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THE HUMANITY OF GOD IN KARL BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Abstract. The article shows the key aspects of the Christological approach to Karl Barth's teaching about "the humanity of God". The author argues that in the mirror of Jesus Christ's humanity the humanity of God *included* in Jesus's divine nature is revealed. It is in Jesus Christ that *kenosis* and *gloria*, *humanum* and *divinum* meet in an amazing way; and in the negotiating space which is constituted by His Person they explain each other, speaking more sonorously with their own voice. Hence the point of departure for a reflection on the problem that is posed here, is looking closely at the formal basis of Barth's theology. Jesus Christ's central place – with respect to the contents, form and method – is considered to be one of its most important attributes. The author of *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* starts his argument by discussing Jesus Christ's pre-existence with the help of the doctrine of "the gracious election" that is a modified conception of his earlier Trinitarian theology. It says that God "from the beginning" is directed to man, suggesting a *pro-human* character of God's being and acting. In the light of Barth's doctrine Jesus Christ, as the second Person of the Trinity, is not only *the object of election*", but He is also *the electing subject*. As the One Who Wants to complete the Father's salutary work, he is the justification and guarantee of our salvation. Barth categorically pronounces himself in favor of the Christological paradigm of the Revelation saying that around history and the dialogue, in which God and a man meet and are together – around a *mutually* made and kept *relation* – there is the most complete opening and exchange. It happens in the Person, since Jesus Christ is in the only and in the highest degree: a true God's man (*Gott des Menschen*) and a true Divine Man (*Mensch Gottes*). The phrase about the "humanity of God" – is Emmanuel, to whom we pass from the Christological centre, taking into consideration the theological and anthropological consequences following this movement.

Key words: Karl Barth's Christology, salvation, humanism, humanity.

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Die Menschlichkeit Gottes – das muß, recht verstanden, doch wohl bedeuten:
 Gottes Beziehung und Zuwendung zum Menschen –
 – Gott, der mit Menschen redet in Verheißung und Gebot –
 – Gottes Sein, Eintreten und Tun für ihn –
 – die Gemeinschaft, die Gott mit ihm hält –
 – Gottes freie Gnade, in der er nicht anders denn als Gott des Menschen Gott sein will und ist.

Karl Barth

What is essential while reflecting on faith and the ways of acquiring it in our lives is the balance of thinking about God, who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ [Mt 11:27, Col 1:15, 1 Cor 1:24, Heb 1:3] as God-Man. The theology of the first centuries, divided into the doctrine (*θεολογια*) and the quest for the understanding of the meaning the history of salvation (*οικονομια*), defined its key moment as the explanation of *aporia* between *the divine* and *the human*, which reached its peak tension in the face of the ongoing Christological debates; yet its dogmatic and ecclesial resolution: *τελειον τον νυτον εν θεοτητι, και τελειον νυτον εν ανθρωποτητι, Θεον αληθως και ανθρωπον αληθως* [DS 301] has ever since been the hermeneutic and theological criterion and the norm of Christian life.¹ What was initiated at the same time was the long-lasting – at times difficult, yet fascinating – way of striving to find not only the place of the *divinum* in the *humanum*, but also the *humanum* in the *divinum*; the way of their mutual penetration and mediation in the history of the world and mankind. This undertaking did/does/will serve as the impulse to re-think, always in a new manner, the relationship between necessity and accidentality, eternity and time, infinity and finiteness, transcendence and immanence, proximity and distance. In light of Christian faith and theology, which attempts to comprehend it, the incarnation of the Son of God is the horizon, whereby it is possible to capture this relationship, which is expressed and realised on various levels. Willful – being the sign of a spontaneous impulse of love – *assuming* of humanity (as it is) by God denotes God's agreement to utter and live one-of-a-kind experience of God in the humanity of Jesus. Although only "God rightly speaks of God,"² this

¹ Cf. Alois Grillmeier, "Moderne Hermeneutik und Altkirchliche Christologie," in Grillmeier, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, (2nd edition, Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1978), 489–582; Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Das Konzil von Chalkedon – Rezeption und Widerspruch (451–518)*, vol. 2/1 (2nd edition, Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1991), 11–12.

² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 798, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm> [November 9, 2016].

Divine *dictum* (the mystery of the Incarnation), given out in its silent presence, is rejected [Jn 1:11]. Assuming the form of denudation, expropriation, humble love [Phil 2:6-8], this humanity *contains* and *reveals* God's glory and power. In a wonderful way, Jesus Christ is the meeting place of *kenosis* and *gloria*, *humanum* and *divinum*, which in the space of negotiation that His Person is explain each other, speaking out with their own voice. What is most significant for man and his history, and what, more or less consciously, has become ordinary; what, being deprived of it meaning, has been forgotten may be elucidated *in* it and *through* this Person.

The goal of this paper is to attempt to retrieve these forgotten spheres by means of penetrating the essence of our humanity that ultimately is *God's humanity*. One of the most outstanding representatives of protestant theology, Karl Barth (1886-1968), will be our guide. He dedicated part of his output to the issues touched upon here, and his doctrine of *Menschlichkeit Gottes* is a sort of hallmark of the work of the theologian from Basel.

1. BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

Before we move on to the primary problem of this article, let us endeavour to elaborate on Barth's approach, which is commonly known as "Christological" or "Christologically inclined." This will allow us to have a broader perspective on the formal foundations of the theology he cultivated. The centrality of Jesus Christ – when it comes to the content, form and method – is claimed to be one of the most important attributes of Barth's theology.³ The Swiss theologian states, "A church dogmatics must, of course, be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts If dogmatics cannot regard itself and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christological, it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as Church dogmatics."⁴ As intended by Barth, Christology is at "the heart of Church dogmatics" in such a way that any deviation from this principle would entail an "error or deficiency." H. U. von Balthasar described Barth's approach as "radically Christocentric," proving that "[he] interprets all secular and

³ Cf. M Cortez, "What Does It Mean to Call Karl Barth a 'Christocentric' theologian?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), no. 2: 1.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), 123, henceforth abbreviated CD.

worldly relations and realities” in these terms.⁵ Contemporary research, trying to encompass the relationship between Barth’s theology with post-modern thought, has led to a clear revision of Barth’s Christomonism. Thus, Christological concentration in theology, of which the Swiss thinker was more than aware, must be reconciled with a kind of ambiguity and lack of clarity. It will rather become a *methodological rule*, which presupposes both a specific understanding of the Divine self-revelation while reflecting on any other “subject” of the doctrine, as well as an attempt to interpret it in the light of knowledge in Jesus Christ. It might be stated that the task of a theologian is to penetrate the text to find the Word, interpreting it from the Word’s point of view. However, this rule cannot be perceived as a *pre-determined* centre, which embraces all created beings within a “total structure.” On the contrary, Barth understands theology in a *non-foundational* way, as a *decentralised* structure, insofar as it is like “the opening in the centre of a wheel.”⁶ It appears as the fruit of the realisation of the finiteness and limitations of man and his linguistic abilities, which is in fact equal to accepting the undecidable and non-finite character of theological discourse. As J. Webster notes, what is striking is Barth’s *density of narration*, his constant alertness as far as the conceptual approach is concerned, the refusal that goes beyond the simple “it came to pass.”⁷ His theology is, first and foremost, focused on the *hidden mystery of God*. It takes into account numerous qualities (*Offenbarung, Ereignis, Verberung, Trinität*) that allow for a deeper insight into the proposal of “Christologicity.” It resounds mightily with its internal tension in the mystery of God’s humanity. In compliance with the *methodological rule*, which ensures the directionality and universality of Christological thinking, Barth attempts to demonstrate that God, in His eternal orientation towards man, is his greatest “Lover” (“*amator hominum Christus*,” Odo of Cluny). Therefore, what constitutes the essence of the doctrine of *Menschlichkeit Gottes* is the fundamental relation of God with man, which was made concrete and complete in the Person of Jesus Christ – the reality of a *mutually* sustained and accomplished relationship, in which the fullest openness and exchange of the *divinum* and the *humanum* take place.

⁵ Cf. Hans U. von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 30.

⁶ Cf. William S. Johnson, *Mystery of God. Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 5.

⁷ John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 83-4.

2. JESUS CHRIST'S PREEXISTENCE AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE "GRACIOUS ELECTION"

Barth writes: "The humanity of God will surely mean: the Divine relation and clemency for man; next: God, who speaks to him in the promise and the commandment; God's existence, ascension and work for him; the community with men that God sustains – the free grace of God, in which [He] is not someone else, because whenever God wants to be man's God, He is."⁸ This quotation is like a single stroke of the brush, with which the theologian from Basel sketches the outline of his doctrine of the humanity of God (*Menschlichkeit Gottes*). He admits that what has been so harshly imposed in the field of thinking about God⁹ 40 years earlier to a lesser degree pertained to His humanity than to His *divinity*. Let us try to delineate the most important points, whereby Barth unfolds his reflection on the humanity of God.

The author of *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* sets out to explain the teaching on the humanity of God by discussing Jesus Christ's preexistence by means of the doctrine of the "gracious election," which is a modified version of his previous Trinitarian theology. In a nutshell, it states that God "from the beginning" is oriented toward man, assigning the pro-human character of the Divine being and acting. We need to stress, however, that the efforts of the thinker from Basel are not driven by a desire to adorn theology with trinkets, but to elucidate the Divine being and history.

Unravelling the Calvinist doctrine of the "double preexistence," he places the Divine being against the backdrop of a "new" Trinitarian ontology so as to describe the relationship between the Divine essence and the Divine act in a different way, or, to put it differently, between the Divine being and the election. Nevertheless, in order to address the question of the nature of the Divine election, the Swiss theologian situates it in the Divine being, which for him is not of metaphysical or statically deterministic character. The doctrine of the "gracious election" denotes that the choice (*election*) is in reality the Divine self-election – the Divine decision to be God, inasmuch as it at once is the decision to be the Man Jesus. God is the one who Himself decides about being in relation to us in/through Jesus Christ.¹⁰ If the election

⁸ Karl Rahner, "Die Menschlichkeit Gottes," *Theologische Studien. Eine Schriftenreihe* 1956, H. 48: 3.

⁹ He wrote it in the middle of the 1950s.

¹⁰ John Webster, "Foreword," in Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 17; James J. Cassidy, "Election and Trinity," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 53.

(*choice, decision*) adds up to His essence, in Barth's opinion, we ought to speak about the second Person of the Trinity in an abstract manner, as the *Logos asarkos*, who would be eternally intrinsic with the "necessity" for any kind of reference to being *pro nobis*. Going even further, the *Logos asarkos* is determined by the *Logos ensarkos*, or alternatively, *Logos incarnandus* is determined by the *Logos incarnatus*. It would mean that the *Logos incarnandus* is determined in His being by the "eternal Divine decision about the incarnation in time."¹¹ Does then the Divine decision determine the manner of God's existence? Or, being more precise: Does the Revelation determine the Divine being to such an extent that God is Trinitarian *only* by virtue of it? Barth certainly does not mean it, but even the opinions of the experts on his theology diverge here.¹² What it rather comes down to is the presentation of the basic *logics of the Divine being and acting*, whereby God is eternally inclined to man by means of the act of His own election, which is the covenant of grace. God Himself assigns His own mode of existence, determining Himself for both Himself and His decision in a Trinitarian way. In the light of Barth's doctrine, Jesus Christ as the second Person of the Trinity, is the subject of the decision, i.e. the God who makes the election. Barth states with predilection that there is no *Logos* beyond or before the act of the decision about the incarnation in time. He is always Jesus Christ-*Logos incarnandus* (as the one to be incarnate), who makes the decision. If we are to speak about Jesus Christ as the subject of the election, according to Barth, there is no *Logos* in Himself and for Himself, who could be distinguished from the Divine act of orientation toward the world and humanity in His preexistence. What shines through here is Barth's assumption that the whole Divine essence should not be defined in any other way than the perception of His presence and activity as the Incarnate Word! Barth knows well that the onto-theological issue, captured in the question: Can God "enter time" without being subjected to a change in His essence? is, as it were, the background to this doctrine. Since God freely decides about who He is and how He wants to be perceived by man, should we not give up the primacy of

¹¹ Cf. Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 94; Michael O'Neil, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election," *Evangelical Quarterly* 76 (2004): 311-26.

¹² We shall not quote many of these interpretations of Barth's concept by B. McCormack or P. Molnar that oppose one another.

being (*esse*), and the categories and cognitive illusions associated with it?¹³ God's decision to "graciously elect" – in Barth's opinion – validates and constitutes the Divine essence (without changing it). It does not permit us to talk about the identity of the *Logos*, which had been established prior to the eternal act of self-constitution, owing to which the *Logos* becomes *incarnandus*. The decision to assume flesh in time would then merely be an "added" element to an already completed identity. Jesus Christ would not therefore be able say anything important about God, whom He is. In His self-revelation, He is who He has always been – the God who has eternally elected. His being is determined by His act of coming to us. This means that neither His humanity nor divinity is diminished in Him.¹⁴ In the act of self-constitution He chooses to be Trinity in the covenant with mankind. Barth suggests that this election is the vent that takes place in the innermost life of God, in which He *assigns* His essence that He will possess for eternity. He, so to say, "brings" the human experience of Christ to the interior of His own life. We are not in a position to speak of God's essence that could be changed outside of the act of His election. The Divine essence, as constituted by its election, is the being that is eternal and prior to time. In this election and in the process of constituting His own essence, God looks toward time and creation. The decision about the covenant of grace lays the foundation for the God's Triunity. It was *ἐν ἀρχῇ* the Father's election, who, through the gift of His Son, wishes to realise the covenant so that He may become man to fulfil His covenant of grace. It was *ἐν ἀρχῇ* the choice of Son Himself to be obedient to this grace; in order to make the covenant real by becoming man and giving Himself. It was *ἐν ἀρχῇ* the mission of the Holy Spirit as well so that the unity and greatness of God's work, God's freedom and love might not be disturbed. The whole Trinity is then the eternal self-election of God's grace directed at man. God's predestination consists in electing Jesus Christ as the subject and object of the election. Barth asserts that the election in question, in an active sense, is primarily divine – understood as the election – yet in

¹³ Barth's idea sparks the debate about new methods of speaking about God that would exclude the possibility of idolatry and go beyond the metaphysical understanding of *esse*. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans Dieu sans l'être: Hors-texte* (Paris: PUF, 1982).

¹⁴ G. Hunsinger, unlike Barth, attempts to distinguish God's eternal act of election, in which God is *Himself in Himself*, from whom He is in time for us. Saying that God has existed eternally as *Jesus Christ*, in whom God and the world coexist, assumes that the incarnation is for Barth an eternal event. Moreover, it is something more than Christ's humanity, which has been "made eternal," and with Him the worlds is also "made eternal." Cf. George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: OUP, 1991), 236-43.

a passive sense, as the object of the election, is a human term for Jesus Christ's existence. In the light of Barth's interpretation, destination (*decretum absolutum*) in its particularity and personalness becomes the good news about God's "gracious election" (*Gottes Gnadenwahl*).¹⁵ The exegesis of Jn 1:1-2 carried out by Barth leaves no doubt that all God's ways are "from the beginning" His ways in Christ; that God's election, which comprises all God's activity for man and the world (God's eternal plan of salvation), is the election in Christ, being simultaneously the basis of his relation to man. Two issues are important. Firstly, this decision had been made *ἐν ἀρχῇ* before time and creation, i.e. before a reality distinct from God came to be as the object of His love. Before the world became the stage of God's acts of freedom, God had taken the decision "In Himself" – he had *a priori* defined it as the goal and meaning of His work for the world. Secondly, all mankind is elected because of Jesus Christ and in Him [Eph 1:4], i.e. *in* His free act and *by* this free act of Son's obedience. In Him there is both the electing God [Jn 1:1f., 17:27] and the elected man [Lk 23:35]. Barth puts forward a revolutionary interpretation of the principle of the "double predestination," which claims that Jesus is both elected and condemned. He is both the God of election and the condemned man, who becomes both freely condemned God and the elected man. Christ is not a man *manipulated* by the Divine essence, but He *Himself* is free in his every act, including taking upon Himself the experience of suffering and death. Christ is "God's decision" in reference to such conduct – He Himself is this "God's conduct."¹⁶ In Him we have direct access to the electing God Himself. Were Christ not Him, we would know nothing about God's choice and our election. Barth's unique input in the doctrine of the elections, as McCormack claims, is that Jesus Christ is not only the "object of election," but He is also the "electing subject," and as such He is not an abstract *Logos asarkos*, but He was, is and always will be Jesus Christ, God-Man.¹⁷ He is the coming Son, the Word of God solely because of the fact that, as the Son or Word of God, He has already been Him *before in Himself*. He is the Word uttered wherever God is, namely in the beginning, *ἐν ἀρχῇ* of everything that has ever existed. He was with God, He belonged to Him, which means that He Himself was God, identifiable with the Word through which all came to be, all came into being [Jn 1:3]. If

¹⁵ Cf. Alfons Nossol, *Chrystologia Karola Bartha. Wpływ na współczesną chrystologię katolicką* (Lublin: KUL, 1979), 62-3.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷ Cf. McCormack, "Grace and Being," 93.

we accept that the Son is at once the subject and object of the election, it opens the way for the following reading: He is the "object" as eternally begotten by the Father, in whom the *Logos* and His mission has always existed. The Father looks upon Him lovingly, because the Son is the only "object" of His fatherly love. He is also the "subject" of the election in the act of reflecting the Father's love, who has given all to the Son – not only the divinity, but also the success of the whole salvific plan. Both these moments are conjoined in the simultaneity and unconditional harmony of the eternal love of the Father and the Son, the Sender and the Sent. The world, as von Balthasar notes, could have been created not only due to God's prior knowledge about its history, but on the condition that the "beloved Son's" mission be incorporated in the original design. The Son, on the other hand, could not have accepted this design "with hindsight," without prior knowledge of it, at the moment of making the original decision *ἐν ἀρχῇ*. Readiness to accept the Father's will could not have been an element of "efficient prompting," but it must have been present in the Son *a priori* and expressed by Him spontaneously "before time." In Son the perfectly free spontaneity of accepting the Father's design and fulfilling it to the end in the most perfect obedience must be identical.¹⁸ What this identity boils down to is the shared divinity of the Son and the Father, and the filial freedom of accepting the mission, which will be realised *in* and *by* the humanity of Jesus Christ. We are dealing here with the greatest paradox of simultaneous greatness and lowliness of Jesus. The one who has been sent with all the power and authority of the Sender, may and must present something of the dignity and authority of the Sender in His attitude and manner of being, but at the same time through His humility He must be seen as the Sent. Eventually, this identity equates the ability to identify Himself with the status of the lowly and sinners. The spontaneity of the decision will have its bearing and confirmation in the difficult experience of Christ's obedience. The original preoccupation of the Creator with the world is founded only on the love that is the guarantee that the Son wishes to carry out the Father's work. This is where we find the *source* of the Son's decision to reveal the love of the Father and carry out His work. Not only does He feel personally responsible for performing this "task," but identifies Himself with it unreservedly. His eternal sonship consists in accepting the gift of everything that the Father is, His whole divinity (God has "only" what He is). Therefore, the Father manifested in the Son all

¹⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Teodramatyka. Osoby dramatu. Osoby w Chrystusie*, vol. 2/2 (Kraków: M, 2003), 486-7.

His love, which leaves nothing for itself, and the Son is a perfect reflection of the love in creation; only *He in His humanity* has the capacity of reflecting the Father's gift in the creation in every way, because He remains in the Father and carries out His works [Jn 14:10]. His activity in the obedience to the Father is just as original and Divine as the activity of the Father, the Beginning to whom He hands over everything.¹⁹ The fact that Jesus Christ is begotten by the Father; that He is the "object" of the election, as well as that He is the "subject" of the decision as the One desiring to carry out the Father's work of salvation, proves and guarantees our own salvation. The personal decision made by the Son "in the beginning" is thus characterised by the Divine value assigned by the Father and His will to assume flesh, i.e. the salvific value.

The doctrine about the "gracious election" tells us that Jesus Christ in Himself is *a priori*, or "first," the One, who in the light of the Bible is *pro nobis*, the Son of God and the Son of Man at the same time. Only by taking this for granted, as Barth asserts, may He reveal the Father to us and unite us with Him. He is revealed as the One, who indeed is from the very beginning! It is exactly this preexisting Son of God, and only He, that is the very same preexisting Son of God, who exists *for us*. Being with God, as the firstborn of all creation, He is at once His plan and decree. What is most important, as Barth concludes, is that He is always with His humanity in such a way that the preexistence of Jesus-Man converges with His eternal predestination. "The inconceivable fact, he writes, is that without ceasing to be God the Word of God is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into His own being and to that extent makes it His own being."²⁰ Barth discerns something dissatisfying²¹ in the traditional stance of Chalcedon, namely the fact that it led to speculations about the essence and work of *Logos asarkos*, i.e. to God being reflected upon from a wrong perspective and whose Divine existence may be defined only by the contemplation of His presence and activity as the Incarnate Word.²² Trying to make Christ's humanity "eternal," as the theologian points out, we may finally understand how God, *looking with one eye* toward the revelation and reconciliation *for*

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 489.

²⁰ CD I/2, 160-1.

²¹ CD IV/1, 181.

²² What seems to vaguely resemble Barth's suggestion are the attempts to place the Chalcedonian "in two natures" in the perichoretic model of investigation: the historical Jesus – the new hermeneutics of the Biblical Christology. Cf. N G. Awad, "Is Perichoresis Between Theological Interpretation and Historical Criticism Possible?" *Theological Review* 31 (2010), vol. 2: 152-78.

us, constitutes and determines who He is in His own being.²³ There is no such a God who remains cold in front of the work *for us in Christ*. For Barth, the above claim, according to which Christ's humanity is taken over into God's being, includes the perfect way of promoting man and his human lot.

3. JESUS CHRIST AS THE REVEALER OF THE HUMANITY OF GOD

Speaking about the vision of God, who is and remains absolutely exceptional in His relationship to man and the world, we must not, in Barth's opinion, forget that this is, above all, an incomprehensible mystery – an overwhelming Height and Distance, the Stranger and completely Different, with whom man may deal only when he received God's name in his mouth [cf. Jer 1:9]. This is God, whom man meets when he gets involved in God's matters: a mystery comparable only with an impenetrable darkness of death, a mystery, in which He at once *covers* (*Verberung*) and *uncovers* (*Entberung*), and manifests Himself. Thereby, Barth admits that concealing (*Verstellung*) is inseparable from the nature of the truth itself. Elucidation does not simply equal revelation without concealing (*aletheia* as *Entberung und Verberung des Seins*). As much as humanity, as proved by the descriptions of the Gospels, covers the divinity of God, it is capable of uncovering it to human sight in a revelatory way. Nonetheless, Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, is – according to Barth – “God's knowability” (*die Erkennbarkeit Gottes*).²⁴ The Divine Revelation is identical to the “event” of Jesus Christ. It has not been given, as the Swiss theologian notes, as if it were man's property and under their control. First and foremost, it is the *event*, in which God manifests and presents Himself to people, at the same time remaining hidden in the sovereignty of His Divine being.²⁵ It is true that Barth emphasises that the Incarnation of Christ is the revelation of God in human nature, and thereby the uncovering of God; however, he denies that humanity in its nature is revelatory – it may be so only *as* a gracious act of God.²⁶ The greatness of the transcendence of God's love calls for the confirmation of its vastness, so bountiful and pure a donation (grace) that nothing is capable of containing it; so absolute that it excludes anything else, i.e. any form of

²³ Cf. Cassidy, “Election and Trinity,” 66.

²⁴ Cf. CD II/1.

²⁵ Cf. CD I/1, 169, 174, 315-25; II/2, 54-7, 179-203; Cortez, „What Does it Mean,” 7.

²⁶ Cf. CD I/1, 173, 323-4.

appropriating claims. The Incarnation is the supreme manifestation of *Deus revelatus*, who at the same time stays *absconditus*.²⁷ The course of Barth's reasoning along the lines of the logics of "the humanity of God," enables him to refute, on the one hand, the apophatic approach, which revokes any "meaningful content" (denying the uncovering of God's self-revelation) and, on the other, it deems that the systematisation in theology, based on concepts, whereby the "rest" of the system is "logically" deduced (denying the "veiling"), is wrong.²⁸

Having the above in mind, Barth firmly affirms the Christological paradigm, stating that we cannot ignore the fact that the divinity of the living God has its meaning and power only on the level of humanity, history and the dialogue with man, that is, in co-existence (*Zusammensein*). This the impassable point, behind which we must not get. It all comes down to *God's* sovereignty in its self-constitution, by means of its self-determining, limiting and ordered *coexistence* with people. It essentially is the event, in which the veracious cognition takes place in reality. It thus has the epistemic meaning, or to be more precise, for Barth, it means the inseparability of the formal and material aspect of the event of God's Revelation. His evasive attitude to conceptualising theology, as well as its defence from succumbing to ideal Christocentrism (*Christic gnosis*), imply the necessity for taking into consideration two fundamental utterances. The first one claims that "in Jesus God is not as much a word or a systematic principle, but a reality and *prima veritas* that constitutes itself before any other thought and sets out its direction and contents."²⁹ He means a form of theology (as speech about God) that will not be a great idea, or a system, or a structure of good intuitions, or a doctrine, even if an appropriate and well-proved one. Just the opposite, it is only against the backdrop of this particularly understood God's self-revelation, which Barth speaks about, that the factual heart of theology is revealed, namely the relation between God and man revealed in Jesus Christ and His concrete existence. The knowledge of this heart may only be confirmed by the event of the revelation (expressed by a phrase *Deus dixit!*). Yet, it cannot be encompassed by its conceptual form. Therefore, the *prima veritas* of theology refers us back to the concrete and historical event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, testified to by the Word of God and the Tradition, which explains it. This event is the dynamic heart of theology,

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 320f.

²⁸ Cf. CD I/2, 868f.

²⁹ CD IV/3.1, 552.

which, having its own *ratio*, subordinated the whole Christian existence to its norm. Ultimately, it all comes down to the matter of what God has done to us in Jesus of Nazareth so that all threads of human destiny may oddly converge in that very Figure, in whom human experience has reached the unheard-of fullness. Trying to penetrate and comprehend the history of this Figure, we arrive at the final dimension of human experience, which we call God. The last sentence guides us to the second of Barth's utterances: "'God with us' at the heart of the Christian message is the description of an act of God, or better, of God Himself in this act of His."³⁰ It shows that in the theological doctrine there is no longer room for an abstract doctrine about God, but rather for the doctrine of God and man, the doctrine of the exchange and communion of life. We should not then focus on Jesus Christ *in se*, without understanding His life as the supreme *recapture* of the dynamism of the Trinitarian movement of the Word of God and the Spirit. By virtue of an absolute and self-constitutional character of this divine-human event, Barth locates the bridge between the history of Jesus Christ and our very own, not in a cognitive or empirical process, but in the manifestation of the resurrected Saviour in the power of the Holy Spirit, as a reality only to be accepted.³¹

4. JESUS CHRIST: *GOTT DES MENSCHEN* AND *MENSCH GOTTES*

The theologian of Basel is aware that some statements from the Gospel, e.g. the one by John the Baptist: "*illum oportet crescere me autem minui* [Jn 3:30], may testify to the explicit "movement" of the humanity of God from the centre to the margins, namely from the main clause to the subordinate one. John's claim, as Barth notes cautiously, is not final, but it rather directs to the future. It is here that this one, unique theological task is revealed: to attempt to justify firmly that only on the basis of the understanding of God's divinity, or more accurately assigning it the status of an interpretative goal, is the realisation of the understanding of God's humanity possible.³² Proving the validity of a thesis thus formulated, as if extending John's declaration, Barth moves on to reflect on what theology has so far made *out*, and thereby been able to speak *out* about the divinity of God. Thinking about God has in fact become veiled. The course of Barth's reasoning

³⁰ CD IV/1, 5.

³¹ Cf. Webster, *Barth's Ethics*, 88; Cortez, „What Does it Mean,” 12.

³² Cf. MG, 4.

moves along the lines of a well-known juxtaposition of religion and faith, whereby the theology of the 19th century, starting from F. Schleiermacher, relying on the anthropological analysis of religious experience, offered no access to real God. Therefore, the only type of theology to be cultivated is the theology of revelation, recalling the authority of God Himself, which sees as binding only what God Himself said in Jesus Christ. We should then reiterate the thesis that only God rightly (properly) speaks of God, whereas theologians mistakenly maintain that what they say about God comes from them. Christians who *think* religiously, as Barth wraps up, speak of God to *only* religious people, and haughtily, in, as it were, a “high-pitched voice.” Yet, (once again and perhaps even more empathically) they speak about the Man (*Mensch*), about His revelation and miracles, His personal faith and His work. They keep silent when it comes to the “man made at the cost of God.”³³ God’s will is God’s *loss* in Jesus Christ so that people may gain. Religious Christians, in Barth’s opinion, speak of the Man who independently confronts others, the One who irrefutably and unchangeably stands before the Lord, the Creator and the Redeemer, as a free Partner of man in the history opened by Him, in a dialogue fully controlled by Him. With this *kind* of God’s divinity, as the Swiss theologian points out, history is threatened as well. Moreover, the dialogue, seen as a religious idea, is reduced to a mythical expression (symbols) between man and the grandeur or depth of the excitement that oscillates in him, whose truth (in its most tangible form) may turn to but a monologue.³⁴ Resuming his reflection on the issue of the understanding of God’s divinity, the Swiss theologian stresses that the divinity in question is not revealed in an empty space of the Divine being-for-itself (*Fürsichseins*), but rather in the most veracious existence as the *Partner* of man, who speaks to him and works; who does *it* all, because He is the living God. It is the freedom with which He does *it* that is His divinity. Freedom is His real divinity (*Divinität*), which as such also has the feature of what is human (*Humanität*), God’s divinity, properly understood, is connected to humanity.³⁵

The Swiss theologian has proved convincingly that an attempt to explain the relationship between the *divinum* and the *humanum* may be successful only in a Christological perspective, by referring to the central testimony of Scripture. In Jesus Christ, as it powerfully testifies, we do not meet a “man,”

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Cf. Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

who in his feeble religiousness or religious morality deprived of God, is left to his own devices. Even more so, we are not faced with a God, who is a great loner. In Christ there is no secrecy whatsoever, either the one that ascends from man (*ascend*), or the one that descends from God (*descendo*). The situation is reverse – around His attitude and work, around the history and dialogue, in which God and man meet and stay together, around the reality of a *mutually* sustained and accomplished *relationship* – there exists the fullest openness and exchange! It takes place in one Person, because Jesus Christ is, singularly and supremely, the real God of man (*Gott des Menschen*) and the real Man of God (*Mensch Gottes*). He is a faithful Partner, who, setting up the community of man with God, becomes the humiliated Lord, while in the community with God who gathers (people) he turns to a servant. Both inconfused and inseparable, completely One, but also completely Different. This *unity*, taken dynamically, denotes that Jesus Christ is the Mediator and Reconciliator between God and man. He is also the God of judgement, which must come, because, wanting to be God *for* man, He shows him His *mercy*. He is the God, who is merciful in bringing to justice, i.e. judging evil; yet at the same time He is the God, who is just in showing mercy when He gives the permission to be judged in order to receive and reconcile the sinner.³⁶ The doctrine about God's divinity, demonstrated by the Swiss theologian, should not lead us astray toward neo-Nestorianism. What is primary and fundamental for Barth, and what in our view on Scripture – that testifies to Jesus Christ's existence – is conspicuous, is the indisputable God's divinity. It exists in Jesus Christ in such a way that God Himself in His sovereignty, which is uttered and performed, is the Subject (*Subjekt*). He is the *One* completely free, in whom the absolute freedom has its foundation, meaning and prototype. *He* is the initiator, founder, who sustains and fulfills the Covenant; He is the sovereign Lord of the astounding situation, whereby He is not only distinct from people, but is one with them. *He*, who is also the Creator of His partner; *He*, whose faithfulness, faced with the lack of faithfulness of His partner, is at once an event.³⁷

When we look at Jesus Christ closely, we discern something decisive: the divinity of God does not exclude His own humanity, but it *contains* it. How to understand this state of incorporation and the lack of exclusion of humanity within God's divinity? As long as it is the Divine freedom to love, it

³⁶ Cf. CD II/2, 182. Hans Küng, *Rechtfertigung. Die Gehm Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung*, (Einsiedeln: Piper Taschenbuch, 1957).

³⁷ Cf. MG, 12.

means that it is, above all, richness, not only on high, but down below; not only in greatness, but also in lowliness; not only in and for oneself, but with others separated from it. Ultimately, richness assumes the face of poverty. God, being rich, according to the Trinitarian logics of love may become poor. The theologian of Basel says that God has and sustains his own relation to the other, which is His own work. For Him it is the unconditional priority. However, the Divine *being* is and remains in His essence the first and deciding word, i.e. *being* the initiative!

5. THE HUMANITY OF GOD: THEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Karl Barth expresses hope and conviction that we should do all we can to gain further insight into how the divinity (*divinum*) and humanity (*humanum*) are contained in one another. However, this claim, as Barth reminds us, should not be carried out in light of the doctrine about “two natures and their idioms.” In Jesus Christ it has been decided, once and for all, that *God does not exist without man!* Not due to the fact that God would require the existence of the latter, but so that He may really be God, as his Partner. Barth’s thinking goes in a completely different direction – he follows the words of the Psalmist: “What is man that you should keep him in mind” [Ps 8:5]. God as eternal love may be self-sufficient. In His innermost life, as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – with neither man nor the entire created universe – God would not be a lonely, egoistic God. Even more so, He does not *need* to be *for* man. Even if a question arises: Perhaps, He *should be* for *man*? Barth asserts that it would go against His nature. After all, as the theologian from Basel points out, it is a mystery, in which God meets us through the existence of Jesus Christ. In His freedom He desires – not *without* man and not *against* him, but without any merit whatsoever on his part – to be God *for* him. Indeed, He desires to be the Partner and Saviour of man.³⁸ Barth states that what is reflected in the mirror of Jesus Christ’s humanity is the humanity of God *incorporated* in His divinity.

The statement about “the humanity of God”: He is the Emmanuel, for whom we are heading from the Christological centre, bearing in mind the

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.

consequences that spring from this movement. Barth enumerates a few theological and anthropological implications:³⁹

1. The claim: God is *human-like* denotes a specific *promotion of man* (*Auszeichnung des Menschen*), based on the promise offered by God that Christ reliably provides. It speaks of the salvation *as* humanisation. The salvation endowed by God gives man the real *recapitulatio*, *recreation* and *deification* as *humanisatio*. Man accomplishes his nature (*humanisatio*) by means of striving, which contains continual and inexhaustible novelty, namely the Divine *always more*, which remains unattainable, because it refers to an absolute Mystery.

2. The doctrine about the “humanity of God” sheds light on the contemporary task of theology (*kultivierte Theologie*) as an interpreting field, which like Christ elucidates the ontological tensions of human existence. Theology should not conclude, reflect and refer monologically, but with the spirit of an understanding faith engage in the issue, accepting its specific character. Regardless of time and place, it is an answer constantly renewed in the Holy Spirit to the questions man poses. On the one hand, so as not to turn to an endless sequence of interpretations, preaching must always refer back to the testimony, it must acquire it and let it happen in the presence. On the other, the testimony is not an account of an event, but is activity itself, as long as it outwardly bears witness the internal truth; therefore, it *brings* content to preaching and *calls for* an interpretation.

3. Another implication of the reflection on the humanity of God pertains to the *meaning* and *tone* of our words, which should be *creative* and *positive* to express the salvific humanism of God, or His solidarity with man. The proclamation of the message of God’s covenant with man aims to indicate the reality in which it has been commissioned and opened for man, once and for all. With regard to being endowed by God’s *grace* and man’s *grateful* response – which both happen in Jesus Christ – man, regardless of His transgression in a categorical and sharp “no!”, meets God, who notwithstanding does not turn His back on him. Preaching and theology, within the subjects under scrutiny, have to start repeating the “no” that Jesus Christ took upon Himself so that it may not torment us anymore. Whereas every single “no” clams man up, God’s humanity in progress brings about the affirmation (*Bejahung*) of man.⁴⁰

³⁹ This issue has been studied in the hermeneutic perspective elsewhere: Grzegorz Barth, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Menschlichkeit Gottes. The Theological and Hermeneutical Implications,” *Studies in Logic Grammar and Rhetoric* 44 (57) 2016, to be published.

⁴⁰ Cf. MG, 23.

4. *Christianity*, or to be more precise *the Church* plays an all-important part in learning about God's humanity. Therefore, it must be taken seriously, be affirmed approvingly and gratefully. Every believer partakes in his own way in the life of the Church, serving her reintegration. Jesus Christ is the Head of His Body and only as such may signify His members. The confession of God in His ongoing work becomes a plea (a prayer) so that *pro nobis* may be also *pro me*. We do believe in the Church as the place (*Ort*) where, in the "Christianised brotherhood," the crown of humanitarianism (*Humanität*), or rather the co-humanity of man (*des Menschen Mitmenschlichkeit*) should be more and more visible. Even more than that: the place where God's glory, dwelling on the earth (humanitarianism) in time, here on the earth, wishes to assume the tangible form of God's humanity. Here it lets us recognise itself and enjoy it.⁴¹

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⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 24-7.

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The preparation of the English version of *Roczniki Teologiczne* (Annals of Theology) nos. 1 and 2 and its publication in electronic databases was financed under contract no. 723/P-DUN/2016 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.

