

The Perfections of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: A Consideration of the Formal Structure

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Abstract

This treatment of the perfections of God in the theology of Karl Barth serves as an introduction and summary of Barth's thinking on this topic as found in Church Dogmatics II.1. The focus of the article is weighted to the formal side of Barth's construction while not ignoring material considerations. As such, the author considers Barth's understanding of God as the One who loves in freedom, general characteristics of Barth's understanding of divine perfections, and more specifically the dialectical dyadic paradigm used by Barth in his construction.

Key words: *Karl Barth, divine attributes, dogmatics, God, perfections of God*

1. Introduction

Perhaps the most neglected part of the *Church Dogmatics* is Karl Barth's discussion of the divine attributes.¹ Indeed, Barth provides his readers with one of the most innovative, interesting, and serious minded approaches to the divine attributes theology has to offer. This makes the relative silence related to Barth's treatment of the divine attributes all the more puzzling.² Christopher Holmes makes a

1 Barth prefers the term perfections (Vollkommenheiten) over that of attributes. This paper largely follows Barth's term. Where attributes is used, it should be understood as synonymous with perfections.

2 George Hunsinger, in discussing the concepts of time and eternity in Barth, observes: "No topic in Barth interpretation is more in need of clarification, and none requires more working with the Church Dogmatics as a whole, than this one" (Hunsinger, 14). While Hunsinger is

critical observation when he states, “As far as Barth scholarship is concerned, the doctrine has received very little scholarly attention” (Holmes, 208-9).³

The purpose of this discussion is therefore two-fold: (1) to provide an overview of the formal structure utilized by Barth in developing his doctrine of divine perfections as a basis for further discussion, and (2) by so doing to make a contribution to a dialogue that is much needed. This dialogue is especially needed given the heightened attention to interfaith dialogue. It seems that in entering those dialogues, the Christian community should have a deep understanding of the doctrine of God, as interfaith dialogue depends upon clarity concerning this doctrine. Certainly Barth needs to be a part of that discussion, and in turn this means that Barth’s understanding of the divine perfections needs to be a part of that understanding and discussion.

As a final introductory note, in attempting to outline Barth’s formal construction, an awareness of the interrelatedness (indeed the inseparability!) of formal and material aspects in Barth’s theology must be kept in mind.⁴ While this is the case, an effort is maintained to concentrate on the formal aspects, though it is to be understood that material aspects, because of the nature of Barth’s method, will also necessarily at times enter the discussion.

2. Revelation and the Being of God

Barth grounds his discussion of divine perfections in his opening statement regarding the essence (*essentia, das Wesen*) of God, namely, that “God is” (Barth,

referring to the concepts of time and eternity within the entire scope of the Church Dogmatics, it is interesting to note that this interrelationship plays a significant role in Barth’s discussion of divine attributes, particularly in the attribute of eternity. Eberhard Jüngel, to provide another example, after touching upon the beginning of Barth’s formal system for the attributes (God as the One who loves in freedom), shifts his attention back to the main line of his thesis: “It would be appealing to follow in detail Barth’s accounts of ‘God’s being as the one who loves’ and ‘God’s being in freedom.’ But what has been said so far is sufficient for the goal we are pursuing here” (Jüngel, 82).

- 3 In the same article, Holmes goes on to say: “C. D. Osthövener’s work is the only available published scholarly treatment of the doctrine.” Indeed Osthövener’s *Die Lehre von Gottes Eigenschaften bei Friedrich Schleiermacher und Karl Barth* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1996) not only is the sole work in the area, but also has been out of print since 2002. This, in tandem with inaccessibility to the non-German reader, considerably narrows the literature available to many! George S. Hendry also made a contribution related to the divine perfections in Karl Barth, although the paper was limited to discussion of divine freedom in Barth in a broader way (Hendry, 229-241).
- 4 As Barth himself states, in many ways and places, “the distinction of form and content must not involve any separation” (Karl Barth, CD I.2, 492-493).

257, 288).⁵ Here it must be stressed that *is* means that God's being is denoted by life (Barth 263, 293). This statement serves as the backdrop, foreground, and pre-supposition of all that follows with respect to the being of God and thereby also of the divine perfections, which are in fact part and parcel of the essence of God. God is, and God is life. This essence of the life of God is encountered in one place and in one place only, "where God deals with us as Lord and Savior, or not at all" (Barth 261, 293). That is to say, that humanity knows God insofar as God makes God's self to be known by humanity. It is also the case that "God has not withheld Himself from men as true being . . ." (Barth 261, 293).

What is critical to both of these propositions is a phrase which Barth employs simultaneously and in conjunction with them: "the act of revelation" (Barth 261, 293). The revelation of God is an act of God, and by this Barth wishes to avoid any confusion. The act of God is not a generalized thing, commixture, or dilution. The act of revelation is in fact "a particular event, not identified with the sum, nor identical with any content of other existing happenings either in nature or in human history" (Barth 264, 296). This event is naturally identified by Barth as the person and work of Jesus Christ and the witness to this event Holy Scripture. In this event "God is who He is" and therefore in the act of revelation, God is revealed as God is (Barth 262, 294). Inasmuch as this event is differentiated from all other events, so too is God's act of revelation a differentiated action. However, both in the event and act in which God is self-differentiated, God is "still connected to it," yet even in this connection God is self-differentiated (Barth 264, 296).⁶ Indeed, this differentiation constitutes the "evidence and authority" of God's revelation and further, "the fact that God's being is event, the event of God's act, necessarily . . . means that it is His own conscious, willed and executed decision. It is His own decision, and therefore independent of the decisions by which we validate our existence" (Barth 271, 304).

All of this is of particular importance for Barth in preparing to discuss in proper the perfections of God, for it is in God's act that we clearly see God's being and no other being for God "alone in His act is who He is" (Barth 272, 305). It is in God's action that one knows one is dealing with God's being and as long as one's gaze is correctly fixed, one avoids the error when thinking on God's perfections of having them become "openly or secretly thoughts about ourselves"

5 The English edition of *Church Dogmatics* will, from this point forward, be cited in text in non-italicized print as e.g., 257. The German edition will be cited in text with italics, e.g., 288. All quotes from Karl Barth, with the exception of footnote four, come from *Church Dogmatics* II.1 and *Kirchliche Dogmatik* II.1. All quotes have been left in situ and therefore are gender-laden. An attempt is made with respect to the remainder of the paper to follow a gender-neutral approach.

6 See also (Jüngel, 39).

(Barth 272, 305).

By way of summary thus far, as well as preparation for the next section, the following are noted: (1) God is. (2) God's being is event and the event of God's act (*Gott ist in seiner Tat. KD II.1, 305*). (3) God's event, act, and therefore being are differentiated from all others in God's free decision. (4) Both God's event and act are particular rather than general, and particular to the person and work of Jesus Christ. (5) This action of God as differentiated also establishes the idea that the perfections of God are also differentiated from the creature. *In sum, this act of God reveals "the being of God as the One who loves in freedom."* This statement marks the foundational proposition, leading into Barth's discussion of the perfections proper. This is the ground of Barth's discussion of God's perfections.

3. God as the One who Loves in Freedom

From the proposition, which Barth seeks to establish in part 1 of §28 of *Church Dogmatics* II.1, "the being of God as One who loves in freedom," Barth moves forward. While desiring to hold the proposition as a unified whole, Barth of necessity now begins to discuss what is the second stage of his formal construction. He accomplishes this by speaking first of "the being of God as the One who loves" and secondly of "the being of God in freedom." Here some consideration must be given to Barth's material understanding of love as God's essence and as God's life, as this relates to how he later formally ties the perfections to either love or freedom respectively.

3.1. God is the One who Loves

God is made manifest to humanity in God's revelation, and in this revelation God reveals who God is. What is clearly visible to humanity in this act of revelation is that "God seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us" (Barth 273, 307). In fact, Barth states that this is the one thing that God does:

In itself, first and last, it will always be this and no other relationship. God wills and does nothing different, but only one thing – this one thing. And this one thing that He wills and does is the blessing of God, that which distinguishes His act as divine, and therefore also His person as divine. This one thing is therefore the divine, the Θειον, the essence of God in the revelation of His name, which is the subject of our enquiry. That is to say, we shall find in God Himself, in His eternal being, nothing other than this one thing (Barth 275, 308).

This free self-extension of God in fellowship to humanity is an act of the self-sufficient God that does not need fellowship outside of God's self, but nevertheless

not only seeks, but creates this fellowship as well as the conditions upon which it is established. That God has so given God's self to humanity is contained in Barth's statement that in this act "we describe God's being more specifically in the statement that He is the One who loves ... His act (is) as that of the One who loves" (Barth 275, 308).

Materially this loving consists of four things. First, God's love is taken up with the cause of seeking and creating fellowship with humanity. Second, this fellowship is established on God's side without reference to humanity's (the beloved's) worthiness for such fellowship. Third, this love of God's is, in and of itself, an end and a purpose and is willed and accomplished on the side of God. Finally, there is a necessity to this loving "for it is the being, the essence, and the nature of God. But for this very reason it is also free from every necessity in respect of its object. God loves us, and loves the world, in accordance with His revelation" (Barth 280, 314).

If the being of God *is* as the One who loves, Barth would also have the reader know that God is the One who loves in *freedom*. This brings the second half of the second stage of Barth's construction into consideration, "the being of God in freedom."

3.2. God in Freedom

God is God's own, belonging to and dependent upon no other or upon no thing. "God's being as He who lives and loves is being in freedom" (Barth 301, 338). This freedom is characterized by the idea that God is unconditioned by that which is external to God and is conditioned only by God's "own choosing and deciding, willing and doing" (Barth 301, 338). Divine freedom for Barth is typified by two distinct poles, a negative and a positive. Negatively divine freedom is unlimitedness, boundlessness, restrictionlessness, and unconditionedness. But these "negative" characterizations apply only with respect to that which is outside the divine. However, this negative aspect is significant inasmuch as it permits an exposition of creation, providence, omnipotence, and eternity. Barth maintains that without this negative aspect being constantly referred to, one cannot grasp these ideas (Barth 302-3, 340).

That being said, Barth does not wish to put too much emphasis on this negative pole. Instead, the positive pole, which is constituent of the essence of God, is where emphasis needs to be placed. This positive aspect points to God's self-groundedness, self-determination, self-motivation, self-dependence, free will and free decision. In both negative and positive aspects, God is completely self-differentiated and is therefore free to be or not to be "like the reality different from Himself" (Barth 304, 342). This is God, expressed in freedom, God *ens a se*. This understanding of the freedom of God leads to what Barth calls a second

proposition of God's aseity: "The fact that in every way He is independent of all other reality does not itself constitute God's freedom but its exercise" (Barth 308, 346).

This absolute freedom of God is therefore expressed not simply by utter transcendence, but by the freedom expressed in divine immanence:

It is just the absoluteness of God properly understood which can signify not only His freedom to transcend all that is other than Himself, but also His freedom to be immanent within it, and at such a depth of immanence as simply does not exist in the fellowship between other beings (Barth 313, 352).

That is to say, God is free and is therefore free also to reveal God's self in the act of revelation. God is absolutely free to love. God is completely free to live. God is utterly free to exercise God's freedom to live and to love. There is in this living, loving, and freedom a distinct integration and perichoretic interaction and inter-essence of these concepts. Barth simply and eloquently states this interplay when he says:

It is not that God first lives and then also loves. But God loves, and in this act lives. If we have interpreted the divinity of His act, or the divinity of God as freedom, we could not and cannot mean by this notion of freedom anything different from Himself as the One who loves (Barth 321, 361).

This then is the discussion in which Barth's treatment of the perfections of God is grounded. God lives in the act of loving in freedom, that is, "God's being consists in the fact that He is the One who loves in freedom" (Barth 322, 362). This is God's perfection.

4. The Divine Perfections: Some Characteristics

It is at this point that the discussion of God's perfections in proper may begin. Since God is (i.e., God is life) the God who loves in freedom, Barth discusses the divine perfections (*Vollkommenheiten*) in relationship to the divine perfection (*Vollkommenheit*). That is, all perfections point back to love and freedom which are bound together in God's being. However, before moving on to the perfections related to the divine perfection of "God being the One who loves in freedom," note must first be taken of Barth's more general observations with respect to divine perfections.

4. 1. Function of Glory

One of the more perplexing aspects of Barth's general introduction is the way in which he employs the concept of glory. In what is an otherwise incredibly balanced and cogent treatment of divine perfections, this segment can be something

of an enigma. That God is the Lord of glory is, in fact, a device used by Barth to limit two errors that arise with respect to the perfections and therefore perfection of God.

The first is that the Lord becomes separated from being glorious, or being the God who is the Lord of glory. In this instance, the Lord is an impoverished being insofar as the perfections are seen as primarily a divine economy which links the divine with the world. The glory of God's perfections is therefore reduced to an economic and causal glory not grounded in divine reality, that is the life of God (Barth 324-5, 364-5).

The second error is that glory becomes a concept that has no Lord. The perfections in this case are reduced to a mere "collection of mighty potencies by which man sees himself surrounded ... (and that) in them all, he is confronted by the divine" (Barth 325, 366). Barth's intention is noted in a summation excursus in which he makes the following assertions: (1) "He (God) does not assume them (perfections) merely in connexion with His self-revelation to the world, but that they constitute His own eternal glory," and (2) "it is of equal importance to interpret God's glory and perfections, not in and for themselves, but as the glory of the Lord who alone is able to establish, disclose and confirm them as real glory" (Barth 327, 367).⁷

Part of the difficulty with understanding the function of glory is, at least in part, due to the difficulty in translating Barth's word-play at the head of the section. There is a small omission in the English, but it does somewhat impact the conditions that Barth is trying to convey. Compare, for instance, the following:

In this doctrine we have to attain the insight that God – and here the German language offers a possibility of expression which other languages do not have – is not only the Lord (*Herr*), but the Lord of glory (*Herrlichkeit*), and conversely, that all glory is the glory of God the Lord (*die Herrlichkeit Gottes des Herrn*).

We have to carry out the realization in this doctrine, that God – the German language offers here a possibility of expression that others do not have – is not only the Lord (*Herr*), but as such glorious (*herrlich*): that every glory (*Herrlichkeit*) is the glory of God (*die Herrlichkeit Gottes*) the Lord (*des Herrn*) (Barth 324, 364).⁸

The first translation omits "but as such glorious." This, at the very least, changes the form of Barth's word-play. At first glance, this may not seem significant; however, the points of Barth's concerns, as discussed earlier, are contained

7 This citation refers to both points 1 and 2.

8 The second translation belongs to the author.

in this statement, and the construction of the statement is therein jeopardized. The statement then integrates as such: if God is the Lord (at all) then God is also glorious; God is the Lord and as such glory is the glory of God the Lord, and God also the Lord of glory. This use of glory then preserves the perfections of God against the two weaknesses that Barth wishes to avoid. The initial translation does not maintain this construction. The glory of God the Lord, then, is a construction employed to avoid the possibility of a reduction of divine perfection on the one hand, and the divine perfections on the other. Glory cannot be separated from God, nor God from glory.

A final observation needs to be made; this is with respect to Holmes' understanding of the function of glory. Holmes states, "Barth's *resolution* of the problem is most perspicuous in his treatment of the divine glory, the ultimate horizon of attribution in the doctrine of divine attributes" (Holmes, 209). Holmes further maintains that "glory is the point of departure for Barth's treatment of perfections..." and also identifies it as the "chief perfection" (Holmes, 211). In distinction to this, the understanding proposed in this paper is that glory is, in fact, not the foundation, ground, nor beginning point for Barth's understanding of divine perfections but rather a part of the greater program.⁹

4. 2. Unity and Multiplicity.

In considering the perfections, Barth must also deal with the idea of multiplicity with unity and singularity. Barth begins by stating:

The one perfection of God, His loving in freedom, is lived out by Him, and therefore identical with a multitude of various and distinct types of perfections. There is no possibility of knowing the perfect God without knowing His perfections. The converse is also true: knowledge of the divine perfections is possible only in knowledge of the perfect God, His loving in freedom (Barth 322, 362).

The perfections then are multiplicities and diversities that constitute the unity of divine perfection of loving in freedom. These perfections are not a wealth which God possesses, but rather a wealth that God is in God's self (Barth 331, 372). The perfections, being the wealth of God's essence, cannot then be divided, reduced, or separated. They are not "capable of dissolution," and "every individual perfec-

9 The problem here seems to be that Holmes has begun his analysis starting with §29 "The Perfections of God" in CD II.1, 322. However, one can only properly see (as Holmes himself notes! on page 209) the perfections in the light of the fuller Doctrine of God. In order to fully understand the construction that Barth employs, §28 is a better starting point. In fact, Holmes' paper moves from page 329 in CD over to page 642 in CD which is the concluding section to the divine perfections.

tion in God is nothing but God Himself and therefore nothing but every other perfection” (Barth 333, 374). Because the perfections in multiplicity are in fact perichoretically tied to God’s perfection in unity, they belong solely to God; they are perfections of the divine being and not any other (Barth 331, 372).

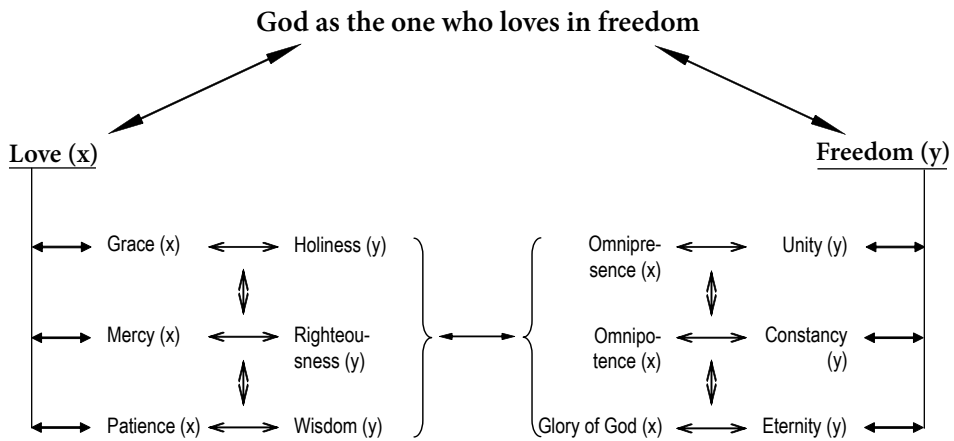
This also necessarily means that divine perfection is not grounded in perfections outside of God. God is not a participant in generalized notions of, e.g., grace, mercy, holiness, etc. Furthermore, the perfections of God are grounded in God’s own essence, and God does not participate in the essence of others (Barth 333, 375). God is not the epitome of what it is to be holy; rather God is holy in and of God’s self and it must be understood that “God does not borrow what He is from outside, from some other” (Barth 334, 375). They are neither found, derived, nor shared perfections. They are, from beginning to end, perfections of the divine perfection. Any attempt to understand or categorize the perfections of God otherwise is to miss the mark. As Barth says, “the right way, on the contrary, will consist in understanding the attributes of God as those of this His special being itself and therefore of His life, of His love in freedom” (Barth 337, 379).

Before moving to the next characteristic of the divine perfections, it needs to be stressed that Barth is at pains to state that while human language and expression necessitate discussing the individual aspects of the essence of God, one needs to be mindful that such divisions, as such, do not exist properly to the essence of God. The essence of God is unified. This is emphasized again and again with each discussion and each perfection, all of which Barth views as belonging to God’s undivided essence, a multiplicity all pointing, revealing, proceeding from, and falling back into a divine singular united essence. With this understanding, the next point in the discussion can be undertaken.

4. 3. Perichoretic and Dyadic

Consideration can now be given to Barth’s construction related to the perichoretic and dyadic relationships involved in the perfections. Simply stated, “God’s freedom is in fact no less divine than His love. And God’s love is in fact divine only in so far as it is exercised in His freedom” (Barth 351, 395). This interplay is further seen thus: “We must recognize and understand all His perfections as the perfections of His love” (Barth 351, 394). The same could be said reciprocally of freedom.

The perfections are then divided into six dyads, three belonging to divine love and three belonging to divine freedom. These relationships can be seen in the schematic appended at the end of this paper. Grace and holiness, mercy and righteous, patience and wisdom all are affiliated with divine loving. Unity and omnipresence, constancy and omnipotence, eternity and glory are connected with divine freedom. But within this structure of dyads exists also a substructure.



Schematic of the Perichoretic Relationships of the Divine Perfections in the *Church Dogmatics*.

For example, within the dyad of the perfections of grace and holiness, which are associated with divine love, a dialectical tension is maintained. That is, for example, that within the divine perfections of love, grace and holiness are further expressed mercy and righteousness; mercy and righteousness as grace and holiness; grace and holiness as patience and wisdom; patience and wisdom as mercy and righteousness, etc. The same construction occurs under the divine perfections of freedom. For example, unity is paired with omnipresence, with unity expressing the divine freedom under consideration and omnipresence bringing the dialectical play of love into the considerations of divine freedom while yet being itself considered a perfection of freedom. This happens then in turn with constancy and omnipotence and eternity and glory. It may further be said that the perfection of divine love, and that of divine freedom as wholes also express this same form of perichoretic relationship. Each of these interrelationships point back and interplay with the foundational proposition that God is the One who loves in freedom, and in this is the essence of the life of God, the God who lives as the One who loves in freedom.

5. The Six Dyads

Why these particular tandem pairs are formally connected with each other and their particular perfection of either love or freedom is the next point of discussion. Consideration of each dyad will occur in the order with which Barth's addresses it.

5. 1. Dyad 1: Grace and Holiness

The first dyad to be considered within the perfection of divine love, is grace and holiness. Divine grace is in tandem with holiness in this dyad because grace “stands directly confronted with and controlled and purified by the concept of divine holiness” (Barth 353, 396). Grace is a perfection of divine love as it not only seeks and creates fellowship with the creature, but that it does so without condition or merit on the part of humanity. There is a turning of God toward humanity, but this is accomplished “not in equality, but in condescension” and “the fact that God is gracious means that He condescends: He, the only one who really is in a position to condescend” (Barth 354, 398). Because God is so gracious and acts out of the divine essence, God “distinguishes Himself from the creature by His grace” (Barth 357, 401). Barth states:

This is how God loves. This is how He seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us. By this distinctive mark we recognize the divinity of His love. For it is in this way, graciously, that God not only acts outwardly towards His creature, but is in Himself from eternity to eternity (Barth 357, 401).

This then is the formal relationship of the perfection of grace to divine love. But because the grace of God is beyond us, because our notions of grace cannot apprehend what God’s grace is, Barth is emphatic that humanity’s understanding, knowledge, and clarity of the concept must ever expand in faith. Therefore, the counter and complementary perfection of this dyad, holiness, must also be explored.

In doing so, Barth wishes the reader to understand that he is not speaking of something new, different, contrary, or conflicting. It is here that Barth clearly explains his method in moving forward:

We must adopt the same procedure at every point in the details as well. We will therefore make the kind of distinction which does not imply a second factor along side a first, but simply wishes to recognize the one according to the clearness and fullness with which it is a unity in God. We are not, then making any crucial change of theme when we go on to speak of God’s holiness. We are merely continuing to speak of God’s grace (Barth 359, 403).

Holiness is paired with grace for precisely the fact that in God’s gracious and loving turning toward the creature, God remains distinct from all others in God’s graciousness and therefore in God’s loving: “God’s loving is a divine being and action distinct from every other loving in the fact that it is holy” (Barth 359, 403). God’s holiness means that even in God’s gracious turning in condescension, God freely does so without compromise to his divine essence. God “remains true to Himself and makes His own will prevail” (Barth 360, 404). Finally, grace and holiness are placed in tandem with one another because “the holiness of God consists in the unity of His judgment with His grace. God is holy because His grace judges and His judgment is gracious” (Barth 363, 408).

5. 2. Dyad 2: Mercy and Righteousness

How indistinguishable Barth wants to make the perfections is seen at the beginning of the next dyad of perfections, mercy and righteousness. “We . . . must place along our first affirmation a second and third: not with the idea of adding something new, but with the idea of continually saying the one thing . . . in ever new forms” (Barth 368, 414). Mercy is tied to grace inasmuch as it is an expression of God’s kindness in turning to humanity. God’s grace is merciful, not only in the fact that God can freely turn in love toward humanity, but that God can and does have a “readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing” (Barth 369, 415). God not only has sympathy for the situation of humanity but also God can will and does will to remove the distress of humanity. That is, “the merciful God has taken action on our behalf both in freedom and in power” (Barth 374, 421). Freedom then brings forth the other partner in this dyad, righteousness.

In so doing, Barth’s order of the priority of Gospel before Law enters the picture. Just as grace preceded holiness; so too does mercy precede righteousness. As Barth states the matter, “we cannot speak at all of the righteousness of God which is so much emphasized in the Bible, if we do not proceed from a consideration of God’s mercy” (Barth 376, 423). Because of the economy of God’s revelation, grace and mercy have priority, but they are not present without holiness and righteousness. The righteousness of God “is a determination of the love and therefore of the grace and mercy of God” (Barth 376, 423). It must also be stated that if love, grace, or mercy were cast adrift from holiness or righteousness, then those would necessarily no longer be perfections belonging to divine essence.

5. 3. Dyad 3: Patience and Wisdom

This leads to the last dyad of the perfections of divine love, that of patience and wisdom. In moving to the discussion of patience and love, Barth reminds his readers that they are not leaving behind grace and holiness or mercy and righteousness, but merely “reaffirming them in a new way” (Barth 407, 458). It too is a “special perfection of the love and therefore of the being of God” (Barth 407, 458). Patience is a special perfection in that God grants space and time in which humanity may exist. It is in patience that love is demonstrated because God does permit in time and space the existence of a “reality side by side with His own” (Barth 410, 461). This means that love does not over-reach, devouring humanity, but permits humanity to exist. If patience was not accompanied by the perfection of divine love, again divine love would not be godly love, as humanity would be overtaken or annihilated or prohibited a free existence as a consequence of “divine” impatience. But this is not a possibility for divine love which must be exercised in patience.

Patience is now set alongside wisdom, but as with the other dyads, “in such a way that there cannot arise any material antithesis to the ideas of the second category” (Barth 422, 475). Wisdom is formally paired with patience because as God gives time and space for humanity to exist (and respond to divine love), God’s patience is understood to be wise. In love, God not only knows what God wills, but why God so wills it to be, and this is wise. God knows in completeness “why and to what end He is gracious,” and this is wisdom (Barth 424, 478). God is not a capricious God, nor does God exist or act out of whim, reaction, or chance; this means God is wise. God is wise insofar as God is gracious and merciful, holy and righteous. Again if God were not wise, and wisdom was not linked with the perfection of divine love, neither would God be gracious and merciful, holy and righteous. Wisdom is paired with patience precisely because:

God is Himself the truth and clarity which justifies, confirms and attests itself. He can allow time, space, and existence to another beside Himself without uncertainty, danger or infidelity, as the Lord of this other, and to the praise of His own glory. And He does all this with the same truth and clarity. In this way His wisdom is the meaning of His patience and forbearance. (Barth 472, 481).

Wisdom therefore points back to the meaning of patience. Patience is not adrift, but grounded in the divine being and the meaning and purpose behind patience. Wisdom means again that God is the One who loves in freedom.

5. 4. Dyad 4: Unity and Omnipresence

Attention is now turned to the second pole of the perfections, that is, the perfection of divine freedom. Barth confirms the nature of his formal system when he states that “we have already spoken about the divine freedom as we spoke about the divine love” (Barth 440, 495). In so saying, Barth is affirming the one perfection of God that is inherent to all the divine perfections of which he is speaking:

The divine nature of God’s freedom consists and confirms itself in the fact that even in His freedom, as the One who is free, God is the One who loves. God is One. He is constant and eternal in Himself and in all His works. This is His freedom (Barth 441, 496).

It is fitting, therefore, that Barth should begin his discussion of the second group of dyadic perfections with the perfection of unity which is paired with omnipresence (the counterpart in love) under the perfection of divine freedom. Unity is constituted by the concepts of uniqueness (*singularitas*) and simplicity (*simplicitas*). In the first instance, this means that there is no other than or like God; that is, God is one of a *kind*. God is unique in essence, likewise in perfection, and therefore also in God’s perfections (Barth 442-3, 498-9). In simplicity, God is in-

divisible, that is, God is composed in essence only and strictly of God's self. God is incapable of being reduced to anything other than what God is. Unity therefore is seen in these two ideas, that of singularity and that of simplicity. For Barth, this assertion means that "God's unity can be called the basic proposition of the doctrine of God's freedom" (Barth 445, 501).

The partner in this dyad is omnipresence, and for Barth, God can only be omnipresent insofar as God is unity. The formal relationship of omnipresence with divine unity is explained by Barth:

The concept of the unity of God as such does not seem to describe God's being in such a way as to explain His being as love. The concept of the divine omnipresence, however, does this without any ambiguity, and when this term is associated with that of the divine unity, the latter does also (Barth 462-3, 520).

On the side of freedom, omnipresence clearly advances the love of God exercised in the freedom of God's unity. Because God loves, God's omnipresence means that God can and does in freedom allow humanity and creation to co-exist with the divine presence. This other existence, however, does not limit, border, or restrict the essence of divine being in any way. The interrelationship of this co-existence is understood in terms of spatiality. God, far from being a non-spatial being, is spatial inasmuch as God "possesses a place, His own place, or, we may say safely His own space" (Barth 468, 527). Barth distinguishes God's spatiality from all other spatiality in the following:

The spatiality of God is to be distinguished from the spatiality of every other being by the fact that it is the spatiality of the divine being, and that like all other divine perfections it is identical with this being. God is spatial as the One who loves in freedom, and therefore as Himself (Barth 470, 529).

Additionally it is understood that God possesses not only divine space but creates and possesses all space that God has created and permitted in love and freedom to co-exist alongside the divine space and presence. There is "nowhere where God is not, but He is not nowhere" (Barth 471, 530).

Because God is present, this implies a relationship both of distinction as well as nearness. God is not the thing to which God is present, and therein lies the distinction, but God is also near to that with which God is present. The relationship of this spatiality is also important. It is not God that "stands," so to speak, in humanity's space, but rather humanity that stands in God's (Barth 476, 535-6). It is precisely because of this priority and pre-eminence of divine presence and spatiality that it can be said, there is nowhere to "flee from God's presence" (Ps. 139), and this means there is also no place to flee from the God who loves in freedom.

5. 5. *Dyad 5: Constancy and Omnipotence*

Barth's system is extended with the dyad of the divine perfections of constancy and omnipotence. Barth uses the term *constancy* in lieu of the classical term *immutability*. Barth prefers constancy as it does not stifle God nor imply immobility on the part of God who is "eternal actuality" (Barth 494, 556). Barth does not wish to deny or suppress the vitality of the God who "is new every morning" (Lam 3:23). Rather, constancy witnesses formally to the trueness of the perfections and therefore the perfection of God. If it is said that God is the One who loves in freedom, then this is a statement of the constancy and unfailing nature of the essence of God. If it is said that God is grace, holiness, mercy, righteousness, patience, wisdom, unity, and omnipresence, then those perfections which constitute the very essence of God are always so, since constancy is numbered among the multiplicity of divine perfections that are bound in unity within the divine perfection and essence. God cannot deny God's self:

At every place He is what He is continually and self-consistently. His love cannot cease to be His love nor His freedom His freedom. He alone could assail, alter, abolish, or destroy Himself. But it is just at this point that He is the "immutable" God. For at no place or time can He or will He turn against Himself or contradict Himself, not even in virtue of His freedom or for the sake of His love (Barth 494-5, 556).

Constancy, far from being restrictive or limiting divine freedom, is in fact a confirmation of divine freedom. Placing constancy with the perfections of divine freedom formally means that God is "immutably" free, free in constancy and without fail. Yet, in constancy, love is also assured first because "if God has befriended man in his sin and continues to befriend him, this was and is again a free act of positing" (Barth 506, 569). Love is also assured in freedom as constancy is in tandem with omnipotence.

The divine perfection of omnipotence is one of the most protracted segments among Barth's treatment of divine attributes. Particular care will be taken, then, to draw out the formal considerations of omnipotence.

First, omnipotence is immediately connected with its counterpart constancy. As the God that is omnipotent, God is constant in that omnipotence, and conversely omnipotent in constancy. This omnipotence extends, then, also to all of the other divine perfections. That is, it may be said that all God's perfections are omnipotent, omnipotent grace, holiness, etc. (Barth 523, 588). This also means that omnipotence is not power without connection: that is, power in and of itself is not God, but rather that God is power, true power, real power. With this understanding, omnipotence is then understood to be both a *potentia* (a power within possibility), but simultaneously and without separation, a *postestas* (an authority or rule) as Barth defines it: a "moral and legal possibility" (Barth 526,

591).¹⁰ Then there is, in fact, no *potentia* that is absent *postestas*. When God acts out of the omnipotence of God's essence, God does so rightly and powerfully. This act proceeding from the divine perfection of omnipotence is referred to as omnicausality. Care is taken here by Barth to not confuse, but rather to clarify the relationship of omnicausality to omnipotence:

We have to see that His omnipotence becomes His omnicausality as God takes up and binds this other reality to Himself in love, but without ceasing to be God and omnipotent in Himself, in the height from which He can also be omnipotent for this other reality, for us, and for us in His omnicausality (Barth 528, 593).

Confusing omnicausality with omnipotence is, for Barth, anathema. If the focus is upon the causality of God (e.g., creation), and not the God who is omnipotent, then worship is misplaced at the very least. This is precisely the error which many traditional approaches to the divine attribute of omnipotence make, a confusion of omnicausality with omnipotence (Barth 528, 594).¹¹ For Barth,

Absolutely everything depends on whether we distinguish His omnipotence from His omnicausality: not to the glory of an unknown omnipotent being who is beyond and behind His work; but to the glory of the omnipotent God who is present to us in His work and is known to us by His self-revelation; to the glory of His divinity, of the freedom of His love, without which His love would not be divine love or recognizable as such (Barth 528, 594).

Having established this critical distinction between omnipotence and omnicausality, Barth adds two other dimensions to the understanding of omnipotence. What is obvious, even if one only peruses the table of contents of *CD II.1*, is the absence of omniscience from the classical line-up. This absence is due to the fact that Barth sees omniscience as properly belonging to the perfection of omnipotence. In addition to omniscience, omnivolence is also understood as belonging to divine omnipotence. God is "the personal Creator of all personal being, the spiritual Creator of all spirit. As such He is omnipotent in His knowing and willing, and His omnipotence is the omnipotence of His knowing and willing"

10 Barth also states here: "God's might never at any place precedes right, but is always and everywhere associated with it."

11 Barth is particularly cautious of François Turretini's assertion that "Potentia Dei, quae est principium exequens operationum divinarum, nihil aliud est quam ipsa Essentia Divina extra se productiva, per quam concipitur ut potens facere ea omnia quae vult, vel velle potest; quae hinc ante omnia distinguenda venit à potestate seu ἐξουσίᾳ, quae ius & auctoritatem aliquid faciendi norat, cùm potentia innuat demum in conceptu suo vim & facultatem agendi." See, François Turretini, *Institutio theologiae elencticae, Quaestio XXI* (Geneva: Apud Samuelem De Tournes, 1688), 270. NB, the English translation incorrectly attributes this to Quenstedt.

(Barth 543, 611). This means that God knows what God's will is, and since God is all-knowing, God wills what God knows, and all of this is done within the divine perfection of omnipotence. God also knows God's essence, and therefore God wills what God is in essence, the one who loves in freedom. God "is not compelled to do what He does . . . He does what He does because He wills it" (Barth 588-9, 664). In summary, omnipotence must be understood primarily as an omnipotence of love which knows and wills, a love which acts, knows, and wills in freedom.

5. 6. Dyad 6: *Eternity and Glory*

Eternity and glory is the final dyad in Barth's discourse on the divine perfections. God is eternal, and eternity is, for Barth, a duration that is "lacking in time," and "has and is simultaneity" (Barth 608, 686). There is a tri-unity involved in divine eternity, that is, that eternity is all at once beginning, middle, and end, and since it is all of these at once, it is "pure duration," and in this pure duration "God is free" inasmuch as this pure duration is "exclusively His being" (Barth 608-9, 685-6). God's eternity is then durative, and therefore exercises omnipotence over time itself. Since God is eternal in essence, it typifies God's freedom. Humanity, in contrast, exists in time and has no power over or above time.

The divine perfection of eternity functions formally with respect to time in the same way that space interrelates with the divine perfection of omnipresence. Simply stated, the eternity of God surrounds, enfolds, penetrates, and rules time (Barth 613, 691-2).¹² The relationship between time and eternity become more complex as Barth considers the material matter of the incarnation. In this event, eternity, without ceasing to be such, became time. Barth concludes from this: "From this standpoint too we cannot understand God's eternity as pure timelessness. Since it became time, and God Himself, without ceasing to be the eternal God, took time and made it His own . . ." (Barth 617, 695). In this act of taking time into eternity "real created time acquires in Jesus Christ and in every act of faith in Him the character and stamp of eternity, and life in it acquires the special characteristics of eternal life" (Barth 617, 696). This is again a perfection of God's freedom where God is free as eternal, but turns in love to that which is other.

Looking to the other aspect of the dyad, Barth remarks that God's "being is eternal in glory," and that this consideration of God as freedom "has led us again and for the last time to a consideration of His love" (Barth 640-1, 722). This is a reminder of the beauty and extraordinary balance executed in the construction of Barth's doctrine of divine perfections. Barth uses glory as a microcosm and

¹² This is seen again on p. 623 (CD) and p. 703 (KD): "God's eternity is in time. Time itself is in eternity."

reminder of his formal system:

For while the glory of God describes especially His freedom, majesty and pre-eminence, and therefore definitely belongs to the second series of divine perfections dealt with in this section, yet this final and supreme predicate of the divine freedom can be understood as such only if the divine freedom itself and as such is seen to be God's freedom to love (Barth 647, 730).

Because God is glorious, God loves. God's glory then, being attached to love in freedom, means that God is glorious in and of God's self, but also that God is revealed as such in the act of the revelation. That is, God's glory is a proceeding glory that shines upon humanity, and the glory of God becomes, thereby, the light that illuminates humanity. In so doing, "God's glory is the answer evoked by Him of the worship offered Him by His creatures" (Barth 647, 730). Glory becomes the superabundance that pours out and spills over. Humanity, in the act of worship, does not have its own voice, but rather "echoes and reflects the glory of the Lord" (Barth 648, 731). The same may be said of the rest of creation.

God's glory also contains God's beauty. God is distinctly beautiful in uniqueness and distinction. There is an attraction: God is desirable. Barth maintains that God's beauty, and thereby glory, gives pleasure, creates desire, and rewards with enjoyment. God does this because God is this. God is "pleasant, desirable, full of enjoyment, because first and last He alone is that which is pleasant, desirable, and full of enjoyment," and this, in the final analysis, "is what we mean when we say that God is beautiful" (Barth 651, 734).

One final observation should be made by way of summation about the perfection of glory as Barth himself puts it: "God gives Himself to the creature. This is His glory revealed in Jesus Christ, and this is therefore the sum of the whole doctrine of God" (Barth 671, 757).

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to present a general overview of the formal system of Barth's doctrine of divine perfections, and in this way also to explain the interplay of the perfections with each other as they constitute the perfection divine essence in the unity of their multiplicity. Barth's system is unique, beautiful and balanced. Because of its inherent inter-connectedness and its forward-moving while backward-glancing construction, it is challenging to comprehend let alone convey. This is to say that such an overview can only serve as the beginning of a greater, broader, and more detailed accounting of Barth's understanding of divine perfections, especially as this conversation spills over into other doctrinal areas.

In expanding the conversation, two suggestions are proffered. First, Osthöven-

er's work should be made available again. In conjunction with this, it should also be translated into English to open up the greatest possible conversation. Second, an analysis of the influences on Barth's doctrine of divine perfections needs to be made. Holmes has dealt with some of the traditional influences found in, e.g., Polanus. However, greater influence is to be found in Schleiermacher. This is born out of looking at Barth's study of Schleiermacher, as well as turning to Schleiermacher's work. This influence, naturally, has both positive and negative aspects involved.

Certainly a thorough consideration of the material considerations is needed as Barth himself notes: "We can now state more explicitly the decisive truth that it is the content of the divine being which creates the particular form of the divine being. This form is particular to this content" (Barth, 660, 745). The form and material aspects of Barth's theology of divine perfections should be further amplified, especially given the emphasis on interreligious dialogue. In approaching the dialogue table, it is especially important that each dialogue partner have a profound and deep understanding about the very thing over which they are attempting to come to terms, namely the very foundation of the doctrine of God, which, for Barth, also means the perfections of God. Barth can certainly not be left out of this conversation or consideration in coming to dialogue. This, then, will require a clearer understanding of this particular aspect of Barth's theology.

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Eric J. Titus

Božji atributi ili njegove savršenosti u teologiji Karla Bartha: Razmatranje osnovne strukture

Sažetak

Ovo razmatranje Božjih savršenosti u teologiji Karla Bartha služi kao uvod i sažetak Barthovog stajališta na ovu temu koji možemo pronaći u Crkvenoj dogmatici II.1. Fokus ovoga članka uglavnom je na samu strukturu Barthove konstrukcije ne ignorirajući njezin sadržaj. Autor razmatra Barthovo razumijevanje Boga kao onoga koji ljubi u slobodi, opće karakteristike Barthovog razumijevanja božanskih savršenosti i detaljnije paradigmu dijalektičkog binarnog odnosa kojega Barth koristi u svojoj konstrukciji.