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# Karl Barth and the *Articulus iustificationis*

*The significance of his critique of Ernst Wolf within the context of his theological method*

«Die Überlegung, die dazu anzustellen ist, geschieht auch in impliziter Auseinandersetzung mit Ernst Wolf».<sup>1</sup> The discussion in question is that of «Das Problem der Rechtfertigungslehre»,<sup>2</sup> in which Barth sets out what he understands to be the particular function of the *articulus iustificationis* within the context of his theological method as a whole. The discussion is of crucial importance to an understanding of Barth's theological method, although this does not seem to have been generally appreciated among Barth students. It is also of considerable significance to critics of Barth's theology of the Word of God, as in the course of this discussion, it becomes clear that Barth's discussion of reconciliation, which forms the fourth part of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, is not fully integrated within the context of the Offenbarungspositivismus which characterises the earlier parts of the *Dogmatik*, particularly I/1 and I/2. In the present article, I propose to examine the function which Barth allocates to the *articulus iustificationis* within dogmatics, and the significance of his criticism of Ernst Wolf's «Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie».<sup>3</sup>

## I

*Deus dixit.*<sup>4</sup> God has spoken, in the fullness of time, and it is this event – or these events! – which stand at the heart of Barth's theological

<sup>1</sup> *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (= KD) IV/1, 581.

<sup>2</sup> KD IV/1 §61,1 'Das Problem der Rechtfertigungslehre'. On Barth's doctrine of justification in general, see H. Küng, *Rechtfertigung: die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung*, Einsiedeln 1957; G. C. Berkouwer, *Der Triumph der Gnade in der Theologie Karl Barths*, Neukirchen 1957; A. E. McGrath, *Justification: Barth, Trent and Küng*, SJTh 34 (1981) 517–529.

<sup>3</sup> Originally published in *EvTh* 9 (1949–50) 298–308; reprinted in *Peregrinatio II*, München 1965, 11–20. This latter edition is used in the present study.

<sup>4</sup> KD I/1 §§4–7. See E. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, Tübingen 1965, for an excellent presentation of the matter. The study by the young British theologian, R. D. Williams, *Barth on the triune God*, in *Karl Barth, Studies of his theological method*, Oxford 1979, 147–193, should also be consulted.

concerns. It is the task of any authentically *Christian* theology to attempt to unfold the nature and the characteristics of the God who has spoken to man in the man-ward movement envisaged in the *Deus dixit*. The structures and the inner nexus of relationships presupposed by the fact – not the *idea!* – of the *Deus dixit* determines what theology has to say concerning the God who speaks. Barth thus abandons his earlier attempt, in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, to construct a ‘grammatical’ doctrine of the Trinity, based upon the *idea* of revelation, in terms of the logical analysis of the event of the *Deus dixit* in terms of its implied subject, predicate and object: it is now the *fact*, and not the *idea*, of revelation which claims Barth’s attention. Barth develops an *Offenbarungspositivismus* in which the concrete structure of revelation as it has happened and as it still happens is interpreted theologically. To interpret the *idea* of revelation would, in effect, reduce theology to anthropology, as a prior human model with its associated epistemological presuppositions is required for the requisite analysis of the idea in question. Although revelation is a unitary act, it nevertheless possesses a divinely-grounded unity in that diversity, which Barth formulates as ‘Das Wort Gottes in seiner dreifachen Gestalt’<sup>5</sup>. God speaks in history, but is not bound by its categories: the divine event of revelation can be actualised in every human circumstance, and is not confined to any given historical form under which he may speak. The *function* of Barth’s concept of the three-fold form of the Word of God is therefore to provide a sound theological foundation for Barth’s insistence that God, who has spoken his ultimate Word in Jesus Christ, still speaks to man today – and in every conceivable human circumstance. The single assumption, which alone can be recognised in theology, is that God has spoken: *Dominus dixit!*

It is clear that Barth’s theological system is, in essence, the unfolding of the inner structures and relationships which characterise the *fact* that God has spoken. The theological enterprise could be characterised as an exercise in *Nachdenken*, following out the order of revelation in the man-ward movement of God in history. Barth’s method is thus necessarily deductive and descriptive. He is overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible bridging of the vast epistemological gulf between God and man by a gracious act of divine self-revelation. *Deus dixit*: God has spoken to man across the epistemological chasm which separates them,

<sup>5</sup> KD I/1 §4.

and by so speaking to him, discloses both the *reality* of that separation and also the *possibility* of its abrogation. It is the reality of this divine abrogation of this epistemological chasm, and also of the axiom *homo peccator non capax verbi Dei*, which stands at the centre of Barth's theology.

But should not something else stand there? Is the fact that God has spoken to man *really* what the Gospel is all about? Has not Barth substituted *divine revelation to sinful man* where the *divine justification of sinful man* rightly belongs? In the present study, we propose to demonstrate that Barth's treatment of the *articulus iustificationis* lends considerable support to the thesis that Barth has merely 'grafted' his soteriology, as expressed in IV/1, onto his theology of revelation without in any way resolving the inherent contradictions posed to his theological method by the epistemological assumptions which underlie it.

In his earlier dialectical theology, Barth had laid great emphasis upon the enormous separation between God and man, and their infinite qualitative distinction. God is *totaliter aliter*, wholly and absolutely distinct from man. The God-man relationship is characterised supremely by the infinite superiority of God over man, and by the divine initiative in revealing himself to man. In effect, Barth has totally inverted the prevailing liberal interpretation of the relationship between God and man – an inversion which he holds to be justified on the basis of the *krisis* of divine revelation. However, as Hans Urs von Balthasar has rightly pointed out, Barth has simply not broken free from the influence of Schleiermacher at this point: despite the evident and decisive differences in substance between Barth and Schleiermacher, they both work within a similar frame of reference. Schleiermacher's theological method has stamped an indelible impression upon that of Barth, 'the pattern from which he cannot break free, despite all difference in substance'<sup>6</sup>. Barth has reacted against the theology of the nineteenth century – but by doing so, he has merely reacted, expressed the opposite, inverted.<sup>7</sup> Barth remains within the frame of reference set by Schleiermacher.

<sup>6</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth, Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, Köln 1961, 210.

<sup>7</sup> This point has been well made by one of Barth's most acute critics, G. Wingren, *Die Methodenfrage der Theologie*, Göttingen 1957. It is our contention that Barth's treatment of the *articulus iustificationis* in §61, 1 lends considerable weight to Wingren's criticisms, although Wingren would not have had access to this section at the time of writing.

Barth criticised Schleiermacher for making man the central object of theological reflection,<sup>8</sup> so that God became, in effect, of secondary importance. Barth's inversion of this procedure may be taken as re-establishing the priority of God in theology. However, Barth's positivism in regard to the fact of divine revelation leads to a certain modesty in his soteriological interests: for Luther, the gospel was about the fact that God loved sinners, and the fact that he spoke to them was purely incidental to this love. One of the curious aspects of Barth's discussion of Luther in the course of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* is that he seems to fail to realise that he and Luther had quite different theological interests and methods. The question of the sixteenth century Reformation was the soteriological question of how sinful man could stand before a righteous God<sup>9</sup>: the question of the twentieth century, as judged by Barth's theology, is the epistemological question of how an infinitely superior and totally distinct God can speak to man. For Luther, epistemological questions are secondary to the *articulus iustificationis*; for Barth, the *articulus iustificationis* is secondary to the *Deus dixit*.

## II

In IV/1 §61, 1, Barth acknowledges the peculiar importance which Luther attached to the *articulus iustificationis*.<sup>10</sup> He further concedes that Luther did not regard the *articulus iustificationis* as the *primus et principalis articulus* merely in the polemic against Rome, but against all forms of sectarianism. However, he notes that no-one, with the possible exception of Martin Kähler, ever dared to construct an Evangelical dogmatics with the *articulus iustificationis* at its centre. This observation leads Barth to his critique of such a procedure. Conceding that the *articulus iustificationis* has been regarded as being the Word of the Gospel on several occasions in the history of doctrine, he points out

<sup>8</sup> K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Zürich 1952, 410: 'Ihm (i. e. Schleiermacher) war, wie es sich nun herausgestellt hat, der Mensch, das menschliche Selbstbewusstsein, nämlich in seiner Bestimmtheit als frommes Selbstbewusstsein fraglos der zentrale Gegenstand seines theologischen Denkens.'

<sup>9</sup> For the development of the doctrine of justification from the earliest times to the present day, see A. E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, a history of the Christian doctrine of justification, 3 volumes, Cambridge, in press.

<sup>10</sup> KD IV/1, 581.

that these occasions represented instances where the Gospel, understood as the free grace of God, was under threat – e.g. the Pelagian controversy. Barth then argues that it is necessary to free the theological enterprise from the contingencies of such controversies: ‘Man tut aber in der Theologie gut, über die Bedürfnisse und Notwendigkeiten des Tages hinaus immer auch auf weitere Sicht zu denken, sich in allem noch so berechtigten Reagieren Mass zu auferlegen, sich der Grenzen der jeweils herrschenden ‘Anliegen’ (mögen diese noch so echt und begründet sein!) bewusst zu bleiben’.<sup>11</sup> We shall return to this statement later: however, it is appropriate to point out at this juncture that Barth’s theology itself can be regarded as a reaction against a particular theological position (viz., that of the ‘liberal’ school, particularly in regard to its anthropocentricity), and that his critique of the centrality of the *articulus iustificationis* can therefore be applied to his own theological position. Barth then asserts, of the doctrine of justification: ‘Sie war nun einmal auch in der Kirche Jesu Christi nicht immer und nicht überall das Wort des Evangeliums, und es würde einen Akt allzu krampfhafter und ungerechter Ausschliesslichkeit bedeuten, wenn man sie als solches ausgeben und behandeln würde’.<sup>12</sup> Whilst this is true in the historical sense, in that the *articulus iustificationis* has not always been regarded as the centre of theological speculation, it must be pointed out that the *lex orandi* continually proclaims the centrality of soteriological considerations to popular understandings of Christianity. Furthermore, the fundamentally soteriological orientation of the patristic Christological and Trinitarian debates<sup>13</sup> leads to the conclusion that the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas are, in themselves, ultimately an expression of the early Church’s soteriological beliefs, whatever reinterpretation Barth may choose to place upon them. If the *articulus iustificationis* be taken to represent an assertion of the priority of soteriological considerations within the sphere of the Church, Barth’s statement must be regarded as seriously misleading.

It is clear, however, that Barth’s chief reason for relegating the *articulus iustificationis* to a secondary position is that it poses a serious and comprehensive threat to his own theological method. It is for this rea-

<sup>11</sup> KD IV/1, 583.

<sup>12</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup> M. F. Wiles, *The making of Christian doctrine. A study in the principles of early doctrinal development*, Cambridge 1978, 94–112.

son that he singles out Ernst Wolf's study of the function of the *articulus iustificationis* within the theology of the early Reformers, and particularly Luther, for criticism. The significance of this critique will become clear when the content of Wolf's study is considered.

### III

Wolf locates the significance of the *articulus iustificationis* in terms of its function, a function which he finds conveniently expressed in the celebrated dictum of Luther: *Articulus iustificationis est magister et princeps, dominus, rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum, qui conservat et gubernat omnem doctrinam ecclesiasticam et erigit conscientiam nostram coram Deo* (WA39 I.205.2).<sup>14</sup> Wolf summarises Luther's understanding of the function of the *articulus iustificationis* in terms of its defining the 'Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie', which he elaborates as follows.<sup>15</sup> 'Mitte – das heisst: alles in reformatorischer Theologie ist auf sie bezogen; in ihr wird ja das *subiectum theologiae* zentral erfasst. Grenze – das heisst: alles, was ausserhalb des durch die Mitte Bestimmten und Zusammengefassten liegt, ist 'error et venenum in theologia'.

Wolf illustrates this interpretation of the function of the *articulus iustificationis*, with reference to Luther's anthropology and ecclesiology, with convincing results. The significance of Wolf's study is two-fold:– 1. It establishes that the *articulus iustificationis* is the leading principle of Luther's theology, and thereby also establishes the priority of soteriological considerations within the context of Luther's theological method. 2. The *subiectum theologiae* is defined as God's salvific activity towards mankind.

This second point is of particular importance. Wolf takes up Luther's celebrated statement of the proper subject of theology: *Theologiae proprium subiectum est homo peccati reus ac perditus et Deus iustificans ac salvator hominis peccatoris* (WA 40II.328.17), and remarks of this: 'Nicht ein metaphysisches Wesen, sondern ein konkretes geschichtliches Ereignis, Gottes Heilshandeln mit dem Sündermenschen, ist der Gegenstand der Theologie, und zwar der Theologie als Wissen-

<sup>14</sup> Wolf, op. cit., 21. Barth knows of this citation – see KD IV/1, 582.

<sup>15</sup> Wolf, op. cit., 14.

schaft'.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that this differs considerably, both in substance and in emphasis, from Barth's position – chiefly because of the emphasis placed by Luther upon Gottes Heilshandeln mit dem Sündermenschen. The modesty of Barth's soteriological interests are merely highlighted by Luther's insistence upon their dominating role in theological speculation. Furthermore, the secondary and derivative role of revelation within the context of Luther's theology will be evident,<sup>17</sup> although Barth does not seem to appreciate this point.

Barth recognises Luther's concern for the question of how a gracious God may be found, but considers that it leads to a 'certain narcissism'.<sup>18</sup> Properly understood, he argues, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* is not the doctrine of justification as such, but its 'basis and culmination' in the 'confession of Jesus Christ' and 'the knowledge of his activity'. This, however, is beyond dispute – the *articulus iustificationis* is itself merely a convenient statement of the salvific activity of God towards man, concentrated in the person and hence the work of Jesus Christ. Wolf had made this point in the above study! What is particularly significant, however, in Barth's evaluation of the importance of the *articulus iustificationis* is the fact that he has avoided mentioning its soteriological connotations, and instead introduced terms such as 'Bekennnis' and 'Erkenntnis' where one would expect terms such as 'Heil' or 'Versöhnung'! The correlation of the *articulus iustificationis* with Kenntnis and its cognates is of the greatest significance, as it demonstrates that Barth is inclined to subordinate salvation itself to knowledge of salvation. This point has already been noted by Wingren, who described this remarkable shift in emphasis with reference to a financial analogy: when you receive a cheque for 100 DM, the important thing is that you receive 100 DM – but for Barth, the important thing seems to be that you receive the *knowledge* that you are getting 100 DM<sup>19</sup>. For

<sup>16</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> For example, his celebrated distinction between *Deus praedicatus* and *Deus absconditus* arises within the context of his discussion of the justification of the sinner, in *de servo arbitrio*. See H. Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott. Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie*, Berlin 1958.

<sup>18</sup> KD IV/1, 588 'Die Frage: Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott? in höchsten Ehren! Sie ist aber dem Protestantismus – jedenfalls dem europäischen und insbesondere dem deutschen Protestantismus – allzulange Anlass und Versuchung gewesen, einem gewissen Narzismus zu huldigen und gerade nach der nun zuletzt angedeuteten Seite auf der Stelle zu treten...!'

<sup>19</sup> Wingren (N. 7), 53–54.



Luther, the emphasis lies totally upon God's graciousness towards man, and only as the consequence of this upon the knowledge of the graciousness of God.

In his discussion of both the positive and the negative aspects of the judgement and sentence of God executed and revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Barth reveals a strong interest in the *knowledge* which results.

'Im Spiegel des für uns dahingegebenen und als dieser Dahingegebene gehorsamen Jesus Christus *wird offenbar*, wer wir sind: wir als die, für die er dahingegeben wurde, sich selbst gehorsam dahingegeben hat. Im Licht der Demut, in deren Bewährung er als wahrer Gott für uns gehandelt, d. h. gelitten hat und gestorben ist, sind wir *durchschaut, erkannt* und *haben wir uns selbst zu erkennen* als die Hochmütigen, die sich selbst Gott, Herr, Richter, Helfer sein wollen, die als solche von Gott abgewichen und also Sünder sind... Und so ist und bleibt die *Erkenntnis* der Gnade Gottes und des aus ihr fließenden Trostes in diesem Urteil und also die *Erkenntnis* seines positiven Sinnes gebunden daran, dass wir nicht aufhören, uns auch als in ihm Verurteilten zu *erkennen*'.<sup>20</sup>

It is on the basis of the knowledge of the actuality of the reconciliation of the world to God accomplished in Jesus Christ that the community of faith stands or falls.

'Und gäbe es keine Erkenntnis der hier waltenden Gerechtigkeit Gottes, oder Erkenntnis nur in Form von Verkennung, getrübt und entstellt durch teilweise oder gänzliche Missverständnisse, wie könnte dann die Gemeinde dem Irrtum und Zerfall und der Glaube dem Zweifel, der Auflösung in allerlei Unglauben und Aberglauben entrinnen?'<sup>21</sup>

The entire discussion of the justification of man *coram Deo* appears to proceed upon man's knowledge. This is not necessarily to say that man's knowledge and insight, rather than God's activity, forms the centre of Barth's theology; however, it is fair to say that Barth's approach to the question of justification places considerable emphasis upon human realisation of divine revelation, with its concomitant epistemological framework. The human predicament is that of ignorance – the characteristic of *homo peccator* which seems to be most important within the context of Barth's methodology is that *homo peccator non capax verbi divini*. Of course, it may be objected that Barth supplements his description of man in accordance with Holy Scripture,

<sup>20</sup> IV/1 §61, 1, 574–5. The italics are mine.

<sup>21</sup> IV/1 §61, 1, 578.

but it must be pointed out that this proceeds upon a different set of epistemological assumptions from those implicit in his basic method. A similar criticism may be directed at his soteriology, as expressed in IV/1: Barth attempts to expand his basic idea of salvation as knowledge using other, biblical ideas – e.g. salvation as liberation – but fails to integrate these on account of the unresolved complex of epistemological assumptions which characterise his method in general. Thus the more ‘traditional’ concepts of salvation are appended to his methodological concept of salvation, without a sound theological and epistemological basis having been laid for them.

Barth criticises those who see in the *articulus iustificationis* the Word of the Gospel, because he saw in it a reaction against perversions of the gospel which narrowed its relevance. He retains the traditional designation of the *articulus iustificationis* as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* on these grounds: ‘Ohne die Wahrheit der Rechtfertigungslehre gäbe und gibt es keine wahre christliche Kirche’.<sup>22</sup> However, it is clear that this must be subject to considerable qualification, as his comment a few sentences later makes clear:

‘Gerade des Menschen Rechtfertigung und gerade das Vertrauen auf die objektive Wahrheit der Rechtfertigungslehre verbietet uns das Postulat, dass ihr theologischer Vollzug in der wahren Kirche *semper, ubique et ab omnibus* als das *unum necessarium*, als die ganze Mitte oder als die einzige Spitze der christlichen Botschaft und Lehre angesehen und behandelt werden müsse’.<sup>23</sup>

By this, Barth means that the *articulus iustificationis* may withdraw into the background, so long as its truth is not denied. However, his reasons for making this assertion are far from clear. Why should the *articulus iustificationis* be secondary in importance to the ‘*articulus revelationis*’? The truth of the matter is that they are in competition for the title of the Word of the Gospel. *Deus iustificat* – *Deus dixit*. The substance of Barth’s statement simply reduces to the fact that he regards soteriology as being secondary to the fact of revelation, *Deus dixit*, which is simply a reassertion of the principles which govern his theological method. Within the context of Barth’s theological method, the *articulus iustificationis* must take second place. Furthermore, as we

<sup>22</sup> IV/1 §61, 1, 583.

<sup>23</sup> IV/1 §61, 1, 584.

noted earlier in this study, Barth's own theology may be regarded as a reaction against the anthropocentricity of 'liberalism', and may therefore be subjected to precisely the criticism which Barth levelled against those who made the *articulus iustificationis* the centre of their theological system. Barth has merely inverted the 'liberal' theology, without fundamentally changing its frame of reference. As such, he may be regarded as perpetuating the interests and concerns of nineteenth century man. Nineteenth century man was not concerned with the question of 'guilt' or of 'righteousness coram Deo'. The 'liberal' theologians of the nineteenth century had no real sense of human bondage or slavery to sin: thus Albrecht Ritschl regarded Luther's 1525 *de servo arbitrio* – which develops in some depth the notion of human bondage to sin – as 'an unfortunate botch'. And yet it is precisely this work that Rudolph Otto singled out as indicating the 'psychological key' to Luther's religious thinking. The 'liberal' approach to Luther suffered a devastating blow with the appearance of the first volume of Karl Holl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, entitled simply '*Luther*', and the Luther renaissance which followed it. In part this renaissance served to emphasise the importance of the deity of God – but it also emphasised the importance of the *articulus iustificationis* within the context of Luther's theology. Dialectical theology began with a passionate concern with the question of the right knowledge of God, inspired by a conviction of man's ignorance of God and the impossibility of any natural knowledge of God. There is no bridge from which the yawning chasm fixed between man and God can be crossed from man's side – hence the news that God has bridged that chasm from his side means that the Word of God must be taken with the uttermost seriousness. In this, early dialectical theology took up one aspect of Luther's thought – and abandoned the other. Hence for the young Barth, the significance of the 'righteousness of God' lay in precisely the fact that it was totally distinct from human righteousness.<sup>24</sup> The disinterest in human bondage to sin which characterised the nineteenth century thus passed into the dialectical theology of the early twentieth century. The theological drama which the Christian faith represents is thus held to concern man and his knowledge of God, and the presuppositions of the communication between God and man – whereas for Luther, the theological drama concerned was for the salvation of sinful

<sup>24</sup> See K. Barth, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, München 1929, 5–17.

man, caught up in the cosmic conflict between sin, the world and the devil.<sup>25</sup> Such a conflict is impossible within the context of Barth's theology: Barth shares with Hegel the difficulty of accommodating sin within what is essentially a monist system: his characterisation of evil as *Das Nichtige* has provoked considerably more irritation than admiration, for it seems to be an attempt to evade rather than face the appalling difficulties associated with stressing both the priority of grace and the reality of evil. Barth simply has no concept of a real engagement on the part of God in a cosmic struggle with evil; instead, we find only talk about God making his love for mankind known. The impartation of knowledge is no substitute for a confrontation with sin, death and evil; even the Cross, traditionally the scene of precisely such a conflict, is reduced, in effect, to a monologue between God the Father and God the Son – a monologue which Urs von Balthasar has rightly derided as 'a ghostly apparition without reality'.<sup>26</sup>

The most significant aspect of Barth's criticism of the role allocated by Wolf to the *articulus iustificationis* lies in the different theological methods envisaged. For the later Barth, the concept of 'christomonism' (Althaus) or 'christological concentration' (Urs von Balthasar) became of increasing importance. This christological concentration refers not, however, to the Incarnation or to the Cross, but to the pre-existence of Christ, before all eternity. The reason for this lies in Barth's understanding of the divine freedom to reveal, or not to reveal, and is particularly well expressed in his critique of Hegel.<sup>27</sup> The antecedence of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son preserves the divine freedom in revelation – and it is from this point that everything may be regarded as taking place. Both the beginning and the end of the historical process lie in Jesus Christ. Unlike the New Testament, Barth now finds himself obliged to proceed from the pre-existence of Christ and as a result is further obliged to assert that Christ is equally present at every stage in the history of salvation. That redemption presupposes sin is a difficulty which cannot really be accommodated within Barth's essen-

<sup>25</sup> On this theme in Luther's Christology, see M. Lienhard, *Luther témoin de Jesus Christ*, Paris 1968. For its occurrence in the patristic era, see H.E.W. Turner, *The patristic doctrine of redemption*, London 1952, 47–69. A classic study remains that of G. Aulén, *Die drei Haupttypen des christlichen Versöhnungsgedankens*, ZSTh (1930) 501–538.

<sup>26</sup> Urs von Balthasar, (n. 6) 225–6, 380.

<sup>27</sup> Barth, *protestantische Theologie*, 375–377.

tially supralapsarian understanding of the Fall.<sup>28</sup> It is simply impossible to convincingly accommodate the existence of sin and evil within the context of a theology which presupposes that the historical process is absolutely determined by what is already perfected at the beginning of time. For St. Paul, sin ‘entered into the world’; Barth cannot speak of sin ‘entering into’ such a historical process, as it has already been determined! It will be clear, however, why Barth has to allocate so menial a place to the *articulus iustificationis*: this article has always been taken to refer to the actualisation in time of the divine graciousness towards the sinner. Setting aside for the moment Barth’s lack of interest in soteriology in general, it will be clear that his emphasis upon what has been determined christologically from all eternity leads to a certain lack of interest in what pertains here and now. The *articulus iustificationis* deals with man’s predicament as he now is, enslaved by sin and unable to redeem himself. Barth’s interests lie elsewhere than with sinful man, even though it is possible to argue that his theology ultimately represents the outcome of anthropological and epistemological considerations.

Wolf’s study of the function of the *articulus justificationis* leads us to another conclusion, one which Wolf does not explicitly acknowledge. If the starting point for theological speculation is defined as the *articulus iustificationis*, it is clear that an analytic and inductive methodology must be followed, arguing from the particular event of the divine justification of the sinner to the context in which it is set. It can be shown that this methodology characterised the first age of the Reformation. However, the onset of Reformed Orthodoxy saw the starting point for theological speculation shifted from the concrete event of the justification of the sinner to the divine decrees of election and reprobation. All else, justification included, is now understood as a consequence of the divine decision to elect or condemn, a decision expressed in the divine decrees. This shift in emphasis in the *ordo salutis* from justification to predestination is itself a consequence of a decisive shift in methodology associated with the onset of ‘Protestant scholasticism’. Instead of an analytic and inductive method, a synthetic and deductive method was now employed which inevitably resulted in justification – i. e. the con-

<sup>28</sup> III/2 §43, 2, 39. ‘Die Lehre von der Sünde gehört in den Zusammenhang der Lehre von der Versöhnung.’ As such, it will be clear that the concept of sin involved will be dictated by the concept of salvation employed, and by the emphasis placed upon this within the context of the Dogmatik as a whole.

crete actualisation of the divine decision to elect – being accorded a place of low priority in the *ordo salutis*. The systematic exposition of the salvation of mankind would logically begin with the divine decision to redeem, proceeding from the intratrinitarian decision to the *opus trinitatis ad extra* – i. e. the actualisation of the decision in time. In an important study, Kickel showed that Beza may be regarded as having effected this decisive change in theological method in the sixteenth century.<sup>29</sup> This method led to predestination now being considered under the doctrine of God, and not salvation. This change in emphasis is due entirely to a change in theological method.

Applying these observations to Barth, it will be clear that he approximates considerably more closely to the theological method of Beza than of Calvin. The synthetic and deductive approach necessitated by his insistence upon the antecedence of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son leads to the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ being placed low in the order of priorities within the specific context of his theological method. Barth's essentially synthetic and deductive method, which is observable in his doctrine of election as much as anywhere, is therefore very similar, if not identical, to that of Beza and Zanchius – a method which leads to the theology of the *decretum absolutum*, which Barth so heavily criticised!<sup>30</sup>

## V

In conclusion, we have examined the significance of Barth's criticism of the place of honour which Wolf accords to the *articulus iustificationis* in the theology of the early Reformers, and supremely that of Martin Luther. We have shown that this criticism reflects Barth's theological method, and that it is characteristic of the unsatisfactory nature of his discussion of the redemption of mankind in Christ. Barth's theological concerns are poles apart from those of Luther: it is also possible that they are poles apart from those of ordinary Christians, who look to the Gospel for salvation, not just illumination.

Alister E. McGrath, Oxford

<sup>29</sup> W. Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza*, Neukirchen 1967. See also the following: E. Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, Zürich 1963; O. Gründler, *Die Gotteslehre Giralmo Zanchis*, Neukirchen 1965.

<sup>30</sup> KD II/2 §32, 2. Note that Barth sets his discussion of predestination within the context of the doctrine of God!