

ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

by

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Karl Barth does not explicitly address the question of women's ordination, he does speak of Man as male and female; and from this approach that inferences may be drawn regarding the ordination of women. In order to understand the context, out of which Barth is speaking, and to be able to draw reasonable and honest conclusions from his theology of Man, as male and female; the following areas will be briefly touched upon: The Man Jesus; The Cosmic Significance; Covenant and Creation; Differentiation and Relationship; and Old and New Testament Symbolism.

The Man Jesus

The center and ground of Barth's doctrine of Man as male and female begins by looking at the Real Man--the man Jesus. Barth believed that all doctrine, including the doctrine of man, must begin at this point. As he says,

So long as we select any other starting point for our study, we shall reach only the phenomena of the human. We are condemned to abstractions so long as our attention is riveted as it were on other men, or rather on man in general, . . . In this case we miss the one Archimedean point given us beyond humanity, and therefore the one possibility of discovering the ontological determination of man. Theological anthropology has no choice in this matter. It is not yet or no longer theological anthropology if it tries to pose and answer the question of the true being of man from any other angle.¹

It is from this christological center that Barth defines man--the same center from which he defines all his theology--recognizing, of course, the dissimilarity as well as similarity between man and the man Jesus.² In the

man Jesus, he writes, we see what pure human nature is like. The man Jesus is totally for God and for fellow-man, and is therefore the imago Dei in a way which man cannot possibly be. The image of God consists of two movements, the vertical relationship between man and God, and the horizontal relationship between man and his fellow-man; in this sense the tertium comparationis is an analogy of the divine.³ Man cannot reflect the movement within the Divine and the movement of the Divine toward man as the man Jesus does, for He alone is the Son of God; He alone is the creaturely image of God Himself, and man cannot be such simply because he is not the Son of God. Nevertheless, man is a creature of God and as such has been created to reflect the image of God in which his creatureliness does have a share.⁴

Barth says, "the divine original creates for itself a copy in the creaturely world. The Father and the Son are reflected in the man Jesus. There could be no plainer reference to the analogia relationis and therefore to the imago Dei in the most central, i.e., the christological sense of the term."⁵ Consequently, Man, as male and female, must be understood in reference to the imago Dei and the analogia relationis as seen in the Real Man--the man Jesus.

The Cosmic Significance

Barth points out that the distinctiveness of this creature--Man--consists in the fact that he is for God--as the man Jesus is--and the fact that he is for God means that he exists for God's glory throughout the universe. Man is the being who is for God and as such he surpasses all other creatures; his value is identical with his telos. Man is not the center of the cosmos nor is

he the sole object of salvation. God is not man's servant, rather, man is the servant of God and created to glorify Him. Man is not the world nor is he an independent microcosm, but he is under God's grace and as such God is in covenant with him and through him sheds light on the cosmos.⁶

Man remains, therefore, the creature of God and as such needs to be understood as being under the category of responsibility. The highest good of man is not that he should be saved by God, but that God should be glorified by man; human life, in responsibility before God, involves the character of obedience to God.⁷

The question must therefore be asked: How can Man as male and female created in responsibility and obedience before God, glorify God? Barth says, man must live as the covenant-partner of God and as a creaturely being he must live in relationship--as an I and a Thou, as man and woman. Only in this relationship is he human, and in this humanity has the likeness of his Creator.⁸ Man is in fact fellow-human, and as such he is this particular human, he is male or female; male and female with all the other essential and non-essential distinctions. Man can forget it, misconstrue it, despise it, dishonor it, but he cannot slough it off or break free from it.⁹

Barth's concern is not with the physiology and psychology of the sexes, but with the determination of man by creation, as a covenant-partner, to glorify God through obedience. He therefore warns that,

It is much better if we avoid such generalized pronouncements as that man's interests are more outward and objective and woman's inward and subjective; that man is more disposed to freedom and woman to dependence; that man is more concerned with conquest and construction and woman with adornment; that man is more inclined to wander and woman to stay at home. . . . because real man and real woman are far too complex and contradictory to be summed up in portrayals of this nature. . . . Man speaks against himself if he assesses and treats woman as an inferior

being, for without her weakness and subsequence he could not be man. And woman speaks against herself if she envies that which is proper to man, for his strength and precedence are the reality without which she could not be woman.¹⁰

While Barth warns against generalized pronouncements about men and women, he does see a distinction of function, an I--Thou relationship posited with primal humanity at creation. To know nothing of this sphere, he maintains, is to know nothing of Man as male and female, and therefore of humanity. Man does not need to be ashamed of his humanity--the male of his masculinity and the female of her femininity--because, to be the creature of God is self-justification.¹¹

Barth sees Man, as male and female, as eternal because he sees God's everlasting glory as the goal of creation. Therefore, when Paul says there is neither male or female, or when Jesus says there will be no marriages in heaven, Barth concludes, that woman will not cease to be woman in the resurrection because man would not be man if he were no longer male and female. This duality then, Man as male and female, is the everlasting visible symbol of the covenant which was given to glorify God and belongs to the very center of Holy Scripture.

Covenant and Creation

The reader needs to be aware of the fact that Barth's theology begins with covenant and from there proceeds to creation. Creation is only the external form of the covenant. God created mankind in order to demonstrate His grace. Man, as male and female, was created to fulfill His plan--His coming as the God-Man. The creation of man and woman, as the imago Dei, was a foreshadowing of the "creation" of the authentic man--the man Jesus--who would come to

fulfill the covenant.¹²

While it is not our purpose here to examine the biblical validity of Barth's covenantal theology, with its doctrine of election, it is important to point out that other scholars do not see the covenant as the goal of creation. Rather they see the restoration of creation to its original sinless state, as the goal of the covenant. They say, creation did not include a creature created to fall and then to be redeemed. This world was not predestined to be the theatre of God's saving grace, but became such only after man sinned. The covenant is therefore a covenant-of-restoration not a covenant-of-intent.¹³

Still others question Barth's exegesis. He bases his concept of Man, as male and female, on the sequence in Genesis 1:26 and 27, "Let us make man in our image", followed by "male and female created he him". He says that these texts define the image of God because the second verse interprets the first.¹⁴

Berkhouwer sees in Barth's interpretation some obvious inconsistencies and points out that when Barth speaks of the "definitive statement" of Genesis, he emphasizes the importance of the "man--woman" relation and when he speaks more generally of the analogia relationis, he stresses the "man--fellow-man" relation. Sometimes Barth speaks of these "I--thou" relations at the same time. It is this ambiguity in Barth, Berkhouwer says, that can hardly be resolved. What Barth calls his "straight forward defining explanation of the text", actually involves constructive interpretation, and the ambiguities Barth becomes involved in soon show this.¹⁵

Erickson also questions the accuracy of Barth's understanding of the creation of Man, as imago Dei, and suggests that existentialism has influenced his view of the image. Consequently, the image of God is not an entity which

man possesses as much as it is the experience which is present when a relationship exists. Erickson believes that Barth and Brunner's existentialist philosophy of revelation, in which the Bible is not inherently the Word of God, but becomes the Word of God when God meets man in it or through it, underlies their common relational view of man. Therefore, to them, the image is dynamic rather than static, it is not something man is, but something man does, something he experiences both vertically with God and horizontally with fellow-man.¹⁶

Furthermore, the reader needs to be aware of the different periods of Barth's theological development. In his earlier period Barth did not use the expression "the image of God," but spoke of a unity between God and man. The second period was the period of controversy with Brunner during which Barth's unequivocal, Nein!, made theological headlines when he denied that any part of the image of God remained in man for him to receive the Word of God in and of himself. The third period of Barth's thinking is most novel, Erickson reflects, because Barth speaks of the image as still present within the human, inasmuch as he is man.¹⁷

With these sample cautions regarding Barth's theology, we need to continue our sketch of his doctrine of Man, as male and female, and to focus specifically on the analogia relationis.

For Barth, "Let us make man in our image," means that man was created as a being which has its ground in the fact that the "us" speaks of God's being in which there exists a divine and self-grounded prototype of relationship to which man corresponds. Man is the creature of God and as male and female is the image of God, i.e. the analogia relationis, the I and Thou--the summoning

I and the summoned Thou. Man is no more solitary than God and it is in this way that he is a copy and imitation of God. Men are to be seen not in groups, species, races and peoples, but in the concrete form of duality of man to woman and woman to man; man is simply male and female. However, it is not conceivable, Barth says, that we have a simple correspondence, an analogia relationis, that includes an I and a Thou; it must be recognized that the differentiation in the human sphere is not identical with the differentiation within the trinitarian being of God, i.e. the bi-sexual form belongs only to the creatureliness of man not to the divine.¹⁸

The bi-sexual form of man, as Barth points out, is God's creative work because man cannot produce a woman of himself. Man must be robbed of part of himself, without ceasing to be wholly himself; and this is God's doing, not man's. God used man for the creation of a woman and brought her unto the man, who recognized her as being part of himself, yet a being with its own autonomous nature and structure.

God created man and woman as I and Thou in mutual relationship and it is He who invites man to say an unequivocal "Yes" to His work. What constitutes this climax of creation, Barth points out, is not the fact that man says "Yes" to woman, i.e. "she is bone of my bones," but in this affirmation man says "Yes" to God in the presence of the woman. It is in this act that he really receives her and honors her. It is in this sense that woman has been ordained to be man's helpmeet, and it is proper for her to be beside him without detriment to her or to her independence.

This relationship, Barth says, is not a question of value, dignity, or honor, but of order. Man was not taken out of woman but woman out of man,

which means that he does not belong to her but she to him--and not to her shame but to her glory. Her "Yes", in this matter, is anticipated by that of man; as man has chosen her, she has chosen him, and in this sense she chooses that for which God has chosen her. She is the elect of man and recognizes in this God's purpose for her.¹⁹

The goal of the act of creation, according to Barth, in which women is taken from man and man elects woman, is the unity in which alone man and woman can be together in love and their marriage based upon it. Humanity is no longer single but couple, and God will now relate to humanity as man and woman. Man does not exist as male in abstract masculinity, but as the man to whom woman belongs; she is not called woman as the wife of the male, but as the wife of man she is called "his" wife. This does not involve any humiliation for her because this is the only expression in which her person can make the male, man; she can be female only in relation to male and woman only in relation to man. Therefore, she is the completion of humanity. There is no abstract manhood, there is no abstract womanhood. The only real humanity is that in which the "I" has found its "Thou" and man is now "both." Nothing must be emphasized at the expense of something else, or suppressed or neglected for the sake of something else, whether it is the supremacy of man or the rights of woman.²⁰

Differentiation and Relationship

Barth goes on to say that Man as male and female, being created to be God's covenant-partner, is to mirror God--not as Deus solitarius (God alone) but as God in relationship; and therefore God cannot be mirrored in homo

solitarius (Man alone). Humanity without fellow-humanity is not humanity just as God without the Trinity is not God. The first sphere of fellow-humanity, the first relationship and differentiation, he maintains, is that between male and female.²¹

However, this is not seen solely in marriage, because marriage and physical love is not the objective of creation, much less erotic and romantic love, nor is marriage and physical love to be treated as sacramental. Barth believes that the whole domain of the relationship between man and woman needs to be de-mythologized, de-romanticized, and de-demonized and be seen in the light of covenant-partnership with God.

This does not mean, Barth says, that maleness and femaleness should be avoided, and man thrust into a third and higher existence as a bisexual, homosexual, or even an a-sexual creature. Sex and differentiation must be accepted, whether in or out of marriage, for it is under the command of God; man must break out of his singularity and into obedience. Flight into non-humanity, where Man is no longer male and female, is flight from God.²²

In this Barth goes beyond Brunner, who seems to reflect the traditional view--in which the terms man and woman are synonymous with husband and wife.²³ Barth believes that the differentiation particular to male and female, which are at issue in the divine command, lie above the sphere of the typical typologies of tasks assigned to the sexes in virtue of their inherent characteristics. He thinks that Brunner has not totally grasped the higher significance of Man, as male and female. Barth's theology of Man is not caught up in the question of procreation and marriage or in specific tasks. He simply says that man and woman must be true to that nature and function to

which they are summoned and engaged in by the divine command.²⁴

While Barth does not characterize man and woman as Brunner does, neither does he equate them. He believes that:

"Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like the two halves of an hour glass, which are obviously two, but absolutely equal and therefore interchangeable. Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore be equated. In inner dignity and right, and therefore in human dignity and right, A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage. What is more, when we say A we must with equal emphasis say B also, and when we say B we must with equal emphasis have said A. . . . They stand or fall together. . . . Yet the fact remains--and in this respect there is no simple equality--that they are claimed and sanctified as man and woman, each for himself, each in relation to the other in his own particular place, and therefore in such a way that A is not B but A, and B is not another A but B."²⁵

For Barth A always precedes B, and B always follows A, for him order means succession; it means preceding and following; and as we shall see, it means superordination and subordination as understood in the man Jesus.

Old and New Testament Symbolism

According to Barth, man and woman must function as I and Thou in order to be the concrete form of the covenant as God intended. In this relationship man is primarily and properly Yahweh, and woman primarily and properly Israel. Barth says, that this immutable covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel stands dominatingly at the center of Old Testament witness behind Genesis 2 and the Song of Solomon.²⁶ He sees this same analogy in the New Testament, but carried beyond to a more perfect relationship when Paul writes to the Corinthians and tells them that he is jealous over them because he has espoused them to one husband and desires to present them as a chaste virgin to Christ.

As God brought Eve to Adam, Barth says, so Paul brought the Corinthians to the real Jesus as the one Husband, betrothing them to Him as His bride in a legal relationship created between them by His Word and Spirit and therefore solidly established. This relationship of man to woman and woman to man is seen in the liturgical order at Corinth, where men uncovered their heads and where women covered theirs. Paul saw in this liturgical order man's relationship to woman as representing Christ in His relationship to the community, and woman's relationship to man as representing the community in its relationship to Christ. The point at issue, Barth maintains, is that an attempt was made to introduce equality, and the argument in favor of abolishing the distinction between male and female was initiated by those opposing Paul. They were rejecting the authority, office, and word of an apostle. Their slogan being--"We are all apostles."²⁷

Barth believes that dishonor and harm are done both to man and to woman if this relationship is altered. The superordination of man and the subordination of woman is grounded in the superordination of Christ to man and the subordination of Christ to God. Men are not the authors, lords and saviors of women any more than they are their own lords and saviors. Man stands to woman as Christ stands to the community. It is a particular responsibility of the man to exercise this self-giving for the woman; and the advantage of the woman--her birthright--is to attest in her subordination the reality of the community. Her subordination is ennobled because it is primarily and properly that of Christ and can be only represented by her. Barth points out that the curious wish of Schleiermacher that he had been a woman is not so foolish when it is seen against this background. Thus it can

be said that the lordship and service, the super-ordination and the subordination, the divinity and humanity of Christ are seen in Man as male and female.²⁸

In this brief sketch of Barth's theology of Man, as male and female, we have come full-circle. Man can be rightly understood, and his nature and function can be seen correctly, only in the pure human nature of the authentic man--the man Jesus.

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize Barth's theology of Man as male and female and draw from it conclusions regarding the ordination of women is not without risk, simply because the material is so vast and the concepts so different from those normally found in classical theological systems. In retrospect, Barth's understanding of Man, as male and female, may be summed up as follows:

1. He understands the nature of man in the light of the nature of the man Jesus, who only is the express image of God; and he sees the creation of Man, as male and female, as reflecting that image in both its vertical movement towards God and in its horizontal movement towards man.

2. He begins and ends his theology with the covenant, for which creation was made. Man, as male and female, was created for the glory of God, which is reflected in his obedient "Yes". Man, as male and female, will always exist because he was created as a witness within the cosmos to the glory of God.

3. He understands the differentiation between man and woman to be two parts of one whole, a relationship in which there must be an A and a B, each with its own honor and dignity. He believes the relationship of man and woman

to be symbolic of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel in the Old Testament, and the relationship of Christ and the community in the New Testament. He sees the superordination of man and the subordination of woman corresponding to Christ's superordination to man and to His subordination to God.

To draw conclusions from this brief sketch of Barth's theology of Man, as male and female, concerning the ordination of women is more interpretive than substantive, because nowhere in his theology does Barth explicitly address the question of woman's ordination. If his theology impinges on the question of woman's ordination, such conclusions must be drawn by inference.

It seems, to this writer, that on the one hand, if we say that Barth's theology does not support women's ordination on the basis of woman being B and not A, this would destroy the concept of Man, as male and female, as the "image" and "analogy" of God, which Barth has so meticulously penned, and in which men and women are free and independent--yet each incomplete without the other. On the other hand, if we allow Barth to speak in behalf of woman's ordination on the bases of "fellow-man", such an ordination would need to be a "sub-ordination" to the ministry in order to retain the analogia relationis and the Imago Dei, for which Man, as male and female, was created.

NOTES

1. Barth, C.D., III/2, 44, pt. 3, p. 132. [All references are from Karl Barth's, Church Dogmatics, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence, published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh, English Translation, 1956 ff.]
2. Barth, III/2, 44, pts. 1,2, pp. 68-71.
3. Barth, III/1, 41, pt. 2, p. 184ff.
4. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 2, pp. 222-227.
5. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 1, p. 221. (Note: On page 220, Barth speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but he does so in the context of freedom and not in the context of analogia relationis. Throughout this section he addresses the relationship of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father which, he says, is the same relationship and love extended by God to man.)
6. Barth, III/2, 44, pt. 1, pp. 3-19.
7. Barth, III/2, 44, pt. 3, pp. 174-183.
8. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 1, p. 203.
9. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, pp. 285-289.
10. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, p. 287.
11. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, pp. 289-292. (For a discussion of the I and Thou and its significance for understanding how humanity finds itself only as it relates to God, how God responds to humanity, and the basic form of humanity and its determination according to creation, in the light of the humanity of Jesus, see: III/2, 45, pt. 2, pp. 243-285.)
12. Barth, III/1, 41, pts. 2, 3, pp. 94-329.
13. Elwell, Walter A., editor, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, "Barth, Karl," Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, pp. 126,127. See also, Our Firm Foundation, A Report of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference Held September 1-13, 1952, in The Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church Takoma Park, Maryland., Vol. I, "The Covenants and the Law," Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., pp. 437 - 492.
14. Barth, III/1, 41, pt. 2, pp. 182-184.

15. Berkhouwer, G. C., Man: The Image of God, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1962, p. 73. (Note: For a more complete treatment see: "A Preliminary Orientation," pp. 37-66; and "The Meaning of the Image," pp.67-118.)
16. Erickson, Millard, J., Christian Theology, Vol. 2, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984. pp. 502-508.
17. Erickson, pp. 504,505.
18. Barth, III/1, 41, pt. 2, pp. 183-196.
19. Barth, III/1, 41, pt. 3, pp. 296-305.
20. Barth, III/1, 41, pt.3, pp. 386-389.
21. Barth, III/4, 54, pt. 1, pp. 116,117.
22. Barth, III/4, 54, pt. 1, pp. 116-163.
23. Jewett, Paul K., Man as Male and Female, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, p. 31. (See Jewett's entire discussion, pp. 23-48.)
24. Barth, III/4, 54, pt. 1, pp. 152,153. (Note: Brunner in Man in Revolt, in Chapter XV, "Man and Woman," pp. 345-361, takes the position that the fellowship of the sexes is part of the divine image and that super- and subordination of man and woman is part of this world--although not for eternity. Yet he does not totally release his hold on the traditional view and makes the terms man and woman synonymous with husband and wife who need to fulfill their natural calling and carry out their different duties such as: the man must conquer, the woman must tend; the man must plan and master, the woman must understand and unite, etc.)
25. Barth, III/4, 54, pt. 1, p. 169.
26. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, p. 296-300.
27. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, pp. 301-310.
28. Barth, III/2, 45, pt. 3, pp. 311-315.