

Karl Barth (1886-1968), *Church Dogmatics on the Trinity*

When we Christians speak of God, we may and must be clear that this word signifies *a priori* the fundamentally Other, the fundamental deliverance from that whole world of man's seeking, conjecturing, illusion, imagining, and speculation. . . . The God of the Christian confession is, in distinction from all gods, not a found or invented God or one at last and at the end discovered by man; He is not a fulfillment, perhaps the last, supreme, and best fulfillment, of what man was in the course of seeking and finding. . . . What is involved is man's meeting with the Reality which he has never himself sought out or first of all discovered.

This work of creation, of the covenant and of redemption is the reality in which God exists, lives and acts and makes Himself known. From this we must make no abstractions, if we would know God's nature and existence. Here, in this work, God is the Person who expounds Himself, and is thus the subject of this work. It is the work of God's free love. . . . We do not know what love is and we do not know what freedom is; but *God* is love and *God* is freedom. What freedom and love is, we have to learn from Him. As the predicate to this subject it may be said that God is the God of free love.

God's Word is God Himself in His revelation. For God reveals Himself as Lord and according to Scripture this signifies for the concept of revelation that God Himself in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired distinction is Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness. . . . *God* reveals Himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*. . . . It is only—but very truly—by observing the unity and differentiation of God in His biblically attested revelation that we are set before the problem of the doctrine of the Trinity.

It thus follows that we cannot prove the truth of the dogma [of the Trinity] that is not as such in the Bible merely from the fact that it is a dogma, but rather from the fact that we can and must regard it as a good interpretation of the Bible. . . . The basis or root of the doctrine of the Trinity, if it has one and is thus legitimate dogma—and it does have one and is thus legitimate dogma—lies in revelation. . . . Revelation in the Bible means the self-unveiling, imparted to men, of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men. . . . God's self-unveiling remains an act of sovereign divine freedom. To count on it is to count on God's free loving-kindness.

As He is the Father who begets the Son He brings forth the Spirit of love, for as He begets the Son, God already negates in Himself, from eternity, in His absolute simplicity, all loneliness, self-containment, or self-isolation. Also and precisely in Himself, from eternity, in His absolute simplicity, God is oriented to the Other, does not will to be without the Other, will have Himself only as He Himself is with the Other and indeed in the Other. He is the Father of the Son in such a way that with the Son He brings forth the Spirit, love, and is in himself the Spirit, love.

Because God is antecedently love in Himself, love is and holds good as the reality of God in the work of reconciliation and in the work of creation. But He is love antecedently in Himself as He posits Himself as the Father of the Son. . . . That the Father and the Son are the one God is the reason why they are not just united but are united in the Spirit in love; it is the reason, then, why God is love and love is God.

When we ask questions about God's being, we cannot in fact leave the sphere of His action and working as it is revealed to us in His Word. God is who He is in His works. He is the same even in Himself, even before and after and over His works, and without them. They are bound to Him, but He is not bound to them. They are nothing without Him. But He is who He is without them. He is not, therefore, who He is only in His works. Yet in Himself He is not another than He is in His works. In the light of what He is in His works it is no longer an open question what He is in Himself.

God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us. He does not have to do it, because in Himself without us, and therefore without this, He has that which He seeks and creates between Himself and us. It implies so to speak an overflow of His essence that He turns to us. . . . As and before God seeks and creates fellowship with us, He wills and completes this fellowship in Himself. In Himself He does not will to exist for Himself, to exist alone. On the contrary, He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and therefore alive in His unique being with and for and in another. . . . He does not exist in solitude but in fellowship. Therefore what He seeks and creates between Himself and us is in fact nothing else but what He wills and completes and therefore is in Himself.

God's loving is concerned with a seeking and creation of fellowship for its own sake. Loving us, God does not give us something, but Himself; and in giving us Himself, giving us His only Son, He gives us everything. The love of God has only to be His love to be everything for us.

God's loving is necessary, 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 God loves the world, in accordance with His revelation. But He loves us and the world as He who would still be the one who loves without us and without the world; as He, therefore, who needs no other to form the prior ground of His existence as the One who loves and as God. While God is everything for Himself, He wills again not to be everything merely for himself but for this other.

God's being as He who lives and loves is being in freedom. In this way, freely, He lives and loves. And in this way, and in the fact that He lives and loves in freedom, He is God, and distinguishes Himself from everything else that lives and loves. But freedom in its positive and proper qualities means to be grounded in one's being, to be determined and moved by oneself. This is the freedom of the divine life and love. In this positive freedom of His, God is also unlimited, unrestricted, and unconditioned from without.

The meaning of the incarnation is plainly revealed in the question of Jesus on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The more seriously we take this, the stronger becomes the temptation to approximate to the view of a contradiction and conflict in God Himself. . . . We have to think something after the following fashion. As God was in Christ, far from being against Himself, or at disunity with Himself, He has put into effect the freedom of His divine love, the love in which He is divinely free. He has therefore done and revealed that which corresponds to His divine nature. He is absolute, infinite, exalted, active, impassible, transcendent, but in all this He is the one who loves in freedom, the One who is free in His love, and therefore not His own prisoner. He is all this as the Lord, and in such a way that He embraces the opposites of these concepts even while He is superior to them.