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IN CONTRAST TO GENERATIONS of western theological thinkers, Karl Barth confessed the resurrection, indeed, the resurrection of the *flesh*, daring to express his belief about eternal life in the sense of the raising of the selfsame physical body. Truly, few theologians of the modern period have proclaimed so stridently as Barth the corporeal nature of the resurrection. Throughout his career he spilled much ink defending the corporeal quality of the resurrection, whether it be the resurrection of Jesus at Easter or His followers at the end of time. Perhaps more impressively, one finds a kind of resurrection-shape throughout Barth's dogmatic projects. As a sort of structural principle, resurrection can be construed as the connective tissue for Barth's entire theological undertaking, something of "axiomatic importance."²

A seeming contradiction has limited Barth studies, however. For all his orientation to eschatology, it sometimes appears that Barth is silent when it comes to matters pertaining to eschatology proper. For all his talk of resurrection, he does not elaborate when speaking of the coming resurrection of the dead. Readers of Barth are hard-pressed to find sustained discussion of the end-times events, the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, and activity in the New Jerusalem. It does not help that volume V of his magisterial *Church Dogmatics*, intended to cover "The Doctrine of Redemption," went unwritten. To date no major work has addressed eschatology proper in Barth's voluminous work, in large part because it as such does not appear to be a locus of theological inquiry for Barth.

Barth's silence is misleading, I suggest. One uncovers significant deposits of eschatological content scattered throughout Barth's work, including and especially statements about the resurrection of the flesh. More importantly, an eschatology proper can be compiled by deriving end-time doctrines from other areas of Barth's theology. His doctrine of the Word of God displays a resurrection character. His doctrines of God

2. Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, 2.

and creation bear the logic of resurrection. His discussion of the risen Christ lays out the parameters for the general resurrection. His pneumatology too, sparse as it is at times, is intimately related to a doctrine of the resurrection. In this study I unpack a wide range of Barth's writings for the purpose of showing that Barth is always speaking about how humans are "raised to God," a miraculous event which, when extrapolated as an absolute future state, yields the doctrine of the resurrection. And I will show that Barth, though he fails in the long run, always attempts to cast the resurrection as something dynamic, earthly, and specific, always something bodily, always something involving the *flesh*.

The study unfolds as follows. In chapter 1 I rehearse a history of the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. The patristic usage of the term "flesh" reflects the early Church's lofty view of the body as the locus of responsibility and redemption. As the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh developed, two basic trajectories emerged: one understanding the resurrection as the collection of the selfsame particles from the person's earthly life so as to restore their fullness, the other portraying the resurrection as a participation in God in which the fleshly person is taken up into the divine life. The collection view (developed mainly in the west by thinkers such as Jerome, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas) and the participation view (developed mainly in the east by the likes of Origen, Athanasius, and Maximus) each bore theological fruit—though each trajectory suffered from a Hellenistic tendency to spiritualize, attaching the flesh to the redeemed human person as an auxiliary dimension of human life. Some readers may find this chapter a helpful survey, regardless of their interest in Barth; others familiar with the history of the doctrine may choose to move on to the second chapter.

In chapter 2 I explain the formation of Barth's theology leading up to the start of the *Church Dogmatics* in the early 1930s. Influence from pietism, romantic idealism, and religious socialism gave his theology a distinctive shape, one that was articulated under the rubric of "the resurrection of the dead." During these decades he identified and radicalized a dialectical way of speaking about humanity confronted by God's transcendent immanence. Barth describes the "moment" of encounter between God and the human in terms of a resurrection (viz., that in the moment of revelation we, "the dead," become what we are not, "resurrected"). In fact, Barth equates resurrection with revelation. God's Self-disclosure effects a "raising" of dead humanity into God's life; humans are "dissolved and established" in the presence of God. In this complicated

way, Barth sees the resurrection of the dead as a kind of basic methodology for talk about God. While Barth makes the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ take on some of the axiomatic burden along the way, he continues to construct his eschatology in terms of the “lifting of human existence” into God’s own presence. Again, Barth’s critical reformulation here is the equation of resurrection with revelation. Everything characteristic about the event of God’s supernatural taking up of humanity in revelation is characteristic of God taking up of humanity in the ultimate state of risen-ness. As ethereal and abstruse as the young Barth can wax, he is consistent in his profession that the resurrection is the raising of the flesh because revelation happens to us who are now in the flesh.

In chapter 3 I move to Barth’s mature dogmatic work pursuing a first aspect, that of the resurrection of the flesh as *eternalization*. He spells out a conception of God’s eternity in which God’s transcendence of time is also His freedom to lift time into itself. Jesus Christ’s own resurrection is the Father’s eternalizing verdict which imparts a pan-temporal quality to Jesus’ concluded, historical life. Barth’s “actualistic” ontology expresses the finite arc of human existence as something complete only through the gift of eternity from God. Human lives are necessarily demarcated by conception and death, but these limitations become good in that they define the terminated life that is “raised” into the simultaneity of times enjoyed by God. I question whether Barth has quarantined temporal process too much here, and whether he is unintentionally paying honor to God’s enemy, death.

In chapter 4 I look to another aspect, the idea of the resurrection of the flesh as *manifestation*. Barth describes Jesus Christ’s incarnate being as having perfect integrity, characterized by the full fellowship of the human with the divine. Along Alexandrian and Lutheran lines, Barth says the exaltation of the human essence stems from its communication with His divine essence even before the resurrection. To protect the finality of Christ’s reconciling work, Barth will go so far as to say that Easter does not add anything to Christ’s perfect work and being (which was finished in His incarnate ministry). What is His resurrection, then? Barth says that the resurrection of Christ simply manifests His reconciling life and makes it effective for others. Humans do not have Christ’s integrity by nature, muddled as they are by creational ambiguity, the sin of self-reliance, and a dialectical identity in the penultimate age. But Barth explains that our own resurrection will be the disclosure of our hidden glory in Christ. In all this, the concept of “presence” is key. Our life is unveiled

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with the Son in His three-fold parousia: an identity definitively revealed at Easter, currently being revealed (however ambiguously) in the age of Pentecost, and fully manifested at Christ's return. For all the novelty of Barth's proposals, I question whether his highly noetic conception of the resurrection has not given way to a somewhat spiritualistic concept of the *visio Dei* in heaven, and whether he has not in his Alexandrian discourse perhaps violated some creaturely parameters through the logic of deification.

In chapter 5 I grapple with Barth's relational protocol through a conception of the resurrection of the flesh as *incorporation*. God the Holy Spirit orchestrates the movement of communion, incorporating the expansion of the divine power and the retrieval of others into God. Similarly, in the resurrection Jesus Christ appears as the prophet of incorporation who calls, upbuilds, and sends out the community so that all might gravitate to Him. The human as such suffers from isolation, from the alienation possible in creation and caused by sin. The resurrection of the flesh, however, overcomes this isolation through the incorporation of all history into the capacious body of the living Christ. For all of Barth's care, I suggest that a series of absorptions are at work: the resurrection is conflated into the work of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is conflated into the ministry of the risen Christ, and, it seems, all human beings (once the outward movement of the resurrection ceases, at least) are absorbed into Christ at His return. That is, human particularity is threatened by the resurrection, for, in Barth's view, it is difficult to see how the coming Day will renew individuated, concrete identities.

To repeat, Barth describes the resurrection of the flesh in three complementary ways. First, resurrection is eternalization, i.e., the Father's "raising up" of a person's temporal history into the eternal contemporaneity of God. Second, resurrection is manifestation, i.e., a "raising to the surface" of a person's true identity in Jesus Christ. Third, resurrection is incorporation, i.e., a "raising into God" through participation in the living Christ by His Holy Spirit. In each of these three aspects one finds Barth working creatively to make room for corporeal affirmations. Eternalization, manifestation, and incorporation each retain a sense of bodily redemption, though I call into question the extent to which they qualify as a genuine resurrection of the flesh.

It may be helpful to the reader to keep in mind that chapters 3, 4, and 5 correspond roughly to the persons of the Trinity. These chapters also interact chiefly with IV/1, IV/2, and IV/3, respectively. Dealing with

the philosophical question of perdurance of human selfhood, they also reflect Barth's provision for material, formal, and numerical identity. Most importantly, one should also note that within each chapter I have followed a consistent program of analysis: a) the divine reality, b) Christ's expression of the divine reality in the resurrection, c) our fleshly need, and d) our own divine (yet somehow fleshly) expression in the resurrection.

Though it was not my original intention to do so, my study leads to a rather stern critique. Increasingly with each chapter I take up the mantle of agitator and interlocutor, insisting upon a significant, earthly, corporeal, and concrete identity of the raised human. Barth speaks of eternalization—but does he eradicate temporal process in God's simultaneous Now? Barth speaks of the manifestation of the flesh in its proximity to the divine—but what of our distinct creaturehood when it appears in the divine essence of Christ? Barth speaks of incorporation—but what becomes of fleshly individuality as human lives are knit into Christ fully by the Holy Spirit? For all of his profound affirmations of physicality, Barth's construction of the doctrine comes up wanting. In his presentation of the resurrection body there is a certain changelessness, a certain lightness, and a certain indistinguishability, all of which suggests a fleshless existence. Along the course of the study I argue that Barth eschatological predicament was produced by some theological conflation, each of which must be undone.

In my opinion, all of Barth's missteps are related to his deep-seated commitment to speaking of salvation as participation in the divine nature. Accordingly, *Karl Barth and the Resurrection of the Flesh* can and should be read as a warning toward theologians pursuing a full-fledged doctrine of glorification based on participatory categories. For the sake of directedness I have made only passing reference to those with comparable ideas on "eternal life," whether it be Barth's contemporaries (Gogarten, Tillich, Brunner), his theological offspring (Torrance, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Jüngel), or more recent Barth-influenced scholars (Jenson, Lash, Tanner, McCormack, Neder, Habets). I trust that discerning readers will begin to see just how much each of these thinkers, for all their diversity of opinion, must confront the same theoretical problems when it comes to participatory eschatology. One should not hear my warning as a call to dismiss a theologian's work simply because it banks on participatory dynamics (I am convinced that the concept of participation should have a prominent place in Christian doctrine). Neither am I suggesting that one dismiss participation as a device for eschatology (I

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suspect a repurposed doctrine of participation may offer new avenues for describing the intermediate state). This study, however, demonstrates that any reconfiguration of the doctrine of the resurrection in terms of a “relational ontology” is a project laden with serious difficulties.

On a final note, I beg the reader to grant me the same patience I have had to afford Barth. The doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh only surfaces after a circuitous journey through dogmatics. Barth unearths theological riches all along the meandering path to an eschatology proper, and verily, something like human flesh is there at the end of that road. But if the reader is ultimately disappointed to discover how static, vaporous, and indistinct that resurrection body seems in the end, my roundabout approach will have made its rather unsettling point.

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