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## Sünde und Schuld in einer nachchristlichen Gesellschaft

Barth verstehen und über ihn hinausgehen



79



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## **Sünde und Schuld in einer nachchristlichen Gesellschaft**

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Gerrit Neven (Kampen)

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Anna Lena Schwarz (Siegen)

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Prof. Dr. Georg Plasger  
D - 57068 Siegen  
zdth@uni-siegen.de

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# “The Judge Judged in Our Place” Sin and Atonement in Karl Barth

## Introduction

Recently, analytic theologians<sup>1</sup> have begun to reexamine traditional Christian doctrines using the methods of analytic philosophy and theology. Unlike analytic philosophy, analytic theology might be regarded as an insider's philosophical study of the Christian faith. In so doing, analytic theology does not question confessional Christianity; instead, in its ambitious and rigorous study, it seeks to present a precisely logical and viable understanding of the Christian faith. Such exercises have now been extended to issues that do not receive special attention from analytic philosophers. One of such topics is the doctrine of atonement. This paper is part of such an enterprise aimed at drawing lessons from Barth for the current discussion.

The doctrine of atonement as understood today has its origin in the Hebrew word *כִּפּוּרָה*, which has been variously translated as expiation, ransom, to appease, to cover, forgiveness, satisfaction, reconciliation, and the like. The entirety of Judaism as a cultic religion is completely saturated with the notion of atonement. Bernard Low argues that “In fact, all of its principal offerings – the burnt offering, the grain offering, the well-being offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering – have an atoning function in addition to other functions.”<sup>2</sup> In the Old Testament, atonement could be understood as

1 Speaking about the re-emergence of interest by analytic philosophers in the doctrine of atonement and other core Christian doctrines, William Craig argues that “So philosophers have been actively engaged in discussion of the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, which might be called ‘the big three’ of peculiarly Christian doctrines.” “Philosophical Issues in the Atonement,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 231–243, 231.

2 Bernard Low, “The Logic of Atonement in Israel's Cult,” *Scripture and Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (2009): 5–32, 6.



appeasing the wrath of the divine by the worshipper who fails to live up to their theological obligations. This failure, a breach of contract, or, in other words, sin, means that the worshipper who fails to meet their theological obligation or terms of the condition of the covenant as in the Suzerain-Vassal treaty will lose their right to protection. The only way to restore such a broken relationship with God was through atonement. There were several types of atonement in the Old Testament, which we do not need to mention here. The central idea of the Book of Leviticus with respect to the atonement is that the fall has a consequence for the descendants of Adam. Further, apart from their participation in the sin of Adam, the worshippers were, at the time, breaking the laws of God. Instead of facing the wrath of God, God graciously provides an escape route for the defaulter through the atonement.

The worshipper was requested to bring gifts to appease God's wrath. The writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 10) argues that those gifts, in other words, sacrifices, did not lead to the complete eradication of the errors of the worshippers. The errors were covered temporarily to be remembered on the day of atonement rather than wholly blotted out, as understood in the New Testament. This explains why the erring worshippers had to present themselves repeatedly at the Mercy Seat after presenting their sacrifices to receive temporary forgiveness for their sins. However, the New Testament presents a complete reversal of the futile exercise of the Old Testament. Bible writers, including contemporary Christian philosophers and theologians, argue that Christ was sacrificed once and for all, and therefore, believers no longer need to make further sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins.

The question of the proper terminology for the work of Christ has received tremendous treatment from theologians since antiquity. As stated above, analytic theologians are also reminiscing about the nature of Christ's work on the cross. Discussing the atonement seems to raise a few challenges. The first reason for these struggles is simple: the Bible seems to provide various terminologies for Christ's work: ransom (Mark 10:45), substitution (Romans 3:21–31), satisfaction (Romans 3:25, 5:9), reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19), and the like. Secondly, contrary to other Christian doctrines, there has never been any unanimous agreement about the *name* and *mode* of how humanity got saved after the Fall.<sup>3</sup> As a result, theologians seem to concentrate on the notions of atonement as moral influence, ransom, pe-

<sup>3</sup> Kirk Loughheed, *A Relational Theory of the Atonement: African Contributions to Western Philosophical Theology* (London: Routledge, 2024), 1.



nal substitution, and satisfaction theories, including *Christus Victor*, among others.

The ransom theory of the atonement traces its roots back to Origen. This theory is undoubtedly contingent on Jesus' statement in Mark 10:45: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to give himself as a ransom for sinners" (paraphrased). Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 6:20 that believers were bought with a price seems to align with Christ's statement. As a result, theologians argued that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they handed over their authority and freedom to the devil, although they belonged to God. Getting God's possession back in a judicial context demands that there must be a price – in other words, a ransom – to reclaim humanity, and therefore, the Son of God came to offer Himself as a ransom. Justice was done when Christ died on the cross, but the dead could not hold Him.<sup>4</sup> However, who received the price or the ransom is another subject of debate. Anselm, in his satisfaction theory, rejected that there was any payment of ransom.

Having rejected the ransom theory of atonement, Anselm presented a satisfaction theory.<sup>5</sup> He argued that the ransom theory is logically flawed, especially the notion that ransom was paid to the devil. If it is conceded that the devil is God's rebellious creature, then God and humanity owe the devil no payment because humans' sin was not a rebellion against the devil but against God.<sup>6</sup> In a dialogical manner, Anselm and Boso extrapolate the satisfaction theory of the atonement from divine justice, the enormity of sin, and the mercy and compassion of God.

Boso seems to argue that God should have used other means to save humanity without causing the Son of God to suffer on the cross. He stated, "If you say that God, who, as you believe, created the universe by a word, could not do all these things by a simple command, you contradict yourselves, for you make him powerless. Or, if you grant that he could have done these things in some other way, but did not wish to, how can you vindicate

4 Joshua C Thurow, "Atonement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (2023). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/atonement/>.

5 See Eleanor Stump, *Atonement: Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

6 Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. from Latin by Sidney Norton Deane (Downers Grove: The Open Court, 1923) 1:7, 187–188.



his wisdom, when you assert that he desired, without any reason, to suffer things so unbecoming?"<sup>7</sup>

Anselm's argument presented three fundamental responses to Boso. First, due to the creator-creature relationship, humans are obligated to honour God. However, what happened in the Garden of Eden was a dishonour to the glory of God. "Therefore to sin is nothing else than not to render to God his due."<sup>8</sup> This dishonour in a judicial context demands that humans be punished to satisfy justice. This might not necessarily be to satisfy the wrath of God but to satisfy justice, as long as God is just yet a merciful God.

Second, Anselm argues that the suffering of the Son of God on the cross was not imposed on Him, but He willingly, in obedience to the Father, took that path to satisfy justice.<sup>9</sup> In the third place, what has been stolen must be restored. When humanity dishonours God and robs Him of His glory, it must be restored. Nothing passes by in God's kingdom without being discharged; therefore, sin cannot be cancelled without compensation. If that were to be the case, there would be no distinction between the guilty and the innocent. After all, it is an injustice to cancel sin only by compassion.<sup>10</sup> Although the conclusion in this paragraph seems as if God could lose His glory given human disobedience, I doubt Anselm really meant that, or that is the case here. If that is the case, this will be contrary to common sense because the Godhead cannot lose any of His great-making properties, including His glory. What I think is at stake is that every action has a corresponding consequence. However, given God's righteousness, humans in their fallen state could not satisfy the righteous demands of the righteous laws of God. Therefore, it costs God His Son through whom He was reconciling humanity to Himself after satisfying the demands of the law.

The moral influence theory sees Christ as a prototype for believers in Christ to emulate His moral character, while penal substitution originated in the thoughts of Luther and Calvin. Contrary to the ransom theory and close to the satisfaction theory, the penal substitution theory posits that Christ took our punishment. This substitution led to the satisfaction of the justice of God while reconciling humans to God. This view has met a few objections, especially the fact that the substitute is not eternally condemned but living. Lastly, *Christus Victor*, although developed by Gustaf Aulen, has Luther as

7 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1:6, 186.

8 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1:10, 198–201.

9 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1:9 193–197.

10 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1:12, 204–206.



its chief precursor. It centres on the notion that humans were enslaved by the devil. However, Christ's death and resurrection conquered the enemy and freed the captives. Through this victory, humans have been liberated from the bondage of the devil, sin, and death.<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis of these theories of atonement, as mentioned above, is on the consequences of the decision of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Participation in that disobedience made us enemies of God either as a result of justice or because we failed to love God and chose our path, and in the end, became slaves of the devil. However, God, in His justice, mercy, love, and compassion, gave up His only Son, who, in His incarnation, obedience in suffering, death, and resurrection, reconciled us to the Father. Sin, justice, and mercy are the nuclei of the aforementioned theories. As we have shown below, this does not seem to be the case with Barth. Now, let us turn to Barth.

### Das Nichtige

As mentioned above, sin – a break in a relationship – is the basis for the need for atonement. In Christianity, sin has been traditionally understood as something inherent to humanity, beginning with the decision of Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God despite being created without it. So, sin is understood as humanity turning away from its maker. Since Adam (the red clay in the Hebrew language) became a living being after God breathed into its nostrils, the consequence of sin is technically the unmaking of such living breath. As a result, together with our first parent, after participating in such disobedience that led to the pollution and corruption of the *ruach* and the *imago Dei* in us, we were becoming unbecoming and gradually returning to the dust where we came from. To unmake our unbecoming, theologians extrapolating from Genesis 3 argue that only God could restore us to Himself given that we could not help ourselves nor could we restore the broken relationship with God.

<sup>11</sup> Thurow, "Atonement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/atonement/>



Similar to Augustine,<sup>12</sup> Barth refers to sin as *das Nichtige*, which is translated as *nothingness*.<sup>13</sup> He argues that "evil is a form of that nothingness which as such is absolutely subject to God."<sup>14</sup> Barth warns that we should not take evil seriously because 'God is its Lord.' Sin is neither *original* nor independent of God nor a counter-deity to God. Evil and nothingness seem to assume a *theodicean* role in Barth's thought. As its Lord, God might use it to accomplish His will.<sup>15</sup> On the cross, evil appeared to have a counter-power to God when Christ died. However, it was a mere deception. Evil believed the lie that it could take the life of God. Such a lie was overcome once and for all when Christ rose from death.<sup>16</sup>

I find two things interesting to reiterate here. First, the idea of the *originality* of sin seems not to point to the notion of original sin as traditionally understood in Christian theology.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, the issue of the *lie* evil believed about the Son of God comes closer to Origen's fish-hook-and-bait idea, including the purported deception God exemplified when He offered Christ to the devil. Although there seems to be such an idea in the back of Barth's mind while presenting this argument, I doubt this is what he intended to say. What is evident is the fact that on the cross and in the death of Christ, which is foolishness to the Gentiles but the power of God to believers, if Christ had not risen from death, evil would have triumphed over the second Person of

12 Augustine refers to evil as *privatio boni*, the privation of the Good. Augustine argues that "Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good." See Mark Scott, *Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 84. cf. Augustine, St., *Confessions: The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) V.20, VII.12.18, VII.13.19.

13 See Shao Kai Tseng, *Barth's Ontology of Sin and Grace Variations on a Theme of Augustine* (London: Routledge, 2019).

14 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/1: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, translated Church Dogmatics IV/1: *The Doctrine Of Reconciliation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 1956), §60: 406.

15 See Deborah Caswell, "Nothingness and the Left Hand of God: Evil, Anfechtung, and the Hidden God in Luther, Barth, and Jüngel," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 64, no. 1 (2022): 24–49. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2022-0002>

16 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 406.

17 See Paul L. Allen, "Sin and Natural Theology: An Augustinian Framework Beyond Barth," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 57, no. 1 (2015): 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2015-0002>.



the Trinity and ultimately over God. However, this is not the case. God broke the power of evil once and for all in Christ at Golgotha.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to the idea that humans were created free and therefore could possibly sin, which explains what happens in the Garden of Eden, Barth argues that it is erroneous to argue that man was a created a free creature to both obey and disobey God and therefore has the *possibility* to disobey God. Instead, the freedom to sin is not inherent in man from creation. It originated in him when he listened to the voice of the devil. As far as Barth is concerned, sin is an impossible possibility. It was an absurd event that had no origin external to man, nor was it part of a divine plan contrary to infralapsarianism.<sup>19</sup>

Sin, according to Barth, is expressly demonstrated in three ways: pride (CD IV/§60.2), sloth (CD IV/§65.2), and falsehood (CD IV/§70.2). Contrary to the conditions, limitations, and parameters set by God for Adam and Eve in the Garden, they listened to the voice of the devil and acted in arrogance against God's command. As is the case with Adam and Eve, Christians today are trying so hard to become like God, even though Christ became man out of humility. Barth argues that "Sin, therefore, in its totality is pride."<sup>20</sup> Pride, which is the actual sin, is believing in ourselves instead of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Unbelief in Christ and trying to be lords, although ontologically we cannot become God, but God can become man, is pride and a fruitless effort. In doing that, we try to be lords instead of servants, as Christ did. It is stated that *the Word became flesh* because God is God and is free to be anything He wants to be. But as humans, we cannot decide what we want to be. Man's attempt at becoming like God is the revelation of his impotence. However, God becoming flesh is the revelation of His divinity.<sup>22</sup>

Another way sin is expressed in humans is sloth (CD IV/§65.2). Through it, the human essence is diminished, we become stupid and cannot listen to God, we are inhuman in our dealings with fellow humans, we are afraid, and there is a separation between our minds and our bodies. Contrary to the aforementioned, Christ is always attentive to the Father; although He had two natures, He had only one essence, and He always and never feared anything. Lastly, sin expresses itself in us through falsehood. From the foregoing, we can see that Barth's understanding of sin as *das Nichtige*, which begets evil,

18 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 407.

19 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 408.

20 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 413.

21 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 414-415.

22 Barth, CD IV/1, §60: 417.



seems to be a different understanding of sin. Due to this understanding of sin, Barth's doctrine of atonement does not emphasise sin as the precondition for the incarnation and atonement. Instead, the revelation of the Son of God and His solidarity with sinners is the focus of Barth's explication of the atonement. This shift of attention does two things in the estimation of the current studies.

First, in this conception, the devil and the law, which reveal sin, lose their place of pride as the basis for the atonement. Secondly, the revelation of the divinity of Christ and His humility, humans' impotence, and the need to emulate Christ's humility are not only viable but also logically biblical. However, Barth's notion of sin as *das Nichtige* raises a few questions and objections, which I will mention toward the end of this paper. In what follows, I will examine why the Judge needed to be judged in our place, what this judgement meant for sinners, and what implications are there of this singular act on the sinners' past and present experiences in Christ.

### 1) Why was it necessary for the judge to be judged in our place?

As seen above, the weight of human sins and the love of God have always been at the centre of the doctrine of atonement. Anselm's conversation with Bosso, as cited above, and the necessity of satisfying the requirement of the law, which is a form of appeasement to atone for the wrath of an angry Judge, seems to be the order of the discussions. Either a price or ransom is paid (ransom theory), or the demand of the law is satisfied (satisfaction theory), Christ took the place of sinners through substitutions, or Christ triumphantly overcame the enemy of humanity. Amidst these, God's grace, love, and mercy are emphasised as the driving forces that cause God to become man for man's salvation. Contrary to the foregoing, Barth, in extrapolating why the Judge who knew no sin was judged for humankind, argues that such a judgement was a revelation of the second Person of the Trinity. Barth argues that the idea that in the atonement, the wrath of God was satisfied so that we do not need to suffer the consequences of our sins, as championed by Anselm, is strange to the New Testament. He argues that the emphasis should be on the fact that Christ, in His Person, has brought an end to us as sinners and, therefore, He cancelled sin. Not that He suffered our punishment, but He overcame sin.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 253.



As with other traditional doctrines of atonement, Barth mentioned that the Judge did what we couldn't do for ourselves.<sup>24</sup> The severity of the human condition demands that only God-man can overcome it. "The very heart of the atonement is the overcoming of sin: sin in its character as the rebellion of man against God, and in its character as the ground of man's hopeless destiny in death. It was to fulfil this judgment on sin that the Son of God as man took our place as sinners."<sup>25</sup> However, the central issue, according to Barth, is not about the human condition but the nature of God. The passion of Christ on the cross was first a divine revelation of the Godhead before His identification with sinners. It is in the revelation of God's nature that the sinners, as a consequence, are acquitted and reconciled with the Father.<sup>26</sup> In the incarnation of the Lord, Barth argues that God became "[H]is own Doppelgänger."<sup>27</sup>

Speaking on Barth's understanding of divine revelation, Matthew J. A. Bruce argues that Barth is hesitant about the human faculty's ability to comprehend divine revelation in nature because they are part of the creation, and their knowledge is limited to what is within the creation. Therefore, as in the traditional understanding of divine revelation, Barth holds that God is self-revealing, and until He does so, no one human can understand Him. Bruce went on to argue that "The person of Jesus Christ is the definitive locus of God's self-revelation"<sup>28</sup> This is true because the atonement, according to Barth, is a special revealed history. It is the history of God's dealings with humanity. It is not only a special history of God and humanity but also a history of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

One may ask, what difference does distinguishing between God's special history and human history make? To me, the difference is that the atonement means a different thing to God and another to humanity. On the one hand, in this extraordinary history, God reveals Himself as being able to become human. It reveals the nature of the second Person of the Trinity. Contrary to this, on the other hand, it reveals humans' impotence and God's act of recon-

24 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 211–212.

25 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 253.

26 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 212.

27 Alexander Garton-Eisenacher, *Divine Freedom and Revelation in Christ: The Doctrine of Eternity with Special Reference to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023), 25.

28 Mathew J. A. Bruce, "Barth on Revelation," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth: Barth and Dogmatics*, Volume I, First Edition, ed. George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 59–69, 66.

29 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 171–172.



ciling sinful humans to God through the God-man. One fundamental difference we need to point out here is the fact that although God could become human, humans cannot become God. Barth argues that "The atonement is, noetically, the history about Jesus Christ, and ontically, Jesus Christ's own history. To say atonement is to say Jesus Christ. To speak of it is to speak of His history."<sup>30</sup> This history consists of the fact that humanity is guilty and condemned. However, God Himself took the initiative to reconcile humanity with God. God is Himself, both the reconciler and the reconciled, because He is both God and human. "It is in His self-offering to death that God has again found man and man God."<sup>31</sup>

Contrary to the Gentiles, who contemplate the incarnation of the Son as foolishness and not only against the rule of logic but practically impossible, Barth argues that although it seems paradoxical and contradictory, the incarnation, the journey of the Son into a distant land that appears to strip away His divinity, is the revelation of the Godhead. So, like with Jesus' statement to Philip, anyone who sees me has seen the Father, Barth argues, as traditionally upheld in Christian theology, that Christ is the climax of the revelation because "...in Christ, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9). What it means to be God or divine, Barth argues, is something we have to learn through divine revelation. However, "[I]f He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ as the God who does this, it is not for us to be wiser than He and to say that it is in contradiction with the divine essence."<sup>32</sup> In other words, the coming of the Son of God in the form of man, His apparent fragility and incongruity with the nature of God as traditionally conceived in the Old Testament, is a further revelation of God-man. Therefore, this revelation is sufficient, and we do not need to look elsewhere, as seen in Colossians above.

## 2) What does this judgment mean for sinners?

Although Barth's view of the atonement does not align with the traditional doctrines of the atonement mentioned above, Adam J. Johnson argues that his treatment of the atonement is replete with substitutional and representa-

30 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 172.

31 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 172.

32 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 186.



tional notions of the atonement.<sup>33</sup> This is true with respect to Barth's argument about the passion of Christ, as shown below.

First, this judgement means *Deus pro nobis*. Being judged in the sinners' place means God is for us and has not abandoned the world despite its sins. Barth argues that humans do not deserve any atonement and cannot save themselves.<sup>34</sup> Further, the fact that "Jesus Christ judges in our place means an immeasurable liberation and hope. The loss which we always bewail and which we seem to suffer means in reality that a heavy and indeed oppressive burden is lifted from us when Jesus Christ becomes our Judge."<sup>35</sup>

Barth argues that humanity by nature depends on Christ as an elder brother, but a brother from whom humanity cannot detach itself. Humanity's existence is through the grace of God. As the apostle Paul puts it, what is by grace is a gift, and the receiver has nothing to boast about because it is not based on merit. As the Judge, whatever Christ describes as righteous stands that way, and whatever He tags unrighteous is unrighteous. This explains why the revelations of His divinity and His willingness to take up our place made Him the sinful man before God and, conversely, rendered humanity upright before God. He judges from a *place* where no man can stand.<sup>36</sup> This 'place' seems to refer to the place of righteousness. However, Barth's reference to Jesus' starting from the vantage of preaching repentance for the coming kingdom seems to suggest that this *place* is not only a place of righteousness but the judgement throne at the eschaton.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, having demonstrated His impartial judgement to the extent that the Judge was condemned for identifying with His brothers, there can be no escape route for sinners except under the declaration of the Judge of all.

Although humanity sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, the understanding of this sin is not made glaring in humanity but in Christ. "It is again Jesus Christ in whose existence sin is revealed, not only in its actuality and sinfulness, but as the truth of all human being and activity."<sup>38</sup> It is fascinating to see how Barth seems to refer to Paul's argument in Galatians that the law reveals sin. Barth is here drawing a similarity between Christ, the

33 See Adam J. Johnson, "Barth on the Atonement," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth*, 147–158.

34 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 397.

35 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 233.

36 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 400.

37 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 399.

38 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 401.



Judge and the enforcer of the law and the law. Christ is both revealing sin and, at the same time, the sinner who stands condemned by the law.

Further, just as the atonement is a revelation of Christ's divinity and humanity, it is also a revelation of the destructive power of sin. However, Barth quickly points out the distinction between how Christ reveals sin and how sin might be manifested in humanity. Of course, there is the tendency to see sin as a product of manipulation by a higher force and, therefore, to argue that humanity acted based on external influence. However, Barth insists that there is no distinction between the sinner and their sins. As seen above in his concept of *das Nichtige*, he argues that sin does exist on its own without the one committing it. Also, there are no classes or grades of sin, including conscious and unconscious sins. Each is the same. The distinction between lesser and greater sins and intentional and unintentional sins, for instance, the tax collectors versus the Pharisees, has always led to the separation of humans into the camp of more serious and less serious sinners. Contrarily, Barth argues that sin is sin. Christ eradicated the foregoing distinction when He declared Himself sinful in solidarity with sinners. In doing that, He identified not only with better sinners but with every sinner. After Jesus took up our sins, Barth argues that "When He bears it [our sins], even the greatest of sins cannot damn a man."<sup>39</sup>

Sin is indeed sin. However, it seems that a terrorist, a child abuser, or a narcissist might be considered a terrible sinner before the law rather than a fornicator or an adulterer. If every sinful or erroneous action is taken to be the same, we may run into trouble regarding accountability before the law; after all, everyone is a sinner and, therefore, is not qualified to call other sinners out except Christ.

In Christ, the revelation of sin is not an actual action of the Judge but the actual condition and activity of all humanity. Human nature is altered in it, and humans are no longer themselves. Despite this alteration due to sin, Barth argues that humanity remains the excellent creature of God as it was in the beginning. This explains why, despite taking our place, the Judge was restored. Therefore, it follows that since the Judge who was not sinful took our place, borne our sin, and was not destroyed or His divinity lost, through Him, the image of God in us that was altered through sin is restored.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 401-403.

<sup>40</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 401, 404.



Secondly, this judgement means the salvation of humanity. Traditionally, there is no dispute concerning the benefit of Christ's death on the cross. Of course, as mentioned above, the various doctrines of the atonement used various terminologies for Christ's work and the manner through which such work was done. However, the result is the salvation of humankind. This is precisely what Barth also holds. As shown above, the atonement is Christ's history and human history, stating what He accomplished and what humans benefited from this accomplishment. This accomplishment concerns the fact that God in Christ saw humans' precarious condition and the need for salvation. The Son of God, the Judge, all in His compassion and willingness to identify with sinful humanity, went to a distant land where He seemed to be denuded of all His glories so that humans could be saved and reconciled with God. Therefore, "*Deus pro nobis* means that God in Jesus Christ has taken our place when we become sinners, when we become His enemies, when we stand as such under His accusation and curse, and bring upon ourselves our own destruction."<sup>41</sup>

Thirdly, this judgement leads to union with Christ. Christians are not only saved graciously without merit, but the prime benefit of their salvation is union with Christ. Christ took our place, all the punishments we were due to receive; He took everything on our behalf.<sup>42</sup> Not only that, He brought us into unity with the triune God. In the event of the atonement, Barth argues that "[...] God allows the world and humanity to take part in the history of the inner life of His Godhead, in the movement in which from and to all eternity He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and therefore the one true God."<sup>43</sup> This union with Christ has several implications for the Christian life, as mentioned below.

Fourthly, this judgement reveals Christ's virtue of humility and its implications for Christians. God the Son condescends Himself for the sake of humanity. Robert B. Price argues that "If Barth were to rewrite his doctrine of the divine perfections (CD II/1), he would not add humility to the list. But he would ensure that 'all the predicates of [the] Godhead' were 'filled out and interpreted' more fully in the light of the Son's humility."<sup>44</sup> Barth calls this condescension "the aspect of the grace of God in Jesus Christ in which

41 Barth, CD IV/1, § 59: 216.

42 Barth, CD IV/1, § 59: 215–216.

43 Barth, CD IV/1, § 59: 215.

44 Robert B. Price, "Barth on the Incarnation" in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth*, 137–145, 141.



it comes to man as the (sinful) creature of God freely, without any merit or deserving, and therefore from outside, from above – which is to say, from God’s standpoint, the aspect of His grace in which He does something unnecessary and extravagant, binding and limiting and compromising and offering Himself in relation to man by having dealings with him and making Himself his God. In the fact that God is gracious to man, all the limitations of man are God’s limitations, all his weaknesses, and more, all his perversities are His.”<sup>45</sup> He associates with fallen humans, unlike the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

### **3) What are the implications of this singular act on the sinners’ past and present experiences in Christ?**

In the atonement, Christ became both our substitute and representative. Marco Hofheinz argues that according to Barth, the Christian life is not lived in a vacuum but in Christ through baptism. The Christian life is a life of zeal and passion. He argues that Barth sees the Christian life as “To take part in the uprising against the disorder of the world; To oppose the Lordless powers; To join in the coming kingdom of God; To work for the human justice, freedom, and peace that reflects the justice, freedom, and peace of God’s coming kingdom.”<sup>46</sup> If this is the case, it follows that the Christian life cannot be free from suffering, especially in the form of persecution.

Barth argues that the doctrine of atonement differentiates the Almighty God from other gods because they are unwilling and incapable of doing what He did in Christ on the cross. Further, it expresses the humility of the Son of God. The Synoptic Gospels present Christ as both a Lord and a suffering servant who is obedient to the will of the Father. The will of the Father on earth is the redemption of humankind as it is done in heaven, even though this will not serve Christ’s purpose. “He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7); “He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). In other words: “He who was rich became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9).<sup>47</sup> He was cursed for us and made flesh: Barth

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 158, 282.

<sup>46</sup> Marco Hofheinz, “Barth on the Christian Life,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth*, 355–367, 366.

<sup>47</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 156.



argues that to be made flesh refers to His relationship with humanity as a result of being under the wrath of God and in a state of perishing.<sup>48</sup>

Barth argues that Christ's passion, as presented in the New Testament with its ethics, compels us to see a distinction between the followers of Christ and those who are not. Believers must imitate God, as in Eph 5, and be perfect as their Father in Heaven, as in Matthew 5.<sup>49</sup> From this point, they cannot choose whether they will exalt or abase themselves, whether they will save their life or lose it and in that way save it, whether they will leave or take up their cross, whether they will be offended by the beatitudes or put themselves under the light of them, whether they will hate their enemies or love them, whether they will accept or not accept the exhortation to ὑποταγή, to ὑπακοή, to τιμή, to the bearing of the burdens of others, to suffering in the discipleship of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

The New Testament ethics emphasise the importance of obedience, submission, and humility in discipleship. It implies that fulfilling the need for obedience rests on the God whose name and authority it is expected of, in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who tie heavy burdens on their followers without using their fingers to move them. If God were like these, the morality of the New Testament may have been arbitrary, facultative and incidental, resulting in a system of morality that extols its idealism or impatience. The New Testament contends, however, that this ethics reflects God's divine character and that He does not exist above it. This ethics is not a moral code but reflects who He is.<sup>51</sup> In other words, Christ kept an ethical standard for all Christians to follow, especially when He said, take up your cross and follow me. Barth argues that God's true divinity is revealed through Christ's humility, which can be confirmed through our humiliation. This humility is a novum mysterium, demonstrating His love and life even in death. It is a fundamental aspect of God's being, and understanding Christ's deity and suffering is crucial for understanding the free love of God in the atonement.<sup>52</sup>

In His agony, the Judge was in solidarity with sinners. He is a perfect sacrifice for us, once and for all. As stated above, God did for us in Jesus what we could not do for ourselves. In doing so, He reveals His glory so that humans may have reason to praise Him, although He does not need their

48 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 171.

49 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 190.

50 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 191.

51 Barth, CD IV/1, §59: 190-191.

52 Barth CD IV/1, §59: 192-193.



praise because He is contented in Himself.<sup>53</sup> This passion is the radical divine action that destroys the primary evil in the world, bringing in a new man and establishing a new world. It is the divine action of atonement that has taken place for us.<sup>54</sup> Faith in God's Word, specifically in Jesus Christ, is the only way to overcome the idea of an impatient God. God's patience is not only adequate towards us but also in judgment and punishment. By believing in God's Word, we can accept His patience and the possibility and reality of it. The only way to show gratitude for our lives is through faith in Jesus Christ and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The relationship with Jesus Christ allows us to endure suffering and the gift of our life for good, even in the face of inevitable death. This faith in God's Word allows us to grasp the promise of eternal life and the glory that will be revealed in us.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Barth's view of sin and atonement differs significantly from the traditional views. This significant shift has enhanced our understanding of the atonement from the perspective of the revelation of the Son of God and the triune God. The atonement is also a revelation of sin on the one hand as pride, sloth, and falsehood and as *das Nichtige* on the other. This understanding has a theodicean motif, and as a result of it, the emphasis of the atonement in Barth is not about satisfying divine justice due to the sin of our first parents. However, the nucleus of the discussion is God the Son, whose atoning work on the cross in our place is not as traditionally understood, but in overcoming sin, we are saved, reconciled to God, united with the Trinity, and therefore also share in the passion of Christ.

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53 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 211–212.

54 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §59: 247.

55 Barth, *CD IV/1*, §60: 412.