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Faith, Divine Grace and Human Freedom in the Thinking of the Protestant Theologian Karl Barth

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Abstract

In the text below we will focus attention on two important themes of Professor Karl Barth's theological thinking, namely the faith and the role the divine grace plays in the manifestation of human freedom. On the one hand we will attempt to know better the two concepts of the Barthian doctrinaire system, the faith and the divine grace, which occupies a central place in the thinking of the Protestant theologian. On the other hand we will try to highlight the differences between Protestant thinking and Eastern Patristic theology.

Keywords

East, West, divine law, choice, coercion, decision of God, ministry, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ.

I. Introduction

In the text below we will focus attention on two important themes of Professor Karl Barth's theological thinking (1886-1968)¹, namely the faith

¹ Karl Barth is one of the leading Protestant theologians of the twentieth century and even of Protestantism history, recognized as a particularly prolific theologian and also an original thinker, through his unique theological ideas and conclusions. He has a

and the role the divine grace plays in the manifestation of human freedom. On the one hand we will attempt to know better the two concepts of the Barthian doctrinaire system, the faith and the divine grace, which occupies a central place in the thinking of the Protestant theologian. On the other hand we will try to highlight the differences between Protestant thinking and Eastern Patristic theology.

The text presented on the following pages brings two other tests related to theological research. First, it was an effort of synthesis because Karl Barth's vast main work, *Ecclesiastical Dogmatics* is one of the largest works of theology ever written in a total of 9.000 pages². Secondly, we had before us a linguistic test because of the complexity and difficulty of the presentation style of the German Protestant doctrine. Barth is recognized, even by German speakers, as a great innovator in the field of theological terminology.

II. Faith and human freedom

Faith plays a fundamental role in Barthian theological conception. Understanding the concept of faith and even its initiation and carrying out differs from the perception of faith in the Orthodox Church. For Karl Barth, faith is merely a legal instrument devoted to human acquittal before God. Noteworthy is the attitude of the human person to faith: the human being perceives faith as a means of rehabilitation and response to freedom given by God. It is a "wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit and a decisive action of man (*wundergabe des Heiligen Geistes und bewusste, entschlossene Tat des*

special contribution on Protestant theology and the directions of modern and contemporary Western Christianity. Born in Basel in 1886, he was Professor of Dogmatics at the Theology Faculty of the University of Basel from 1935 to 1962, after he previously occupied academic positions at famous faculties of theology in Germany. He is the main initiator and promoter of the *dialectical theology*, a theological current that emerged in Germany in the bosom of Protestantism in the early twentieth century, which pronounced vehemently against Protestant liberal theology of the nineteenth century. Other important supporters of the dialectical theology were: Friedrich Gogarten, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Eduard Thurneysen etc. Barth's most important work is *Kirchliche Dogmatik (Ecclesiastical Dogmatics)*, a large-scale work, which systematizes Protestant Dogmatic Theology. Karl Barth died in 1968 in Basel.

² Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf. Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1978, p. 504.

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Menschen)³. Instead of the classic formula of faith act, “divine decision - human action”, Barth uses a different terminology to capture the process of faith: “human decision in faith is similar in all dissimilarities to the decision of God’s grace (*die menschliche Entscheidung im Glaube ist in aller Unähnlichkeitähnlichder Entscheidungder Gnade Gottes*)⁴. Human faith is based on God’s decision to give the created being power to achieve faith, based on the new creation and on the resurrection of the dead⁵.

In the Protestant theologian’s concept the faith action of a sinner has a creative character on his cognitive intellect by pointing faith to Jesus Christ. The new creature is the mystery of Whom he must believe in⁶. Thus, the faith based on the event of human action is “a cognitive process i.e. a modest acknowledgment about Jesus Christ’s being and work prepared for him (*ein kognitives Geschehen, die schlichte Kenntnisnahme von dem ihm vorangehende Sein und Werk Jesu Christi*). However there cannot be an automatic process that happens by itself or a stone that shines in the sunlight (*nicht um einen von der Sonne beschienenen Stein*), or a wood engulfed in the flames of a fire or a paper in the wind, but a man - a spontaneous, free and active event (*sondern um den Menschen – ein spontanes, ein freies, ein tätiges Geschehen*)⁷. We may notice there is an intrinsic connection between the creation of freedom and freedom of belief without any obvious differences.

Christian cannot but assign God to solve his heart hardness. Karl Barth says that the Christian formula “cannot otherwise” (*ich kann nicht anders*) expresses a human act that is not doubled by the capacity or proper human power, but a pure act. By this statement it becomes an event through external forces, demonstrating the reality of another power that is manifested in force and in fact through man. Indeed, man “cannot otherwise” to the extent that his action is based on what follows from this. Man is a converging lens, a medium crossed by a force outside him in all its special actions, stating firmly that “could not otherwise”, although factually he might. Christian formula “cannot otherwise” contains a fundamental difference to other “cannot otherwise” formulas because here and each time it is not

³ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, 2, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1986, p. 859.

⁴ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 1, p. 252.

⁵ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 90.

⁶ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 841.

⁷ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 847.

about our power or ability (*es steht das christliche „ich kann nicht anders“ allem anderen „ich kann nicht anders“ darin scharf, in grundsätzlicher Verschiedenheit gegenüber, dass es sich in diesem um unser eigenes, in jenem aber bestimmt nicht um unser eigenes Können handelt*). A human action without the corresponding human power is designated (*ohne die entsprechende menschliche Potenz*), a pure action that becomes an event. Like any other great power from the New Testament, it is manifested in a *de facto* strong man (*sich an und einem Menschen faktisch mächtig erweist*). Not only there can be expressed a “however” and a “therefore” against him but even it is achieved through him and this action throws on him a whole contradiction (*das den ganzen aus ihm selbst hervorgehenden Widerspruch übergreift*). For every man it leaves behind the tendency towards stubbornness at every start. And as man is always facing a new beginning, he has to choose the path of declarations every time which will be implemented in the freedom of return (*ihn in die Freiheit der Umkehr versetzt*). Because the action is grounded this way, he really cannot otherwise, while in all his other common actions he still likes to promise solemnly and aloud that he could not do otherwise, when he actually could otherwise (*mag er noch so laut beteuern, er könne nicht anders, faktisch auch anders könnte*)⁸. Therefore in the formula “can otherwise” there is no Christian freedom, because freedom leaves behind everything that is moving, undecided and, especially arbitrary. By this Barth does not ascertain the occurrence of a disadvantage and the lack of variant “can otherwise” is not a problem. So the freedom remains anchored in higher limits dedicated to its creative aspect and the only possible activity of freedom moves towards the space of grace. Regarding the inter-Trinitarian freedom the Swiss theologian rejects “can otherwise” formula because of the same detachment from necessity that makes it ineffective in the divine space for God’s existence is above the order of things. He believes that as Jesus Christ’s freedom as Man is related to necessity, as far as we can afford such an expression, so Christian freedom (*libertas Christiana*) is related to God and it is based on His grace.

To Karl Barth faith is the most revealing expression of human freedom. He believes Martin Luther (1483-1546) did not forsake the law rising against the papacy teachings and practices from need of freedom or desire to change the meaning of freedom concept from that time, but because of

⁸ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 345.

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faith or, rather, lack of faith⁹. “Faith itself is actually a freedom, not only its highest form, but also the only manifestation of human freedom (*der Glaube ist tatsächlich eine Freiheit. Er ist die höchste nicht nur, sondern die eigentliche Gestalt der menschlichen Freiheit*), because faith is a freedom link to God, being a freedom given to man by Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ: freedom that comes from God and goes back to God (*seine Freiheit von Gott her zu Gott hin zu sein*)”¹⁰. The Protestant theologian continues:

“because faith is the freedom given to man by God’s grace, the believer can do everything in the right way. Through its origin that always renews its purpose the faith is impressed by itself through the free grace of God and can be called its anthropological correspondent (*deren anthropologische Entsprechung genant werden*). And even if we called the free grace of God the meaning and power of Jesus’ actions, that is why we revealed here the concept of faith, where everyone has his counterpart and it was given to us sufficiently through the texts. We pay attention to the faith of people participating to Jesus Christ’s miracles and we see in it the light of all these miracles mystery in all its splendour and colours (*wir achten auf den Glauben der an der Wundern Jesu beteiligten Menschen und sehen eben in ihm in allen Brechungen und Farben das eine Licht dieses Geheimnisses aller dieser Wundertaten*)”¹¹.

Faith and love, like justification and holiness, are not

“two things apart, but two different times of a single movement and life action that form the Christian existence, as such, by analogy, love is seen as a concrete manifestation of human freedom (*zwei nicht zu scheidende, nur eben zu unterscheidende Momente der einen Lebensbewegung und Tat sind, die die christliche Existenz ausmacht*)”¹².

By the name of faith and love as the only manifestations of human freedom it is not expressed a formal freedom specifically made clear in its formation and realization by faith, but it is shown that God delivers man to freedom, thereby man becoming God’s free partner. God does not choose

⁹ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 696.

¹⁰ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 268.

¹¹ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, pp. 268–269.

¹² Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 829.

the free ones, but by His choice He makes free the ones He chooses¹³. Who is free by faith “is not only independent, but a stronger and more capable man (*nicht nur unabhängig, sondern positiv ein vermögender, ein mächtiger Mensch*)”¹⁴.

The Protestant theologian perceives religious freedom as a very specific meaning of freedom idea as opposed to law and situated even at its edge. In his view, St. Apostle Paul did not fight for freedom from law, but only for freedom from its unilateral requirements¹⁵. From another point of view, we are led to the idea that God’s comfort frees man of unfavourable misinterpretations¹⁶. The Swiss theologian asserts that given the Law, the sin can open in us the crave for self justification¹⁷ because “Jesus Christ is the purpose of Law (*Christus ist das Ziel des Gesetzes*)”¹⁸.

Barth’s similarity of faith to the Eastern theology faith lies only in its strength and firmness. A free man is who believes from all his heart. By this he frees himself from all that might intimidate him and becomes stable and resilient in the face of any danger. Barth asks himself: “For what is ultimately a free man, if not a man who is not condemned to believe? One who confesses faith has no fear. He left behind everything that frightened him so far. It is therefore a free man - the free man *par excellence*. Every time he confesses his faith he accomplishes an act which puts him in the freedom of God and allows him to free himself¹⁹.”

Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) believes that firm and strong faith must be constantly reinforced through direct and personal contact with God that is the prayer. Prayer, as a reinforcing element of faith gives the human person a greater freedom.

“It is necessary for man to strengthen the faith he received at his baptism by will. However being my relation to God, faith cannot become more firm than by starting to think more often of Him, not in theory, as a subject of philosophical reflection, but as the One I entirely depend on and Who can help me in all my insufficiencies. The thought of God is materialized or main-

¹³ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, 2, p. 257.

¹⁴ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 268.

¹⁵ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, 2, p. 308.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Evangelium und Gesetz*, Kaiser Verlag, München, 1956, p. 20.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Kurze Erklärung des Römerbriefes*, Chr. Kaiser, München, 1959, p. 89.

¹⁸ Barth, *Evangelium und Gesetz*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Barth, *Evangelium und Gesetz*, p. 88.

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tained through a short and dense remembrance of Him, made devoutly and having the feeling that we depend on Him. Such a word focuses our thoughts to God or to Jesus Christ and to what He has done for us as a basis for our confidence that He will help us now too”²⁰.

III. The relation between divine grace and human freedom

The relation between divine grace and human freedom is founded and analyzed by Karl Barth through the person of Jesus Christ. Son of God and Son of Man at the same time, Christ sums up in himself both divine grace and human freedom. The Christian was placed in freedom by Jesus Christ, who, by extension, gave freedom to all people. This freedom was given to man from the beginning, once and for all, but the freedom to achieve good deeds must be renewed each time, keeping it as gift. The problem is that the very realization of good deeds by man cannot be detached from man's faith in God and from the Creator's benevolence to man to do these deeds. This means that man's good deeds are done by God's *disposal*²¹. Without God's intervention, the Christian deeds cannot be good because they lack responsibility, are done under the bondage of sin and have no good consistency.

“When it comes to honesty and, in this respect, to the obedient character of our work, we are called to serve, «service» meaning to be witnesses of God and His will by fulfilling the duty given to us as limited being (*nach unsrem Dienst gefragt, wobei unter «Dienst» zu verstehen ist: unsere in der Beschränkung des uns zugewiesenen Seins zu erfüllende Funktion als Zeugen Gottes und seines Willens*). By «service» (*Dienst*), man corresponds to the honour given to him by God who calls him and wants him to be with Him. The true human identity manifests by this as honour already done to man by God as his Lord and Creator. All human activity which gives up its service is either still lacking honour or has already lost honour forever (*alles menschliche*

²⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica și Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 131.

²¹ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 673.

Handeln, das des Dienstcharakters entbehrt, ist entweder noch nicht oder nicht mehr ehrenhaft). Iar aceasta se întâmplă din cauza neutralității periculoase, care de fapt nu poate fi susținută, a nehotărârii și a iresponsabilității (*Unentschiedenheit und Unverantwortlichkeit*)²².

It is worth noting that man can accomplish good deeds only by preserving the character of God's servant. The relation between Christian freedom and God's mood and supremacy supported by Karl Barth cannot be explained in rational and existential terms or through logic. This is because no one can be free and at the same time cannot act each time only at "the disposal" of another, even if it is the Supreme Being. The Swiss theologian is aware that these two notions cannot be grouped in one unit²³ and tries to solve this dilemma through God's promise and through faith.

In the East people do not try to solve this dilemma simply because it does not exist. The Christian does not do good deeds from God's "disposal" and does not believe in God because God promised to justify and, consequently, to clear of all his sins. The Eastern Christian "stretches his hands unto God" because he is convinced that he is in a relationship with his Creator. He knows and feels this. He receives God in himself through Eucharist and oftenly lives the greatest joy possible, despite the soul suffering caused by external and social conditions, because he lives in God and God lives in him. In this regard the Russian theologian Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970) said that oftenly it is not us who live the mystery, but the mystery lives us. This relationship is possible only through man's complete freedom. Thus we are dealing with a paradox of Orthodoxy, but also a high risk of God's creation: the power of decision belongs to man in order to have the purest and honest judgment expressed in freedom. That is why God does not intervene firmly in the "natural" evolution of the world and often He does not nullify the unjust suffering, not to harm the freedom of the human person who is part of the world "mechanism".

At a closer look to the Barthian theology a question appears: what can be more excruciating for a man than to believe in God and seek salvation of his soul because he necessarily must do this and cannot avoid God's implacable force displayed in the world through His supernatural, firm and energetic actions - "freedom in handcuffs"? "God's action - says

²² Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 4, pp. 758–759.

²³ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, 2, p. 670

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the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) - is carried out not in the world order that tries to justify the person suffering, but in the fight of the person and of freedom against world order. God created concrete beings and persons, creative existential centers and not a world order that involves deprivation of beings and their projection within the outer objectification. ... Divine manifests itself not in the world order that has nothing to do with God, but in the revolt of the suffering person against the order and in the rebellion of freedom against necessity. God manifests in the tear shed by the suffering child and not in world order that justifies this tear²⁴.

According to Karl Barth's conception God's grace acts as such because it awakens man to freedom and at the same time it determines him to make a choice. In some fragments of *Ecclesiastical Dogmatics*, it can be seen that grace works in man even without the self-determination of the human person. The author clearly speaks about the constraint of God's love too. Man is placed in a state of obedience freedom through the covenant of grace²⁵. He based this theory on the words of the prophet Ezekiel:

“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh. That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (*Ezekiel* 11, 19-20).

Prophet Jeremiah's words are interpreted likewise:

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (*Jeremiah* 31, 34). God's grace is imposed as a constraint of correction and healing and thus it helps the people who are not free and are disobedient to receive freedom. “The Christian man *in concreto* whom we cannot avoid when we wish to fully and properly talk about the grace of the Holy Spirit, is thus a free man and God keeps and confirms His freedom in him (*der christliche Mensch in concreto, den wir nicht umgehen können, wenn wir von der Gnade des Heiligen Geistes*

²⁴ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Despre sclavia și libertatea omului*, trad. Maria Ivănescu, Editura Antaios, Oradea, 2000, p. 90.

²⁵ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 34.

*vollständig und recht reden wollen, ist also der freie Mensch, an dem Gott seine Freiheit bewährt und bestätigt)*²⁶.

The Protestant theologian could apply the paradigm of Origen's apokatastasis theory (185-254) according to which, in the age to come all creatures, humans, angels and demons will share the final salvation²⁷. Taking into account the concept of Reformed theology on soul salvation the topic must be put into the eschatological context. Considering the fact that for Karl Barth Christ's community is the appearance of the grace covenant, the notion of man's constraint to awake his freedom, namely the freedom of the reconciled, but still not the saved people, could be understood as the achievement of this covenant. The Swiss theologian believes God does not accept the path of man's salvation including the possibility that through a crazy freedom or the madness of freedom, man rejects the event and the gift of freedom grounded on Jesus Christ. He highlights the constraint of God's love, by which the freedom of belief and obedience is awakened in the sinful and stubborn man that is viewed as a necessity.

On the one hand the presence of the elected ones' beside God and of those who decided by themselves for God is accentuated, and on the other hand, the presence of those who did it under compulsion, but both categories are a testimony of God's free love. When talking about human constraint by God's love Barth does not refer to a physical or moral constraint. He stresses this human compulsion is achieved by God's love.

"We have no other choice but to accept God's intercession upon us by the action of divine revelation that exceeds His negation by affirmation, and to let it work as it is (wir haben keine andere Wahl, als die, die uns in der Offenbarung dieses göttlichen Handelns gemachte Mitteilung (dass Gottes Ja sein Nein überbietet) so entgegenzunehmen und gelten zu lassen, wie sie lautet). Thus, we are constrained not by coercion made by force, but by God's love given to us (wir sind dazu gezwungen: nicht durch den Zwang einer uns angetanen Gewalt, aber gezwungen durch die uns zugewendete Liebe Gottes).. We can run from force, but

²⁶ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p. 403.

²⁷ The Ecumenical Council from Constantinople from 543 condemns the theory of apokatastasis, in the first anathema against Origenism. Remus Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic de Literatură Creștină din Primul Mileniu*, Editura Lidia, București, 2003, pp. 62–63.

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not from love (*der Gewalt können wir uns entziehen, der Liebe können wir uns nicht entziehen*)²⁸.

This constraint of love can be inspired by the prophetic and apostolic constraint that can be found at St. Apostle Paul for example. “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 *Corinthians* 9, 16).

The problem of human freedom and God’s grace is seen very differently in the Eastern Church. F.M. Dostoevsky (1821-1881) said that any good that is done by force becomes bad, and St. John of Damascus (675-749) asserted that God can do whatever He pleases, but He does not want to do anything that He can because He might save man without his will and He does not want it. In this context men’s salvation could undoubtedly occur without the consent of many. According to Eastern thinking

“the authority theory which played an important role in the history of Christianity means the denial of freedom mystery in Christ and the denial of our Lord’s Crucifixion. The mystery of Christian freedom is the mystery of Golgotha and Crucifixion. Indeed, crucifixion does not burden or constrain anyone. You could denounce it or accept it just as free. It addresses freedom of the human spirit. The Crucified One did not descend from the cross, as the unbelievers asked Him then and ask Him until today, because He yearned the free love and not the slave delight of the impotent in front of omnipotence that terrified him forever. The Divine Truth came humiliated to the world and He was torn and crucified by the powers of this world and thus the freedom of the spirit was confirmed. ... The act of faith is an act of freedom and of free denudation of the unseen world”²⁹.

In Orthodoxy, there has never been a tension between God’s grace and human freedom. They always cooperate with each other.

“This issue had never the same acuity in the East that received in the West after Blessed Augustine. The Eastern tradition never separates these two moments; the grace and the human freedom shown at once and cannot be conceived without each other. St. Gregory of Nyssa expresses this interrelation very clearly, mak-

²⁸ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 1, p. 444.

²⁹ Nikolai Beriaev, *Filosofia lui Dostoievski*, trad. Radu Părpăuță, Institutul European, Iași, 1992, pp. 130–131.

ing grace and free will the two poles of one and the same reality: «as the grace of God, he says, cannot dwell in the souls fleeing their salvation, so human virtue alone is not enough to elevate the souls alien to grace to perfection... Uniting together the justice of the facts and the grace of the Holy Spirit fill the soul where they meet with happy life». Here we can talk about collaboration, about synergy of two wills, the divine and the human and a cooperation where grace has the ability to increase; it is appropriated and acquired by the human person. Grace is the presence of God in us that requires us steadfast endeavours. However, these endeavours do not determine grace at all, nor Grace moves our freedom as a foreign power to it”³⁰.

Even St. Apostle Paul confessed God’s grace is within us: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 *Corinthians* 6, 19)

IV. The Christological problem

In Karl Barth’s theology Christology is central and the reference point for all his doctrines and teachings. It is the meeting place of the visible and the invisible world, the correspondence between created and uncreated, in a word “the solving key of all dilemmas” and the centre of existence for each individual³¹. From one end to the other’s the *Ecclesiastical Dogmatics* and

³⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trad. Pr. Vasile Răducă, Editura Anastasia, București, s.a., pp. 228–229.

³¹ As one can easily see, there is a different perception of the relation between Christ the Savior and His Church in the West and in the East, specifically in Protestant theology and Orthodox thinking. If in the West, Karl Barth says that “the Church is not Christ, and Christ is not the Church”. (*Die Kirche ist nicht Christus und Christus ist nicht die Kirche*) Barth, *Jesus und die soziale Bewegung*, in the East, Pr. Stăniloae declares that “the Church has a theandric structure. Its content consists of Christ united with the Father and the Spirit by His divine nature and with us by His human nature. Being embedded in the incarnated Hypostasis of Christ the Church can be called Christ, meaning Christ the expanded in humanity”. I. Karmiris wrote that the church is “Christ Himself, who is in the bosom of the Father ever before and made Himself man at the fullness of time and He always is and lives with us working and saving and extending over the centuries”. (I. Karmiris, *Ἡ ὀρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία*, Atena, 1973, p. 10). G. Florovski said: “In this sense, one can say that the Church is Christ”.

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other Barthian works steadily testify the sovereignty and reconciliation done by the Son of God.

“Jesus Christ our Lord, this is the holy news and meaning of history (*Jesus Christus unser Herr – das ist die Heils botschaft, das ist der Sinn der Geschichte*). In this name two levels are found and separated, one known and one unknown (*in diesen Namen begegnen und trennen sich zwei Ebenen, eine bekannte und eine unbekante*). The known one is created by God, but fallen from original unity with God and therefore in need of salvation, of saving this world of «body», the world of man, time and things, our world. This known level was detached from the unknown level, the Father’s world, the world of original creation and ultimate salvation. But this relationship between us and God, between this world and God’s world wants to be recognized. However the track line between the two levels is not implied. The dash where it can be seen and it is seen is Jesus, Jesus from Nazaret, the «historical» Jesus born in flesh from David’s seed (*der Punkt der Schnittlinie, wo sie zu sehen ist und gesehen wird, ist Jesus, Jesus von Nazareth, der «historische» Jesus, geboren aus Davids Geschlecht nach dem Fleisch*)”³².

Regarding human freedom, the particularity of Protestant theologian’s Christology is embodied in the manifestation of God’s freedom in Jesus Christ. This freedom of God found in Jesus Christ is the same freedom given to every man, because everyone bears the image of God. The Christian is called to the profession of faith in Christ and His love. Christian’s personal deliverance is achieved only in his confessing action. It is not a goal in itself, but helps non-Christians to confess Logos. The history of this confessing ministry is, in fact, the history of the Christian’s personal deliverance³³. Christians must freely accept receiving this deliverance through faith and they must strive, through the Holy Spirit, to fully achieve it and

(*Die Kirchen im Gottesheilsplan*, Ökumenischer Rat, Zürich, 1948, p. 53) A. Nygren makes the following statement: “The body of Christ is Christ Himself. The Church is Christ as He is present with us after His resurrection and He meets us here on earth”. (*Der Leib Christi ist Christus selbst. Die Kirche ist Christus, wie er nach seiner Auferstehung bei uns gegenwärtig ist und uns hier auf Erden begegnet.*) *Corpus Christi. En bokomKyrkan*, Lund, 1943, p. 20.). Apud Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 138.

³² Karl Barth, *Römerbrief*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005, p. 5.

³³ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 3, p. 749.

to confess this fulfilment. The confession may be made only by one who personally received the gift of God's action and meeting.

In Karl Barth's conception the Holy Spirit gives freedom to man through Jesus Christ. "The Holy Spirit translates man immediately into a true and full freedom (*der Heilige Geist versetzt den Menschen sofort in eine ganz bestimmte, wirkliche Freiheit*)"³⁴. The Holy Spirit's power places freedom in man, and through man's decision to obey Jesus Christ, freedom becomes his own nature. No one can say that freedom is the Holy Spirit's and was given us temporarily, but it becomes part of our nature, ontologically speaking. This makes us think freedom does not come from outside to us, but is our own nature.

In Orthodox theology freedom is "the turning point" that can *exalt* man or can *descend* him into the depths of existence, depending on how the person understands this gift and also how he will use his freedom. "By the creation of man God committed to bring him to deification. Man is transcendent in origin and yet his existence is entrusted to his freedom"³⁵.

According to Karl Barth's thinking the paradigm of Christian deliverance committed by Jesus Christ can get more aspects for "*libertas Christiana* authenticity means confessing the freedom action made by God in Jesus Christ (*die Eigentlichkeit der libertas Christiana besteht im Bezeugen der Freiheitstat Gottes in Jesus Christus*)"³⁶. This is manifested by making the Christian free from loneliness and bringing him in the community (togetherness) with God and men. "Making him free means he is driven and crossed from solitary to communion (*des Christen Befreiung geschieht damit, dass er aus der Einsamkeit in die Gemeinschaft geführt wird und hinübergeht*)"³⁷. Man is called from abyss to confess Christ, because the freedom he receives is Christ's freedom. Witnessing the Son of God he has no place in hell. Thus the realization of communion with God begins:

"With every step he can do, he comes out of himself, leaves himself, goes beyond and above himself to communion with Jesus Christ (*geht er eben hinüber und hinein in die Gemeinschaft: mit*

³⁴ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 406.

³⁵ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 247.

³⁶ Ulrich Hedinger, *Der Freiheitsbegriff in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik Karl Barths*, Zwingli Verlag Zürich – Stuttgart, 1962, p. 90.

³⁷ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 3, p. 761.

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Jesus Christus) and such - these two dimensions appear that immediately open: *beyond* and *inside* in communion with God (*es sind ja sofort diese zwei Dimensionen, die sich ihm da eröffnen – „hinüber“ und „hinein“ in die Gemeinschaft mit Gott*), which is accomplished in Christ and with Christ (*in und mit Christus*). He sent man as His servant to be in communion with other people too who are in and with Christ (*in die Gemeinschaft mit den Menschen, zudenen in und mit Christus*). In all cases, the man is with God as his Father and with his neighbour as his brother (*er ist auf alle Fälle mit Gott als mit seinem Vater und mit dem Nächsten als mit seinem Bruder zusammen*)³⁸.

As noted the baslerian theologian affirms man is called to live in communion with God (*Gemeinschaft mit Gott*) and in communion with people (*Gemeinschaft mit den Menschen*). But on this notion “communion” (*Gemeinschaft*), we must bring some needed clarification. In German language the first meaning of the word *Gemeinschaft* is community, i.e. gathering a group of people, according to social or political principles, for different purposes, such as forming a community, association, representation to third persons or institutions etc. In everyday language „*Gemeinschaft*” designates a local, political or ecclesial (parish) community. The meaning of “communion” with someone is the second meaning of the word *Gemeinschaft* and it does not refer to the union (mysterious, mystical, spiritual) with someone, but rather living in the *vicinity* of someone, *with* someone, or in the *proximity* of someone else. In German language another word is also used for “communion” - „*Kommunion*”, but this refers only to the Eucharist, and this term is not used by Karl Barth when referring to man’s communion with God. The meaning of “man’s communion with God”, the man’s “union” with his Creator, as perceived in Eastern theology cannot be applied to Protestant theology and Karl Barth’s thinking. For him this “communion with God” refers rather to human existence in the vicinity of God, close to God. It predominantly envisages a spatial sense which results in the ability to always see and hear God, and not in the unity of the human person with God. For the Patristic mysticism of the East, man’s communion and union with God has deeper connotations, which unfortunately miss the Western theology understanding and are predominantly based on the incessant progress of man to God (St. Gregory of Nyssa). At

³⁸ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 3, p. 761.

the same time in this process man will never be confused with God, but he always retains his own separate and whole identity, remaining eternally a true and deified man.

The German term *Kommunion* occurs in Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German but only to denote the Eucharist. It should be added that in Protestant theology, the Eucharist does not mean union with God, but mostly remembrance and commemoration of the Last Supper, within the meaning of *anamnesis*.

In the East, the Holy Fathers understand the Eucharist as the starting point of communion with God. This is just a foreshadowing of full "living together" of man with God in the next life. According to the Orthodox faith, man's communion with God cannot be conceived without talking about the Holy Eucharist and Liturgy which are "steps to eternal life". This is because the Liturgy can begin "only when this preparation is completed, when all is referred to Christ's sacrifice and everything is included in it and when the eyes of faith see on the diskos "our life hidden with Christ in God": eternal bringing of the One who brought Himself and brought all the existence to God in Himself and also the ascension of our lives to the Kingdom Altar, where He - the Son of God - exalted our lives, becoming Son of Man"³⁹.

In the first volume of *Ecclesiastical Dogmatics* Karl Barth says that man is free, but he cannot live in communion with God.

"Man is free in many respects. He has many possibilities that creation possesses in particular. He even has all possibilities that seem to have something specifically human, only so we cannot ever notice that (*er hat alle die Möglichkeiten, die nun eben die spezifisch menschlichen zu sein scheinen, weil wir sie so sonst nirgends realisiert sehen*). But he is not able to be in communion with God and to be with God as he can be with other people of his rank and, above all, with himself and, in a broader sense of the term, with all other created realities (*er hat aber nicht die Möglichkeit, mit Gott Gemeinschaft zu haben, mit Gott so zusammenzusein, wie er mit seinesgleichen und vor allem mit sich selbst und in einem weiteren Sinn des Begriffs mit allen anderen geschöpflichen Wirklichkeiten zusammenzusein kann*).

³⁹ Alexandre Schmenann, *Euharistia. Taina Împărăției*, trad. Pr. Boris Răduleanu, Editura Anastasia, București, s.a., pp. 114-115.

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He has no special abilities in this sense, nor has any special power compared to his options (*weder hat er dazu eine besondere Möglichkeit, noch hat er in seinen sonstigen Möglichkeiten die Fähigkeit dazu*). In this sense, he is not free (*in dieser Hinsicht ist er unfrei*). We must and can say even negatively: to be man does not mean to be with God (*Menschseinheisst nicht: mit Gott sein*)⁴⁰.

According to the Protestant theologian the Christian is released from the decay of choice because he would not have been able to choose the right path to freedom, still having a single solution: to follow Christ.

“Liberation happens as a rescue from the ocean of countless options that seem to be offered and by a transposition in the reality realm of necessities, that turns into his only possibility in this way (*die Befreiung widerfährt ihm als seine Rettung aus dem Ozean der sich ihm scheinbar in unbegrenzter Zahl anbietenden Möglichkeiten durch seine Versetzung auf den Boden der Wirklichkeit des Einen Notwendigen*). All other options except it disappear⁴¹.

To Karl Barth, Christian liberation means accessing a reality without the temptation of material that brings him closer to God through Jesus Christ.

“Liberation is his passing from the strong mastery of things to the free land of man and human (*die Befreiung ist sein Übergang aus der Gewaltherrschaft der Sachen in das freie Land des Menschen und des Menschlichen*). Jesus Christ made Himself man among men only for the sake of man and not for something else, because only for that reason alone He exists as such. This is the decision that separates His past from His future⁴².

In the Swiss theologian view the Christian does not have to ask for his release, but only to receive it from Jesus Christ.

“Liberation causes man not to crave and pretend, but to understand he must receive (*die Befreiung widerfährt ihm darin, dass er nicht mehr begehren und fordern muss, sondern empfangen darf*). He could and even can receive, become and be a man. And even

⁴⁰ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, pp. 280–281.

⁴¹ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, pp. 762–763.

⁴² Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, pp. 763–764.

this reception without all other prior lusts and desires makes his Christian existence to correspond to that Person he must confess: Jesus Christ, who reconciled the world with God and freedom, whom God justified and sanctified, no longer having the lust and claim (*in Jesus Christus geschehenen Versöhnung der Welt mit Gott, der Freiheit, in der Gott der Menschen in Jesus Christus – ohne alle Möglichkeit eines Begehrens und Forderns seinerseits – vor ihm gerechtfertigt und für ihn geheiligt hat*)⁴³.

Christian liberation means eliminating doubt; it means the happiness for excluding the doubt and his direct passing to action.

“Personal liberation lies on the fact that he was removed from his perplexity and introduced into the action like an eagle with open wings flying over a cliff (*seine persönliche Befreiung besteht weiter darin, dass er, wie mit Adlersflügeln über einen Abgrund, aus der Ratlosigkeit heraus, hinein in die Tat getragen wird*)⁴⁴.

Otherwise speaking, to Barth Christian’s release means passing from the legal reality of his existence to the reality of God’s forgiveness and mercy.

“Christian liberation means he does not have to be in the dialectic between moral and immoral, but he may exist in the dialectic of forgiveness and gratitude (*des Christen Befreiung besteht darin, dass er nicht mehr in der Dialektik von Moral und Unmoral existieren muss, sondern in der Dialektik von Vergebung und Dankbarkeit existieren darf*). He is no longer under the law but under the Gospel (*nicht mehr unter dem Gesetz, sondern unter dem Evangelium*)⁴⁵.

The Protestant theologian declares that Christian’s release means entry into a state of prayer.

“Liberation pulls man out of fear and turns him to prayer. He can meet his Lord in prayer and, as he does this he comes out of the dominion of fear and is able to confess and reveal what God has done in Jesus Christ to all people and to the world (*er darf im Gebet seinem Herrn entgegen – und indem er das tut, aus der Angst heraus gehen und auch so darstellen und abbilden,*

⁴³ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, pp. 765–766.

⁴⁴ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p. 767.

⁴⁵ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p. 769.

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*was Gott in Jesus Christus für alle Menschen, für die ganze Welt geschehen liess)*⁴⁶.

We can conclude that to Karl Barth, human liberation was committed by Saviour Christ in His full freedom, as true man and true God, once and for all, and this release is the foundation for human free will and obedience.

“The liberation of man from his misery was made by the royal freedom achieved by Jesus Christ Himself, i.e. He as true God and true man gave His life in obedience to God and as our Sovereign, Lord and intercessor He gave Himself to death for us (*mit des Menschen Befreiung aus seinem Elend verhält es sich endlich so, dass sie ganz allein in der königlichen Freiheit geschehen und wirklich ist, in der der Mensch Jesus sie damit vollzogen hat, das er sich selbst, sein Leben als wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch im Gehorsam gegen Gott und als unser Haupt und Herr uns Stellvertreter, für uns dahin in den Tod gegeben hat*). It is an act of free will that makes man free from his misery once and for all (*dies ist die Tat des freien Willens, die Entscheidung des liberum arbitrium, in welcher des Menschen Befreiung aus dem Elend ein für allemal vollzogen ist*)⁴⁷

All human actions in relation to the Saviour Christ must be brought to one common denominator, the freedom.

“Finally all we have said about man’s liberation from sins, fear and lie by meeting Jesus Christ, his true witnesses, must be brought to a common denominator: freedom (*es kann und muss aber schliesslich alles, was über das den Menschen der Sünde in seiner Begegnung mit Jesus Christus, dem wahrhaftigen Zeugen, Erschreckende und also von ihm Wegzulügende zu sagen ist, auf einer Nenner gebracht werden: es geht um die Freiheit*)⁴⁸.

V. Conclusions

From the text above we could understand the main features of faith and divine grace in the Protestant theologian Karl Barth thinking and their rela-

⁴⁶ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p. 770.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 2, p. 558.

⁴⁸ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 3, p. 514.

tion to human freedom. One could notice that both the act of faith and the action of grace are *in concreto* achievements of God, either through humans or by direct working on it from the outside. In both cases, the initiative rests solely with God, man only being obliged to respond properly to the divine action. From here we can notice the great importance of human being responsibility, both in Karl Barth's thinking and in the Protestant theology.

In many ways, Karl Barth's thinking differs from Orthodox Patristic thinking which, as we have seen highlights and accentuates other meanings about faith, divine grace and human freedom. Jesus Christ's person occupies a central place in Karl Barth's theology by distinguishing from other Protestant theologians through a profound Christological approach of different dogmatic or moral issues.