a great hospital whose many departments in some way enfold us all.”¹⁹

Although the effects of sin, and the suffering sin causes, permeate human life as we now know it, when Christ turns to relieve human affliction he does not simply address spiritual conditions but regards

¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 374. Elsewhere Barth writes, “The sorrow which openly or secretly fills the heart of man is primarily in the heart of God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 225.

¹⁵ Barth describes the reliability of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ: “[Jesus] was on earth as God is in heaven.” Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* IV/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: T & T Clark, 1958), 184.

¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 184–187. See also Albert Dahm, *Der Gerichtsgedanke in der Versöhnungslehre Karl Barth*, vol. XLVII, Konfessionskundliche und Kontroverstheologische Studien (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1983), 134.

¹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 184.

¹⁸ Barth writes, “The cry of those who suffered was only an echo. ... Jesus had made it His own.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 184.

¹⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 221.

“the whole man in ... his ‘natural’ existence in the narrower sense, his physical existence.”²⁰ While affirming the connection between humanity’s fall into sin and the suffering we now experience,²¹ which we will consider further in section IV, Barth notes that when Jesus turns to heal those in affliction he usually does not mention their sins.²² Rather, Christ regards them as sufferers first, people who indeed are also sinners but whose suffering requires immediate intervention. In this way, Christ’s miracles reveal the opposition of God’s merciful love to all that causes human suffering and distress.

In Jesus Christ, God stands in solidarity with suffering humanity and “enters the field against this power of destruction in all its forms.”²³ Humanity, suffering under the effects and consequences of sin, remains the object of God’s primary concern.²⁴ Barth writes, “[The Son of Man] goes right past sin, beyond it and through it, directly to man himself; for His purpose is always with man.”²⁵ By turning with compassion toward suffering humanity in order to relieve humanity’s distress, Jesus Christ demonstrates God’s deep desire to comfort, console, and liberate the people God loves.²⁶ In this way, Jesus Christ reveals and confirms the Father’s “mercies” and “consolation” extended to us (II Corinthians 1:3).

B. God Consols Those Who Suffer

“who consoles us ...” – 2 Corinthians 1:4a

As Christ’s miracles relieve the immediate causes of human affliction, and thereby reveal the mercy eternally present within God,

²⁰ Barth, 222, revised.

²¹ Barth, 223. Elsewhere Barth writes, “Sin as such is not only an offence to God; it also disturbs, injures and destroys the creature and its nature. And although there can be no doubt that it is committed by man, it is obviously attended and followed by suffering, i.e., the suffering of evil and death.” Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* III/3, ed. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 310.

²² Barth notes exceptions, such as Christ’s healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1–12. Of this passage, Barth writes, “The obvious aim of the story is to bring out the connexion of Jesus’ miracles with His proclamation.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 223.

²³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 225, revised.

²⁴ Barth, 227. On 225–226, he writes, “[The Son of Man] goes right past sin, beyond it and through it, directly to man himself; for His purpose is always with man.”

²⁵ Barth, 225–226.

²⁶ Barth, 225: “The activity of the Son of Man, as an actualisation of His Word and commentary on it, necessarily has the crucial and decisive form of liberation, redemption, restoration, normalization.” See also p. 232.

so Christ's confrontation with the sin at the source of humanity's suffering demonstrates the depth and effectiveness of God's consolation. In Jesus Christ, sinful and suffering people encounter the compassion of God. Indeed, Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection form the original pastoral act to which all other pastoral ministries exist as an echo and reflection.

God in Jesus Christ "consoles us in all our affliction ..." (2 Cor 1:4a) by not only addressing the surface-level symptoms or the most visible features of our distress, but also by addressing the root of the problem. Sin separates humanity from God and destroys the fellowship with God for which we have been created. Barth describes sin as humanity's "headlong [rush] into nothingness, into eternal death,"²⁷ as "nothingness," as the "impossible possibility," and as the "ontological impossibility."²⁸ Sin constitutes humanity's greatest dilemma, for it is "the ground of humanity's hopeless destiny in death," and "the source ... of the destruction which threatens humanity." Because sin ruptures humanity's relationship with God, Jesus Christ's reconciling work overcomes both this separation and the destruction sin entails. He does so "by treading the way of sinners to its bitter end in death" and thereby removing sin, and the eternal death to which sin leads, from humanity.²⁹ Apart from God's intervention in Jesus Christ, humanity remains helplessly unable to free itself from its self-chosen destruction.

In order to console those who suffer, we must draw near to the afflicted and open our lives to them as we humbly accept their invitation to enter their lives. In the archetypal, determinative pastoral act, reflected and echoed in all subsequent moments of pastoral ministry, God the Son draws near to suffering humanity in Jesus Christ by becoming fully human without ceasing to be fully God. Christology, in this way, provides the foundation for reconciliation, and by extension, for the pastoral ministry that proclaims and demonstrates this reconciliation. In "The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country" (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1), Barth offers several

²⁷ Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* IV/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 213.

²⁸ Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: T & T Clark, 1961), 178–179.

²⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 252–253, revised.

presuppositions that form the core of his Christology, which anchors “everything that follows”³⁰ and “which, at all costs, we must accept and affirm.”³¹ First, God in Jesus Christ is the One who acts and who alone reconciles humanity with God. “When we have to do with Jesus Christ we have to do with God.”³² Christ’s exclusively unique status as God and human entails that Christ’s person and work reveal the being and act of God. Therefore, when Christ draws near to those in need and acts with compassion toward those in distress, we see God in flesh extending mercy to sinful, suffering humanity. Second, in Jesus Christ, God acts within the contexts and processes of human life and culture, within “the sphere of human and world history.”³³ Here Barth emphasizes God’s nearness to humanity, the proximity God attains by entering into human life in the person of Jesus Christ. Third, Barth argues that Jesus Christ reveals God to us in his humiliation and suffering: “Everything depends ... on our seeing and understanding ... the proper being of the one true God in Jesus Christ the Crucified.” In light of this, we must “accept the humiliation and lowliness and supremely the obedience of Christ as the dominating moment in our conception of God.” Jesus Christ reveals God’s condescending, compassionate, and pursuing love by standing in “solidarity with the creature,” by “bring[ing] help where there is no other help,” and by setting humanity free from its sin and suffering.³⁴

C. God Confronts the Source of Affliction

“in all our afflictions ...” – 2 Corinthians 1:4b

God in Jesus Christ draws near to us by taking on human flesh, acting within human history, and revealing Godself to us. Christ then confronts the source of humanity’s affliction: its sin-caused separation from God. Karl Barth speaks of this process in “The Judge Judged in

³⁰ Barth, 211.

³¹ Barth, 197. As Gustaf Aulén aptly states, “The Incarnation is the necessary presupposition of the Atonement, and the Atonement the completion of the Incarnation.” Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 151. For more on the inseparability of Christ’s person and work, see George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character (1999),” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131–132, fn 2.

³² Barth, 198.

³³ Barth, 198.

³⁴ Barth, 199.

Our Place” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1), and “Jesus is Victor” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1).

Scripture employs diverse metaphors to portray the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ. In “The Judge Judged in Our Place,” Barth describes atonement using four forensic statements that he then re-expresses in priestly terms. Through these statements, Barth attempts to explain how “Jesus Christ was and is ‘for us’”³⁵ by acting “as our Representative and Substitute.”³⁶ First, “Jesus Christ was and is for us” because he took our place as the judge. According to Barth, “All sin has its being and origin in the fact that humanity wants to be its own judge.”³⁷ Often we are tempted to view ourselves as judges qualified to declare ourselves innocent and others guilty. “Not all people commit all sins, but all people commit this sin which is the essence and root of all other sins.”³⁸ Jesus Christ enters “that place”³⁹ in which humanity has set itself up as the judge, and removes humanity from this place, for the right to judge belongs to God alone. As Christ takes his rightful place as the judge, the substitutionary logic of atonement, and Christ’s solidarity with afflicted humanity, begin to come into view: by reclaiming the place of the judge, Jesus Christ saves us from ourselves,⁴⁰ and demonstrates that “He is radically and totally for us, in our place.”⁴¹ Corresponding to the forensic imagery of Christ as the judge, Barth depicts Christ as the High Priest who serves as humanity’s “mediator and representative” before God.⁴² By achieving reconciliation between humanity and God, the great atonement foreshadowed by the ministry of the Levitical priesthood in the O.T., Jesus offers humanity “peace with God, access to Him, and hope in Him (cf. Heb 10:19f with Rom 5:1f).”⁴³

³⁵ Barth, 231.

³⁶ Barth, 230.

³⁷ Barth, 220; see also 231.

³⁸ Barth, 220, revised.

³⁹ Barth, 232, where Barth speaks of “that place where every person is in his inner being supremely by and for himself.”

⁴⁰ Barth, 216–217.

⁴¹ Barth, 232.

⁴² Barth, 275.

⁴³ Barth, 276–277.

Second, “Jesus Christ was and is for us” by taking our place as sinners. Because our decision to judge ourselves and others constitutes “our basic sin,” and “All our other sins, both small and great, derive ultimately from this source,”⁴⁴ the place of the judge has become the place of sinners. When Jesus takes back the place of the judge, which rightfully belongs to him as God, he also occupies the place of sinners as the sinless one standing in representative solidarity for all sinners. By doing so, Jesus “gives Himself ... to the fellowship of those who are guilty,” makes “their evil case His own,” and bears their “accusation and sentence.”⁴⁵ Jesus removes humanity from the place of its sinful judging, and in doing so Jesus also removes sin from humanity, making it his own along with “the accusation, the judgment, and the curse which necessarily fall on us there.”⁴⁶ As God, Jesus Christ judges sin. As human, Jesus Christ bears God’s judgment to spare the people God loves from suffering the penalty for sin.

Third, “Jesus Christ was and is for us” because he suffered and died. Christ’s death is unique and unrepeatable in several ways. First, Jesus did not merely suffer his death passively. He also “willed” this event. Therefore, Christ’s death was both a passion and an action. Second, Jesus’ death occurred at “a very definite point in world history which cannot be exchanged for any other.” This contextual anchoring prevents his death from being viewed as a timeless myth. In fact, the historical particularity of Christ’s death grounds its universal relevance. Third, in light of the hypostatic union, “this human action and suffering” is “the passion of God Himself,” which cannot be said of any other instance of human suffering.⁴⁷ If Jesus were only human and not also divine, then his crucifixion would not be unique at all; it would fade into human history as simply another instance of brutal suffering and death. By making this claim, Barth in no sense intends to minimize either human suffering in general or the specific forms of physical suffering experienced by Jesus on the cross.⁴⁸ Rather, he is arguing that the singularity of Christ’s death lies

⁴⁴ Barth, 235.

⁴⁵ Barth, 236.

⁴⁶ Barth, 236–237.

⁴⁷ Barth, 245.

⁴⁸ Indeed, Barth acknowledges the profundity of every experience of suffering: “Even if it is only the whimper of a sick child it has in it as such something which in its own way is infinitely outstanding [Footnote continued on next page ...]”

elsewhere than in the magnitude of his physical suffering. The exclusive uniqueness of Christ's suffering and death derives from "the person and mission of the One who suffered there."⁴⁹ In Jesus Christ, God enters into and experiences suffering and death as a human person. As a unique and unrepeatable act, Christ's passion "objectively" and "decisively" changes humanity's relationship with God⁵⁰ by reconciling "the world with God."⁵¹

On the cross, God in Jesus Christ confronts "the destruction which threatens all creation and every individual," "eternal death," "the power of that which is not," and "sin itself and as such." Because Jesus uniquely "wrestle[s] with" sin, suffering, and death on the cross, "His passion has a real dimension of depth which it alone can have in the whole series of human passions." God in Jesus Christ overcomes the sin that separates humanity from God and the "corruption" that arises as the result of sin. "In the place of all people He has Himself wrestled with that which separates them from Him. He has Himself borne the consequence of this separation to bear it away."⁵² Jesus Christ's suffering and death, grounded in the exclusive uniqueness of his person as God and human, achieves the reconciliation of the world with God.⁵³

Barth's priestly portrayal of atonement integrates the second and third elements of his forensic account (Christ took our place as sinners, and Christ suffered and died): Christ is both the "one true Priest" who offers the sacrifice for sin, and he himself is the "one true sacrifice." As Priest, Christ removes humanity's sin by offering himself as the eternally effective sacrifice.⁵⁴ As he does in his forensic depiction, Barth places expiation (i.e. the removal of sin and sinners) at the center of his priestly account of atonement. Through Christ's

and moving and ... something which we can even describe as shattering." Ibid., 246. Christ, in his suffering, experienced the shattering crisis common to all instances of human suffering. Because of this, the intensity of Christ's physical suffering points to his solidarity with afflicted humanity, and the uniqueness of his suffering lies elsewhere.

⁴⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 246.

⁵⁰ Barth, 245.

⁵¹ Barth, 246–247.

⁵² Barth, 247, revised.

⁵³ Barth, 251–252. For Barth, the "decisive" means of reconciliation is expiation, i.e. the removal of sin and of ourselves as sinners (pp. 253–254).

⁵⁴ Barth, 277.

sacrifice on the cross, God “shed our wicked blood in His own precious blood” and “kill[ed] our sin in His own death.”⁵⁵ By removing our sin and ourselves as sinners, Jesus removes the obstacle to our reconciliation with God and unites us in fellowship with our Creator.

Fourth, “Jesus Christ was and is for us” because he acted rightly before God. Jesus displays his righteousness in the place of human disobedience by acting “justly in our place.”⁵⁶ On the cross, Christ acts in “the fulness of a positive divine righteousness” which reveals “the free love of God effectively interposing between our enmity and Himself.”⁵⁷ Jesus provides in himself “the obedience of the creature” to God, which is the righteousness humanity lacks.⁵⁸ He does this in our place by acknowledging God as the Judge, accepting the rightness of God’s judgment against sinners, bearing this judgment as humanity’s representative before God, and thereby reconciling humanity with God.

In priestly terms, Christ is the “perfect sacrifice” that takes the place of “all the sacrifices offered by people.”⁵⁹ The perfection of Christ’s sacrifice consists of his obedience to God’s will by which he converts disobedient humanity to God in his own person and puts to death humanity’s sin in his own death.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the removal of sin and the establishment of human righteousness in Jesus Christ inaugurates the social transformation of human community: “The doing of evil ceases..... The violent are now restrained, the orphans are helped to their right and the cause of the widow is taken up (Isa 1:16f).”⁶¹

Christ further consoles us in our affliction through the victory he attains on the cross, which Barth describes in “Jesus is Victor,” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1). Here Barth describes the atonement in royal imagery within a section of the *Church Dogmatics* devoted to Christ’s prophetic office. This placement indicates that Christ’s

⁵⁵ Barth, 280.

⁵⁶ Barth, 273.

⁵⁷ Barth, 257.

⁵⁸ Barth, 257.

⁵⁹ Barth, 281, revised.

⁶⁰ Barth, 281–282.

⁶¹ Barth, 281.

victory (royal office) provides the content of Christ's prophetic self-witness.⁶² As Jesus prophetically declares humanity's reconciliation with God, a clash ensues between the "light" he reveals and the utter darkness of humanity's sinful condition.⁶³ In this conflict, the light of Jesus Christ exposes darkness for what it is and attacks "sin, death and the devil" with "the incomparable, living, effective and penetrating sword of Heb 4:12."⁶⁴ People themselves do not constitute the darkness opposed by Jesus Christ, though darkness deeply influences humanity. Instead, Jesus Christ "attack[s] and force[s] on the defensive" an element within humanity that opposes reconciliation.⁶⁵ Jesus extends his grace to people while confronting "the resisting element in [them]" that opposes God's grace.⁶⁶ At every point, this conflict exhibits a clear direction, in which light confronts darkness, and an assured conclusion, in which Jesus Christ victoriously inaugurates the peace, joy, and freedom of reconciliation with God.⁶⁷ Even though this conflict rages, and we experience Christ's victory as a "'still' and 'not yet'"⁶⁸ reality under the current conditions of our lives, Jesus Christ ensures the final outcome due to his "unconditional superiority" as the Word of God.⁶⁹

D. God Removes the Suffering Caused by Sin

"in all our afflictions ..." – 2 Corinthians 1:4b

For Barth, God in Jesus Christ "consoles us in all our afflictions" (2 Corinthians 1:4b) by healing both the relational rupture between God and humanity, and the suffering caused by sin. To understand the full consolation achieved through Christ's cross in Barth's thought, we must first examine the connection between sin and suffering.

⁶² See Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 78. John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 139.

⁶³ For this reason, Christ's prophetic ministry may be described as "a history of conflict." Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 237.

⁶⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, 238, see also 239.

⁶⁵ Barth, 251, see also

⁶⁶ Barth, 272.

⁶⁷ Barth, 237–238, 246–248, 251–252.

⁶⁸ Barth, 262–263.

⁶⁹ Barth, 266–267.

In “The Mercy and Righteousness of God” (*Church Dogmatics* II/1), Barth highlights three links between sin and suffering. First, sin intrinsically entails suffering, and misery inseparably adjoins sin.⁷⁰ One cannot sin without the sinful act damaging the sinner in such a way that the sin in and of itself becomes a form of suffering. Second, sin leads to suffering as the “punishment” and “judgment” of sin.⁷¹ Third, suffering is the consequence and inevitable result of sin.⁷² Sinful choices lead to painful outcomes. As a consequence of sin, affliction may arise not only due to one’s own sin but also as the result of the sin of others. Though all remain sinners before God, those who suffer the undeserved consequences of other people’s sin suffer innocently. This recognition opens the door for theological discussions of “victims” (i.e. those who suffer innocently) and of “injustice” (i.e. the sinful actions that cause the suffering of victims).⁷³

When considering forms of suffering arising from random, accidental events or “natural evils,” we usually cannot identify an unjust human cause. When Jesus’ disciples see a blind man in John 9:2–3, they ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus’ response is instructive: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV). Likewise, we cannot assign blame. Christ’s words suggest that certain types of suffering are not directly caused by prior sin, neither the sin of the sufferer nor the sin of others. Furthermore, Barth reminds us that, in light of Christ’s atoning work,

⁷⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, he said, “Arrogance is seen as pitiable folly, the usurpation of freedom as rigorous bondage, evil lust as bitter torment.” See also Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 144, 220, and 436.

⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 371. Elsewhere, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 253, Barth said, “We can say indeed that [Jesus Christ] fulfils this judgment by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves.” See also *CD* III/3, 275; *CD* IV/1, 12, 553; *CD* IV/2, 223. Wolf Krötke, *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. David Willis, trans. Philip G. Ziegler and Christina-Maria Bammel, vol. 10, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 79; see also 77–78, 81. David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 36. Bruce L. McCormack, *For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. David Willis-Watkins, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993), 30–32.

⁷² Barth, *CD* II/1, 371. See also Karl Barth, *CD* III/3, 310–311; *CD* IV/1, 436. Karl Barth, “Poverty,” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946–52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 245. Dahm, 134–135. Krötke, 68.

⁷³ George Hunsinger, “The Sinner and the Victim,” in *T & T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, edited by Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber, (New York: T & T Clark, 2016), 433–450.

the question of human guilt in relation to certain forms of human suffering, like genetic defects or natural disasters for which no one is directly responsible, becomes groundless. All are guilty of sin, and Christ offers his righteousness to all.⁷⁴ At the same time, in “The Pride of Humanity” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1),⁷⁵ Barth argues that humanity’s sin causes “the irruption of chaos” within “the sphere of creation.”⁷⁶ Although no specific person may be blamed for random maladies, natural disasters, or devastating accidents, sinful humanity as a whole twists God’s good creation, and this distortion then leads to various afflictions in the natural order. In this way, sinful humanity collectively bears some responsibility for the suffering caused by natural evils.

According to Barth, when Christ confronts sin on the cross, he also confronts human affliction in the diversity and complexity of its forms, including the suffering caused by random accidents and natural disasters. Christ’s crucifixion “reveal[s]” the significance of seemingly every form of human suffering, even “the great catastrophes of nature and history.”⁷⁷ Natural evils, whose relation to prior sin is not self-evident, receive similar status under the current, fallen conditions of our lives as the affliction directly caused by unjust human action. When Jesus Christ removes sin, and the suffering arising from sin, he opens the way for the healing of human affliction in all its forms.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ See Karl Barth, “Johannes 9, 13 (1938),” in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Predigten 1935–1952*, ed. Hartmut Spieker and Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1996), 115–118.

⁷⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, revised.

⁷⁶ Barth, 436.

⁷⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 395.

⁷⁸ While maintaining the connection between sin and suffering, Barth complexifies the picture further by speculating that natural death and some accidents would still occur in a sinless state as part of God’s good order of creation. He calls this the “‘shadow side’ of creation.” Barth, *CD* III/3, 350. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. O. Bussey J. W. Edwards, Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), 372, 380–382; Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* III/2, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley Harold Knight, J. K. S. Reid, R. H. Fuller (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 598, 631–632; Barth, *CD* III/3, 297. Because we do not live in a sinless state, we cannot imagine sinless physical death or accidents. Within the fallen conditions of our lives, Barth argues that all suffering maintains a connection to sin. Sin amplifies and distorts the natural evils that may have existed in an unfallen state, rendering their original, unfallen character inaccessible to our fallen imaginations.

E. Our Pastoral Response

“so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.”

– 2 Corinthians 1:4c

Barth argues in “The Mercy and Righteousness of God” (*Church Dogmatics* II/1) that God calls humanity, upon whom God has mercy, to respond by extending God’s mercy to others. As John Webster writes, “Grace is imperatival.”⁷⁹ Christians must recognize the ethical responsibility given to all people that corresponds to God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ. Simply put, God’s righteousness determines the character of the human righteousness God requires. Throughout the O.T., we see that God consistently acts to aid “the poor, the widows and orphans, the weak and defenseless.”⁸⁰ Likewise, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God turns to sinners whose inability to achieve God’s righteousness reduces them to desperate need.⁸¹ Christians recognize that in God’s sight they themselves are “the poor and wretched,” and therefore they recognize the deep solidarity that binds them to all who are poor and afflicted around them, as well as their duty to respond in mercy by consoling sufferers and alleviating their affliction.⁸² The human righteousness that responds in obedience to God’s call conforms, therefore, to God’s righteousness by possessing “necessarily the character of a vindication of right in favour of the threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, widows, orphans and aliens.”⁸³ This human righteousness entails “a very definite political problem and task,”⁸⁴ “a political attitude,” and “a political responsibility,”⁸⁵ determined by the human need the Christian encounters. Those who recognize God’s mercy and righteousness in Jesus Christ cannot view human need

⁷⁹ John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51.

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 386; see also 387; William Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 236–237.

⁸¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 387.

⁸² Barth, 387.

⁸³ Barth, 386.

⁸⁴ Barth, 386.

⁸⁵ Barth, 387.

without understanding that they are “made responsible to all those who are poor and wretched in [their] eyes, that [they are] summoned ... to espouse the cause of those who suffer wrong.” Christians seek to console those in affliction through alleviating their distress for the simple reason that Christians see their own spiritual poverty before God in the world’s material poverty.⁸⁶ Profound solidarity, therefore, infuses the Christian’s interaction with the vulnerable, the poor, the distressed, the grieving, and the oppressed. As they recognize their solidarity with the afflicted, Christians receive the obligation to do all they can to relieve misery as an extension of the mercy they themselves have received. Any other response by Christians to those who suffer, Barth argues, constitutes a rejection of their own justification.⁸⁷

We may draw further insights regarding the Christian duty to console those who suffer from “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country,” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1). Philippians 2:7–8 describes Christ emptying himself in humility by “taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” and by being “obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross,” (NRSV). Christ’s downward movement in humility, though, cannot be separated from his upward movement: “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name ...” (Phil 2:9). Philippians 2:3 instructs Christians to display “the same mind ... that was in Christ Jesus ...” Therefore, the movement of *kenosis*, which entails humility and exaltation, extends from Christ to encompass those who follow “in His steps” by “looking to Christ and His way as an example.”⁸⁸ Profound implications result for Christian ministry and ethics as Christ leads us “from the heights to the depths, from riches to poverty, from victory to defeat, from triumph to suffering, from life to death ...” We live and serve under the sign of the cross “in fellowship with the Crucified.”⁸⁹ By grounding the Christian’s service in Jesus

⁸⁶ Barth, 387.

⁸⁷ Barth, 387.

⁸⁸ Barth, 189. Barth speaks of the “law” of humility as “the one binding law for both the Head and the members, for Jesus and His people, and because for Jesus therefore also for His people.” Barth, *CD* IV/1, 189.

⁸⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 190. George Hunsinger relates Christ’s *kenosis* in Barth’s thought to the “enemy-love” at “the heart of the gospel.” Hunsinger, “The Politics of the Nonviolent [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Christ's *kenosis*, Barth avoids valorizing self-sacrifice as an end in itself.⁹⁰ Christians have only one goal: following Jesus Christ wherever he leads. Their path will move downward in obedience and service, yet along this path they will also arise in newness of life.⁹¹

Christian service occurs within the broader context of participation in Christ's prophetic work, which Barth addresses in "The Vocation of Humanity," (*Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2).⁹² Jesus Christ's "self-declaration" establishes the Christian vocation of witness to the "Word of reconciliation," the joyful news of humanity's union with God in Jesus Christ.⁹³ Christians then find themselves incorporated within a "community of action"⁹⁴ in which they are called, which "means being given a task," and led into vocation, the "execution of this task."⁹⁵ Christian vocation consists of speech and action that witness to Jesus Christ's reconciling work.⁹⁶ This "twofold ... unity" follows the pattern of ministry established by Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection by which he models "speech which is also action ... and action which is also speech."⁹⁷ Although Christ's proclamation often precedes and elucidates his actions, both contain his "self-declaration."⁹⁸ In a similar way, Christians attest to Christ's self-revelation and the reality of reconciliation with God through speech and action. In fact, both activities communicate the same content, for when Christians act they

God: Reflections on René Girard and Karl Barth (1998)," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 35, 37–38.

⁹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 191–192.

⁹¹ Christians experience *kenosis* and exaltation in analogy to, and in participation with, Christ's *kenosis* and exaltation. Their *kenosis* is their humble service to others, and their exaltation is their reconciliation with God, which entails their vivification and liberation. Barth follows Calvin in regarding *participatio Christi* as the basis of Christian sanctification. Barth, *CD* IV/2, 581.

⁹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 481–680, title revised.

⁹³ Barth, 481–482. See also Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 142. George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 275.

⁹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 597.

⁹⁵ Barth, 573–574.

⁹⁶ Barth, 860–862.

⁹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 862. In an early essay, Barth writes, "Jesus by word and deed opposed the material misery which *ought not to be*. Indeed, he did so by instilling persons with the Spirit which transforms matter. ... He worked from the internal to the external. He created new men in order to create a new world." Karl Barth, "Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice (1911)," in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, edited by George Hunsinger, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 28, italics in original.

⁹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 862.

declare “the same thing in another way, with the speech of their acts, with their hands as well as their lips.”⁹⁹

One way that Christians proclaim with their actions the reality of humanity’s reconciliation with God is through diaconal service, which demonstrates with unique clarity the liberation from affliction made possible by Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁰ While recognizing that poverty takes many forms,¹⁰¹ and that every aspect of Christian life must exhibit the character of service, Barth follows the tradition in calling the church’s ministries to aid those in physical and economic distress “the diaconate” (from *διακονία*).¹⁰² Christians console those who suffer by “explicitly accept[ing] solidarity with the least of little ones ... with those who are pushed to the margin ... with fellow-creatures who temporarily at least, and perhaps permanently, are useless and insignificant and perhaps even burdensome and destructive.”¹⁰³ According to Matthew 25, the church through its diaconal service declares these people to be the “brothers [and sisters] of Jesus Christ” and attests to God’s solidarity with suffering humanity through the incarnation. If the church neglects this task, then “even though its proclamation of Christ is otherwise ever so powerful, it stands hopelessly on the left hand among the goats” and its witness becomes “futile.”¹⁰⁴

Diaconal ministry remains intrinsically modest, because the tremendous amount of unmet need in our world will continually overshadow its accomplishments. In addition, because diaconal ministry serves those furthest removed from the world’s attention and

⁹⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2.

¹⁰⁰ Barth’s comments on Christian diaconal service occur within the context of a broader examination of various ministries given to Christians as part of their prophetic vocation of witness. These ministries, like prophetic witness itself, always entail both speech and action. For Barth, speech always precedes and elucidates the meaning of the action. Although diaconal service seems to emphasize Christian action, we must regard this service as action inseparably united to speech. Therefore, the proclamation of the gospel (evangelism) and ministries that promote social justice (diaconal service) must operate hand in hand. Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 865–901.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 243, where Barth acknowledges that poverty may appear in sociological, physical, relational, intellectual, and spiritual forms.

¹⁰² Barth, 889: “Diaconate means quite simply and generally the rendering of service.”

¹⁰³ Barth, 891.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946–1952*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 34, 46, 47. See also Jane A. Barter, “A Theology of Liberation in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* IV/3,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53 (2000): 174.

concern, it occurs without fanfare or acclaim in the unsung, unnoticed acts that console those forgotten and abandoned by others. This service constitutes one form of “the good deed which corresponds to the good Word,” which permits “the good Word to be understood in the fulness of its truth.”¹⁰⁵

F. The Cross We Bear

“For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us ...” – 2 Corinthians 1:5a

Christians quickly discover that their proclamation of Christ’s reconciliation, through word and deed, increases their own need for consolation as they follow in the costly steps of the Crucified. As an inseparable aspect of their prophetic witness, Christians receive a cross in analogy, correspondence, and witness to Christ’s cross.¹⁰⁶ Due to the exclusive uniqueness of Christ’s person and work, Christians do not in any way contribute to the reconciliation of the world with God that Christ accomplishes no matter how similar their suffering may appear on the surface to Christ’s own. Nevertheless, Christians do experience an echo, a reflection, and an aftershock of Christ’s affliction as they step forward in faithful witness to the reconciliation Christ accomplishes.¹⁰⁷ As mentioned previously, this acknowledgment in no way entails the valorization of suffering, as though it were an experience to be sought out. Christians possess a firm grasp of life’s true character, purpose, and value, and therefore see suffering’s destructiveness in its true light. In response, they rightly avoid suffering whenever possible. Yet, the “life-movement”¹⁰⁸ of sanctification leads along a path that will be intersected, literally “crossed through,”¹⁰⁹ by the affliction inseparable

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 892.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 609–613. Christians bear a cross in the form of persecution, the suffering and death intrinsic to human life, and temptations in the form of severe doubts.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 598–605. In this section, Barth carefully enumerates the differences between Christ’s cross and the Christian’s cross. Christ alone reconciles humanity with God, Christ alone experiences God’s rejection, Christ is uniquely exalted, and Christ alone bears his cross in spotless obedience.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 601–602. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985), 208–209.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 602. Barth speaks of the cross (das Kreuz) “crossing through” (*durchkreuzen*) the believer’s life. Karl Barth *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2, (Zürich: Theologischer, 1980), 680.

from discipleship. “To save his life [the Christian] must surrender and lose it. He will not seek or induce this loss. It will come to him.”¹¹⁰

Three sources cause this suffering. First, the world responds harshly to the consoling proclamation of humanity’s reconciliation with God, which it perceives as “monstrous presumption and insolent demand.”¹¹¹ In the “Yes” of reconciliation with God, proclaimed by Christians, the world hears God’s “No” toward its attempts to construct a godless life.¹¹² The world then responds by declaring its own “much more energetic No,” and reacts with “oppressive counter pressure” to the “pressure” it perceives in Christian witness.¹¹³ Christians in this way often suffer the world’s negative response to their joyful, consoling proclamation. Second, affliction comes upon Christians because of their refusal to avoid the reality of their calling as Christ’s witnesses, or to change the content of their witness.¹¹⁴ Instead of offering “easy and cheap” words, they proclaim God’s “Yes” to humanity, which “is necessarily enclosed in the No which [humanity] never like[s] to hear.”¹¹⁵ Finally, Christians suffer because they enter deep fellowship with Jesus Christ along their path of prophetic witness, and this fellowship entails affliction “grounded ... in the affliction of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁶ Christians witness to a world “shaken and threatened to its foundations” by Christ’s self-witness.¹¹⁷ As they point to Christ, therefore, Christians bring upon themselves the same opposition the world directs against him, and their suffering distinctly reflects his own.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 603.

¹¹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 620.

¹¹² Barth, 622.

¹¹³ Barth, 623.

¹¹⁴ Barth, 626.

¹¹⁵ Barth, 627.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 634 and 639. Cf. George Hunsinger, “The Politics of the Nonviolent God,” 39.

¹¹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 634.

¹¹⁸ In *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 607–609, Barth examines the four-fold sanctifying function of the Christian’s cross. Through their suffering, they gain humility, a reminder of the punishment they have been spared, increased faith, obedience, and love, and certain “verifications” of God’s activity in their lives due to their increased dependence upon the Holy Spirit. These confirmations of God’s activity may take the form of works that are “more tested and purified and substantial, and may indeed be better and greater, than ever before.”

G. The Consolation We Receive

“so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.” – 2 Corinthians 1:5b

Christ mercifully consoles Christians in their suffering. While their own well-being must never motivate Christians in their vocation of witness, for their life circumstances remain subordinate to their calling,¹¹⁹ Barth argues that they will nonetheless experience the confirmation of “the content of [their] witness”¹²⁰ in the form of “the benefits which Christ has won for the whole world and for all people.”¹²¹ By selflessly proclaiming the world’s reconciliation with God, and bearing the affliction that attends their prophetic vocation, Christians advance their “own best interests.”¹²² For Barth, the consolation of liberation encompasses both the spiritual and material dimensions of life as a holistic experience of the benefits of salvation granted to Christians through union with Christ.¹²³ Counterintuitively, this consolation flows to Christians as they subvert their own self-actualization by stepping forward in selfless service to God and their neighbors. A mutually reinforcing dialectic then unfolds in which the Christian serves “God who points him to his neighbour” and “his neighbour who points him to God.”¹²⁴ By serving God and suffering humanity through the proclamation in speech and action of humanity’s reconciliation with God, Christians experience the reality of the message they proclaim, the consolation of their own liberation, which entails “peace and joy, and even great peace and great joy.”¹²⁵ In this way, although Christians will not seek their own liberation as they proclaim reconciliation, they will nevertheless receive liberating consolation as an intrinsic aspect of their prophetic vocation of witness.

¹¹⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 652.

¹²⁰ Barth, 648–649.

¹²¹ Barth, 651–652, revised.

¹²² Barth, 653.

¹²³ George Hunsinger notes that Barth follows Luther and Calvin by interpreting I Corinthians 1:30 to mean that “Only through union with the person of Christ c[an] his saving benefits be received, for Christ and his benefits [a]re one.” George Hunsinger, “Barth on Jesus, Lord of Time (Hebrews 13:8),” in *Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed*, George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 260.

¹²⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 652.

¹²⁵ Barth, 654.

Conclusion—The God of All Comfort

Karl Barth's theology of the cross traces God's pastoral consolation in Jesus Christ, which establishes the content and pattern of our pastoral ministries today. The God of all comfort turns to us in mercy and consoles us in our affliction by confronting and removing the source of our distress, the sin that leads to our suffering. Our compassionate God then calls us to extend the consolation we have received by proclaiming, through speech and action, humanity's reconciliation with God to those around us. As we do so, we bear the affliction and liberation that accompany our vocation of witness. Our ministries to those who suffer occur under the sign of the cross, and God's consolation flows in and through those who tread in the footsteps of the Crucified. Karl Barth's theology of reconciliation in this way aligns to the character, ordering, and structure of 2 Corinthians 1:3–5, and reveals the pastoral commitment that undergirds Barth's thought. Furthermore, Barth demonstrates the deficiency of isolating ministries of consolation from their basis in the doctrine of atonement on one hand, and, on the other hand, of speaking of Christ's cross without reference to its pastoral implications. Understood in this way, the atonement enfolds pastoral concerns, such as our entrance into others' suffering for their consolation, and pastoral ministries point to the cross of Jesus Christ, where God entered into human suffering for the salvation and consolation of the world.

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