

Article

# The God of the Covenant: Karl Barth on Creation Care

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**Abstract:** This article seeks to explore the identity of the Creator God in Karl Barth's doctrine of creation. Attention is given to his understanding of the eternal covenant God has made with humanity and how we are cared for within a covenantal fellowship. The study also concerns itself with how Barth's distaste for the notion of *analogia entis* is somewhat unsustained in his treatment of creation. I argue that, to some extent, the analogy of being vis-à-vis the cosmos is complementarily employed with *analogia fides* in Barth's articulation of creation care. This is the case as he reconfigures the talk on creation rigidly in and through Jesus Christ as Creator and creature.

**Keywords:** Karl Barth; creation; covenant; *analogia entis*; creation care

## 1. Introduction

In the wake of the Great Lisbon earthquake in 1755, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed his masterpiece: Symphony in G minor. Karl Barth commented that Mozart had the gift of *hearing* the world holistically, that is, 'He heard the negative only in and with the positive' (Barth 2009, III/3, p. 298). That is exactly the aim of this article—to view the current pandemic with the goodness the Creator has in store for his creation.

It has been almost one and a half years that people worldwide have been in lockdown due to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> The havoc wrought by COVID-19 encourages wondering what lies ahead with the new normal.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of Barth's theology in this pressing predicament cannot be ignored—his articulation about God *in* the world still challenges the contemporary reader. Although he lived in a time different from the present, it is not so different at all, as his thoughts were shaped by global upheaval as well.<sup>3</sup> Far from suggesting a panacea, Barth's theology could provide hope during the pandemic.

The study aims to discover why Barth conceives of the divine creative act in tandem with the divine communal act. Furthermore, it argues that although Barth advances the notion of *analogia fides* (analogy of faith) in his theology, he somehow turns to *analogia entis* (analogy of being) in support of God's creation care. To achieve this, Barth's doctrine of creation paired with his conception of God's covenantal fellowship will be investigated. The article begins with a brief account of 'creation as the external basis of the covenant' followed by the 'covenant as the internal basis of creation' with attention to the Creator God as Lord, Advocate, and Guardian. It expounds the four key reasons to hope in the covenant by looking at creation, namely by seeing the light amidst the darkness, by inhabiting the space between waters, by staring up at the sky, and by celebrating the Sabbath. It concludes with a reflection on how Barth helps us redirect the talk on creation care in Jesus Christ—the agent and lynchpin of creation.

Barth's doctrine of creation in the *Church Dogmatics*, specifically expositing God as the Loving Creator (Barth 2009, §41) is foundational. The study is twofold: pedagogical and pastoral. It is pedagogical since it functions as a guidepost to the pathfinder in this dark situation, and it is pastoral because it delivers hope in seemingly hopeless situations. What the study will not do is delve deep into the issues of theodicy. This will be engaged nonetheless, in strict conjunction with Barth's rendition of the Creator as a relational Person towards the creature.<sup>4</sup>



**Citation:** de Vera, Nixon. 2021. The God of the Covenant: Karl Barth on Creation Care. *Religions* 12: 326. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050326>

Academic Editors: Mark R. Lindsay and Joseph Rivera

Received: 11 April 2021

Accepted: 30 April 2021

Published: 7 May 2021

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## 2. Doctrine of Creation

Barth admitted that he is ‘much less confident and sure’ in writing the doctrine of creation (see the ‘Preface’, Barth 2009, III/1, p. ix). He, however, had to do it to continue his series on dogmatics; he began with the hermeneutics of the first two chapters of Genesis. Barth’s take on creation is informed by the dusk and dawn of World War II (Barth 2009, III/1, p. x). According to him, the doctrine of creation poses a challenge to people spiritually and mentally—it is a ‘doctrine of faith and its content a secret’ (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 4). Barth attests,

The insight that man owes his existence and form, together with all the reality distinct from God, to God’s creation, is achieved only in the reception and answer of the divine self-witness, that is, only in faith in Jesus Christ, i.e., in the knowledge of the unity of Creator and creature actualised in Him, and the life in the present mediated by Him, under the right and in the experience of the goodness of the Creator towards His creature.

(Barth 2009, III/1, p. 3)

There are three facets noticeable here: the doctrine of creation is coupled with the doctrine of God—the subject is the Creator, not the creature; the reason why the doctrine of creation is of faith is that it is founded upon Jesus Christ as Creator God; and the content of creation is a secret as creation is rooted in God’s self (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 111). However, for Barth, even if the core of this doctrine resides in the divine being, the Creator, in his freedom, is determined to be in a tight relationship with the creature. Creation, that of faith and a secret, will be the springboard of our theological discussion.

To analyze why Barth views creation with the covenant, we first need to understand what he thinks of creation. He enunciates that creation is the work of the Trinity (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 42) and that it is a pure saga.<sup>5</sup> Creation is first in the triune outworking for it, which is where God displays who he is and what he aims to achieve. God ‘finds a correspondence in the very different but not dissimilar fellowship between God and His creature’ (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 50). The Godhead determines itself to relate with human beings. Moreover, since Barth views the creation christocentrically, the role of Jesus Christ is indispensable in considering his doctrine of creation.

In Christ, the Creator is said to break into creation without being confounded with creaturely reality. Here, we can quite capture Barth’s thought on the simultaneity of eternity with time when he speaks of the being of God (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 77). The Creator God is understood in the creature Jesus as divine transcendence converges with divine immanence. This can be traced back to the Göttingen period (Barth 1991, pp. 388, 437, 441). We can deduce therefore that Barth is consistent in articulating the Creator’s everlasting commitment to the creature.

At the outset of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth advances the idea of divine constancy in creation. God remains immutable in the outworking of the decree (Barth 2009, I/2, p. 50). In volume II, Barth is right in viewing God to be truly dynamic, especially in being free to decide in God’s self (Barth 2009, II/2, pp. 64–65, 106–7). The decree is the triune determination to be for humanity. Then, in volume III, Barth concentrates on the Creator in time but not being coerced by it. The accent is on the Creator becoming a creature. In subjecting himself to creaturely reality, however, God remains the fountainhead of it. It is in this line of thinking where Barth presents a series of encounters between the Creator and the creature, and it is where Christ is seen as the Overseer of the created world. This is why, in volume IV, the self-existing and self-sustaining being is revealed in the fact that, though the world is that of sin and death, the Creator can enter it fully in himself (Barth 2009, IV/1, pp. 187–88). Barth further argues that the Creator cannot be conditioned into a ‘world-cause, a supreme or first cause or a principle of being,’ that God is a being *in se*—someone that cannot be caused or moved by external actions and events (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 13). In the encounters between the Creator and the creature, the former is the One who caused and moved the latter. This order is irreversible. Further,

the divine activity cannot be mixed into human activity (Tanner 2005, p. 94). In the being of Jesus Christ, God overrules creaturely reality though he is human. This is probable, in Barth's assertion, since this human is *also* divine at once. In Christ, therefore, what is distinct in toto can be in complete harmony (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 59, 102).

The concern now is to examine Barth's treatment of the history of creation as pre-historical, i.e., a *biblical history*. As we are dealing with something metaphysical, such history cannot be validated empirically; it can only be a history of the covenant in the form of a pure saga.<sup>6</sup> This form, Barth clarifies, is neither a tale nor a fiction because it is true yet unverifiable. It is historical in a sense that it is not an imaginary false notion, but rather, an event that had taken place in creaturely reality. God is real and so is God's act in the world (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 92).

To understand what Barth means by biblical history, we have to scrutinize his idea of the covenant vis-à-vis creation. He deals with the simultaneity of eternity with time as he treats it with 'the history of God's covenant with man' (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 42). This history arises from the election of the Son to be in the flesh by the will of the triune God. This is the goal of creation as well as the beginning of the covenantal history, Barth reasons. This, accurately speaking, is the eternal history (*Geschichte*), verifiable in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not elsewhere making it unique from the history often inferred (*Historie*).<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the covenantal history is eternal as it is rooted in the Son of God being the Son of Man. It is in time, on the other hand, that this history is demonstrated, specifically, in Jesus of Nazareth (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 115).

Creation, argues Barth, is conditioned to be in the closest proximity with the Creator, and such contiguity is called a 'fellowship' (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 39, 47). We can see here that when Barth refers to creation, he first speaks of the covenant. To talk about the latter as a mere preface will not suffice in how he handles it consonant with the divine outworking. The covenant points to the shared history. In it, humans are united with God, *not* in union with God. In this respect, humankind is united with God as the 'history of creation' is subservient to the 'history of the covenant' (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 60; cf. p. 73). In another respect, humankind is not in union with God; ergo, the two histories are inseparable—they coalesce, not fused. In other words, Barth connects them without blurring their distinctions—the history of the covenant is the antecedent of the history of creation. Tracing the impetus of the covenant is a formula to map what he has in mind in juxtaposing the eternal with the temporal. Furthermore, given that christology is the rubric through which his formulation of creation-care is critiqued (Barth 1996, p. 50).

### 3. The Covenantal God

In his freedom, God loves. Love is God's nature and God's being is in love. In Barth's interjection, God's love is exercised first in the Persons of the Godhead (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 13–14). The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and such a relationship is generated by the Holy Spirit. The fact that the triune love is in and of itself is shown *ad extra* and, hence, in fellowship with creatures.

The second point is that Barth's conception of creation is a radical contingency, understood to be in and through Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as Christ is the origin of creation, the creature's existence is derived from Christ's nature of love. This caused creation and moves it without end. Christ is the substance of creation. The substance is that which gives the creature its fundamental characteristics, its ultimate reality—all outward manifestations and change. In this, humanity's meaning is married with God's self-determination and humanity's purpose is *within* the covenant. Barth writes:

The Creator is the divine Person who as such will later act as the Lord, Advocate, and Guardian of His people and all peoples. That God will create man in His image implies that it is not man but God who is first a living Person as One who knows and wills and speaks.

(Barth 2009, p. 110)

The Creator is a relational Person. Although divine, this quality is orientated to the creature. For Barth, the Creator commands what he wills and accomplishes what he intends by becoming the ‘Lord, Advocate, and Guardian’. God is the Lord as he directs the course of human life. In this lordship, humans are compelled to know what God wills for them in the covenant. It is also here where humans are given ‘ultimate reality’, i.e., being always with their Lord (Barth 2009, p. 368). That is why in Barth’s thinking, creation in and of itself contains both negative and positive aspects. The negative aspect of creation can be located in the creature’s handicap—that it cannot stand on its own (Barth 2009, p. 7). This is unacceptable for secular humanists who insist on managing the world without the thought of a metaphysical being. It is, for them, simply non-existent. Conversely, Barth sees a God who creates and sustains the world. It is in this framework where he construes the positive aspect of creation in a twofold injunction—that the selfless God is sovereign, and that the selfish humanity is not sovereign (Barth 2009, p. 49).

The positive aspect of creation hinges on divine nature in the fullest sense. It is indeed good to embrace, Barth insists, to be wholly dependent on God due to his devotion to us. (Excursus in Barth 2009, p. 45). In other words, God is sovereign in dealing with creation in and through himself alone. If God were not so, he would have been indifferent and vindictive of human life. Humans are selfish by nature. They knew nothing about competent stewardship as they misuse and abuse; treating their bodies and all life forms irresponsibly. Barth posits that the basic instinct of humans is self-centered; therefore it has no genuine concern for the planet they live in. It is indeed consoling to ponder that humans are not the sovereign in the world; if they were, the future would look grim. The knock-on effect could have been beyond repair. The truth, however, is quite the opposite (Excursus in Barth 2009, pp. 222–23).

Jesus Christ is the rationale for why the negative aspect of creation is overruled by its positive aspect. As creation is conceived christocentrically, Barth remarks, ‘He [Jesus] is its absolute origin, its purpose, the power which rules it, its Lord’ (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 7). It is here where the divine imperative over the human is ascertained. The human incapacity to be good in and of itself is overcome by the intrinsic good of the divine. Thus, the ultimate reality of humankind is coincident with the reality of Christ. Within such reality, Barth links the lordship of creation with the covenant itself. In it, Christ is seen to be the ‘Lord and Bearer’ of human nature (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 97). This has to do with the Father’s generation: The Son is the *prōtotokos* (firstborn) of creation, the first begotten of the Father, and eternally begotten, as Barth puts it.<sup>8</sup> Christ is the wellspring of assurance as he stands as the ‘Representative of all creation’ (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 97). And so, it is conceived that the eternal covenant in God’s self is now extended to us. In this case, the Son is the Lord as the Bearer of humankind—our true Representative.

It is in Christ’s humanity where we can seek our true identity. This is far from the sceptics’ worldview, because, in Barth’s conception, we are neither a product of chance nor an afterthought.<sup>9</sup> It is stressed that the human creature is not ‘incidental or accidental’ for the Creator willed and determined its existence (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 111). The Creator is the Lord of the creature. The human tendency to act, and the action itself, cannot be disengaged from the purpose and command of the Lord.

God is the Advocate as he associates himself with human beings. God is in his metaphysics of identity; his essence and existence are not conceived of as something casual but rather deliberate in meaning and purpose (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 229–30). That which is intrinsic in God is what God desires for humans to know, and for them to acknowledge that they exist and continue to exist in his power. In having the divine purpose and meaning, humans reveal who they are. It also exposes the life in God necessitated for the creature—it cannot be revoked. If it could be so, the creature would stop existing at once. This is very indicative of the faithfulness of God as the Advocate of people. The faithfulness here is a must not for his sake, but ours.

This shows God’s fidelity to his decree—to commit as the Advocate. Despite the human self-centeredness, God remains others-centred. According to Barth, the Creator

works for our cause. In being the true Representative, Jesus Christ as Creator is not only one with us but becomes *like* us. In his humanity, Christ has demonstrated that he can never be someone other than this being, i.e., always and altogether functions pro nobis (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 101). Even though Christ is complete in himself, he, however, chooses to interact with us. God, in this sense, defends and sustains us to be in harmony with him.

The underpinning principle here, posits Barth, is in apprehending how Jesus Christ is said to be the proponent of what it is to be human. Christ's humanity is the genuine humanity that perfectly fits the covenant. Barth asserts, 'Creating it, God gives it meaning and necessity. Giving it being and existence, He makes it the exponent of His intention, plan and order' (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 230). All of these originate and consummate in Christ.

God is the Guardian as he acts for the welfare of human beings. For Barth, the Creator has the care of the creature, and it is in this custody where humans find comfort in the world (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 139). Since humans are selfish, it is only in Jesus Christ where they are kept within the covenant. It is in this backdrop where the divine intention, plan, and order of the human is better appreciated. God intends to make us his 'covenant-partners' (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 92). God plans to make us like Jesus Christ—faithful in the covenant. Far from the deistic worldview, the intention and plan are ordered to reflect God's commitment to us (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 134). This gives weight to the idea that the negative aspect of creation is overruled by its positive aspect.

Jesus Christ is the *raison d'être* of what it is to be human (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 200–2). Our essence and existence are intertwined with Christ's selfless act. In this act, we are renewed to be in accord with what God intends, plans, and orders for us. In Barth's schema, humankind benefits from being united with the Creator, although humans have to trust the divine operation (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 330–31).<sup>10</sup> To discern Barth in this matter, we have to probe why creation, in his theological construct, is the external basis of the covenant.

#### 4. Creation as the External Basis of the Covenant

In Barth's view, creation serves as the *äusserer grund* (external reason or outer foundation) of the covenant, for in it, God's intention to make humans his covenant-partners occurs (Barth 1959, III/1, p. 103; cf. Barth 2009, III/1, p. 96). In this, humans are given the predisposition to love as God does. The divine love becomes the bedrock of creaturely love. The divine love, Barth reiterates, can be appreciated by making the creature its object (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 54–55).

Although *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) is often accepted in the Christian tradition, what I advance here is the idea of *creatio ex quod* (creation of the result of, or, creation which results from) as creation is understood christocentrically.<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth and Erich Przywara allude to the former (although the two are not in agreement in their take on *analogia entis*).<sup>12</sup> However, I contend that the latter is more viable in the treatment of the doctrine of creation inside the doctrine of God. In this ontological framework, creation is *from* God—emanating from his being (the divine agency) shown in his act. Though the creation existed from non-matter, which Barth expounds in particular as a sort that 'does not work on an existing object or material', it does not necessarily mean, in a strict sense, that it came about out of nothingness *per se* (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 16). It does not follow either that since creation comes from God, the two are alike. God remains non-analogous with the outcome of his divine operation—a theme I share with Barth. Yet I assert that the human essence, though entirely distinct, is not foreign to God.

What makes the Creator distinct from the created, I think, is also a case for creation *from something*. The disjunction of them cannot be a hindrance to conceiving that what consequently existed (the creation) is sourced from what exists forever (the Creator). If the Son is indeed the origin of creation, and that creation cannot be divorced from the divine agency, it is logical to presuppose that creation can be a product or an outflow of the Father's begetting of the Son. In this sense, my idea of *creatio ex quod* reconfigures

the traditional take on *creatio ex nihilo*. This is to view creation more biblically than Greek to take it substantially, i.e., from God's inner life, not materially, i.e., outside of God (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 95).<sup>13</sup>

Be that as it may, Barth does not reject wholesale the term 'analogy'. What he opposes is a formula of causality and analogy exemplifying the kind of generic assimilations of the Creator to the creature (Busch 2010, p. 80). What is proposed is an analogy of faith as a 'mode' of revelation, or a theological construct arising from the revelation of the analogy of faith (*analogia fides sive revelationis*). The Creator gives to the creature 'the thing which by nature they cannot have—in their creatureliness the character of an analogy to Himself as the Creator' (Busch 2010, p. 80).

Barth's version of 'analogy' is a radical maneuver away from anything that accommodates the humanistic sort of natural theology to avoid the danger of assimilating the Creator with the creature, or vice versa.<sup>14</sup> This version is advanced metaphysically and semantically (yet departing from the Thomistic framework) in articulating human participation with God (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 74).<sup>15</sup> The concept of participation allows Barth to navigate through the challenging terrain of a univocal or equivocal reading of being. In metaphysics, the Creator is unlike the created in terms of existence and quality. Distinct from the creature, God is self-existent and self-moved. God is complete in and of himself as the *Perfekt sondergleichen*, 'incomparable Perfect' (Barth 1959, pp. 12–13; cf. Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 13–14). In semantics, however, the Creator is analogous to the creature in terms of association in the covenant and, the treatment of nature. For instance, given the covenant, God is the Partner as he determined humans to be his partners. Concerning creation, God is the ultimate Carer of the earth as he calls us to take care of it (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 94–95).

Moreover, God is the essential cause of humanity even though he does not essentially share a common genus with it.<sup>16</sup> The distinction, of course, is important in the structure of participation. It does not mean that humans cannot participate as stewards because they cannot participate in God's nature.<sup>17</sup> The unlikeness and the likeness in discussion coincide dynamically, i.e., it is taken constructively as Barth renders creation as the outer foundation. Thus, the employment of the term 'analogy' points to the subsistence of the creature with the Creator. Here, creation is the showcase of the Father's begetting of the Son (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 13–14).

In Barth's assertion, creation is God's avenue of revealing himself. In creation, God's incomparable perfection is understood. The love within the Godhead is shared with someone who is not part of it—the creature. Contra the Kantian presupposition, it is possible to know God by knowing love, and in due time, imitate God by loving others. God does this by loving humans (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 96–97). People come to know God and learn how to love. Even if humanity tends to break the covenant, grace overcomes it, hence the 'covenant of grace' (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 97). What is altogether sovereign is not the human will to go against the covenant, but instead, the divine will to make humans stay within it. This is achieved in Jesus Christ. In so thinking, Barth explains that 'creation is not itself the covenant' but creation is the evidence of the covenant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 97).

We will now discuss why Barth thinks of the covenant as the internal basis of creation.

## 5. The Covenant as the Internal Basis of Creation

The covenant is the *inner grund* (internal reason or inner foundation) of creation as Barth views it within the covenantal history (Barth 1959, III/1, p. 262). The covenant is the heart of creation as the former is the 'material presupposition' of the latter (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 232). Even though creation 'takes precedence historically', the covenant stands as the 'substance' of it (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 232).

Creation is the 'material requirement' (*materielle Anforderung*) of the covenant as the covenant is the 'factual priority' (*sachlichen Vorrang*). The aim of creation is for the creature to have a covenantal fellowship with its Creator (My translation of Barth 1959, III/1, p. 262). When we consider the fellowship in the central episode of the covenantal history, Barth puts a premium on the role of the Son. Jesus Christ is the material requirement of the

covenant for creation to actualize its factual priority. Barth elaborates that creation is the antecedent for God's covenant with humans. Without it, they cannot appreciate the divine orientation in being human (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 229). God does not need creation to show who he is, but we do. Without the external medium, the inner foundation of God's history with us remains oblivious. The meaning of the creature stems from God's intention for it to exist—far from it coming into being by chance. As a covenant-partner, therefore, the creature realizes its purpose, plan, and order. Furthermore, in this way, creation becomes a necessity as a 'sign and witness' of God's nature and being (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 229). In other words, the primary function of creation is to serve as God's tool for his covenant of grace. In grace alone, humans become worthy to *be* in the covenant. This is how creation 'promises, proclaims and prophesies' the covenant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 232).

The covenant likewise announces that the Creator is the Sustainer *and* the Finisher of creation. The One who creates, Barth avers, is the One who finishes it for the meaning and purpose of creation to be realized (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 52, 146). Because the covenant is the root of creation, the former is not the outcome of the latter. It is the covenant that drives the creation, not otherwise. It is also in this arrangement where the two cannot be seen as redundant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 290).

Now there seems to be a dissonance between the idea of the covenant and what is taking place in creaturely reality. How can one make sense of God's covenanted love for creation when what transpires, at the moment, seem to negate such love vis-à-vis the pandemic? This love for humanity is hardly seen when thousands of people die every day of COVID-19 (aside from other deaths worldwide). Barth aims to convince us of the continuous divine creation-care amidst tragic circumstances. There will always be a threat to our existence. The way forward is to keep a balanced vista in contemplating the present condition. Moreover, if ever we are not convinced by Barth, he then provides us with something solid to hope for.

## 6. Looking at Creation to Appreciate the Covenant

We now come to the part of this study where hope can be found in creation. We have to deal with Barth's qualification of it in a rigid christological manner. His theological structure is based strongly on *analogia fides* and has nothing to do with *analogia entis*.<sup>18</sup> The latter is denied. For him, it resides from human conceit and arrogance (Excursus in Barth 2009, p. 223). What the world offers can only work for the demise of people.

According to David Bentley Hart, Barth's distaste for *analogia entis* is flawed since the original intent and meaning of it is what he tries to put forward—creation from nothingness in such a way that God is not reduced into a being amongst beings. It attains what Barth is most concerned to achieve: a proper appreciation of God's transcendence as the absolute 'Wholly Other' (Hart 2011, p. 397).<sup>19</sup> In other words, the *analogia entis* fits with ease in Barth's theological structure, not at all in opposition to it. In my estimation, Hart is right. Barth seems to have misread Przywara that God is the source of all beings. It dismisses any metaphysical speculations on the 'non-necessity of the created order' (Hart 2011, p. 397).

Hans Urs von Balthasar, however, notes that Barth is open to accommodating the *analogia entis* as long as it is 'within the context of an overarching analogy of faith' (Von Balthasar 1992, pp. 163–64). However, in Barth's effort to distance himself from philosophical and empirical approaches to creation, his iteration still betrays some inferences from observing nature itself (Cf. Fergusson 2016, pp. 428–30). His take on the 'analogy' is not just confined to the repudiation of any anthropomorphic fashioning of God but also of any high appraisal observable in nature. Further, it views the analogy in temporal history, which Barth cites as 'world-occurrence' (Barth 2009, III/3, pp. 50–51).

Barth compares the world-occurrence (big and small) as a dim mirror. It is a static reflection and speculative likeness of God's providence. In contrast, the covenantal history is 'really an occurrence which comes upon man as such, and claims him totally, and leaves him no place for mere contemplation or idle experience' (Barth 2009, III/3, p. 51). The analogy of being, in Barth's mind, is problematic. One could be tempted to absolutise the divine

activity based on the state of things (in heaven and on earth) or world events (human-made or natural phenomena). What he rather champions is the revelation of the analogy of faith even in seeing the creaturely occurrence as ‘a mirror and likeness’ (Barth 2009, III/3, p. 51). Nevertheless, the *analogia entis*, which spotlights the divine providence, is reciprocally conceived with *analogia fides* as the four key reasons to hope are explored.

### 6.1. Hope in Seeing the Light Amidst Darkness

For Barth, the light was the first creation of God, and the light after darkness points to the future of creation (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 117–18). Even if the present appears dark (evil), it is but temporary. There will always be light (good) afterward (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 70–71). The light is the ‘repetition of this proclamation’ as it confirms the turn of the present creaturely reality into what God reserves for the future (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 117–18). Time and again, we are assured of a happy ending at every dawn of the new morning—an inescapable ray of hope. It is here where Barth expositis the future as an event for the Creator’s steadfast hold on the creature. Any contra argument can be fed into the revolutionary interpretation of light in consonance with divine faithfulness.

The covenant with death brought by sin is nullified by the covenant of grace (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 119). Any human counteraction of the covenant is in vain, for God’s commitment is eternal. Its sign is seen over and over again every time darkness is conquered by light. A new day comes after the night. The covenant is therefore by grace since divine faithfulness to humans is foremost in the talk of the Creator’s relation to the creature.

The darkness before creation is what Barth calls ‘chaos-reality’ (*Chaoswirklichkeit*)—something God rejects. Therefore, it will never be the permanent state of humanity. Pandemonium and misery do not last (Barth 1959, III/1, p. 113; cf. Barth 2009, III/1, p. 133). In exclaiming ‘let there be light’, God, in a sense, is transforming the chaotic environment into an orderly one.<sup>20</sup> This is the ‘creative utterance’ of God against that which is not. That which is is what is proclaimed to be the state of the world (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 133). It is an existence with God’s presence.

Remarkably, Barth seems to point out that darkness, although created, is something God did not intend at first—what should be not (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 117). Darkness is ‘the reality which was rejected by God’; it vanishes when the light came about (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 117). It is in this context where Barth expounds on his theology of evil. It is also that which is not elected to be in creation (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/3, 352).<sup>21</sup> Whatever God willed is of God. Whatever God did not will is of evil.<sup>22</sup> God is light, and in him, there is no darkness at all (Barth 2009, II/2, p. 163). Light is identified with the inner being of God as opposed to darkness seen altogether outside of God. Light, Barth continues, is the ‘irresistible and irrevocable declaration of life’, for it overrides the ‘separation, displacement and banishment’ of darkness (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 117).

As such, Jesus Christ is the *berêšit* (in the beginning) of creation—the precedent of darkness.<sup>23</sup> Barth also perceives the darkness as an ‘alternative reality’ that God neither wills nor creates (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 117). However, in one sense, though it is rejected, Barth qualifies that the darkness serves God’s purpose (Wichelhaus 2010, p. 355; Barth 2009, III/1, p. 55). It is in the darkness where God’s glory shines the brightest. It is in the darkness where divine love can be appreciated. It is so when the Son enters into the created world—that Jesus Christ is the *phōs tò alōthinon* (true light) of the world.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that it is Barthian not to deny the divine intent for darkness. Barth alludes, ‘Had He [God] not been the Creator of light, there would have been no darkness. As He is the Creator of light, darkness, too, is not without but through Him’ (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 106). In this case, darkness is dependent on God. What is un-Barthian is to make God an accessory to what darkness implicates—evil. I concur with Barth that darkness has its intended purpose in the world. What I counter is the misconstrued darkness in the creation itself. Despite his belief that God forms the light and creates the darkness, the idea of the divine ‘unwilled’ lingers without disavouring any suggestion of incidental or accidental subsistence or occurrence (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 12).

Light is always associated with God due to the fact that God created it. However, the flip side, I argue, is equally true and valid—God not just created darkness but *willed it too*.<sup>25</sup> ‘If it is to be insisted that God is not the source of darkness, then it interjects that darkness has another creator, or, it is self-existent. Biblically speaking, there is just one Creator as there is just one self-existent being’ (*De Vera Forthcoming*). It is, I suppose, well suited to underline that darkness (not evil), should have been thought to be an alternative reality that is not unwilled, yet rejected, to exemplify the determined reality in Jesus Christ. This will make Barth’s formulations more cohesive regarding the interplay of light and darkness. I have to say, and express it strongly, that darkness itself does not counteract light, but rather, complements it as shown above. Moreover, I have to add that it is in darkness (self-centredness and ignorance of God’s love) where the splendour of grace persists.

Of course, we can attach the chaos-reality to the ongoing pandemic—something God has disapproved, but that remains real for grace to flow in abundance (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 133, 135). Chaos is just intermediate; it is neither first nor last. In Barth’s covenant paradigm, grace is the beginning of God’s operation; it is also the climax of things. Such persistent grace is more evident in the habitable land enclosed by the raging waters.

### 6.2. Hope in Inhabiting the Space between Waters

The fact that God separated the waters to give way to a habitable place, says Barth, declares the divine intent. The waters represent the ‘revealed, rejected, displaced and banished’ in the Creator’s intent (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 142). The space in between waters, therefore, testifies to the divine goodwill. Forasmuch as things stay as they are, it serves as an aide-mémoire of God’s unchanging original intent. Everything is well coordinated; all are accorded in the covenant. Barth reasons that as long as we see land as the massive waters are kept at bay, it should remind us of God’s faithfulness to the covenant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 142). We have witnessed that land can disappear at once, e.g., the Great Flood, and yet God commanded the waters to part. This is how God manifests himself—God is not someone to be afraid of but someone to be a friend of. It is not in God’s nature, thus in his interest, to threaten humankind. Rather, God ensures that the threat to our existence is already averted. It is demonstrated in God’s covenant of peace symbolized by the rainbow.<sup>26</sup>

The land is a form of an optimistic trajectory of what is to come (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 142). The fact that the waters parted providentially, not accidentally, proves that what is ahead is covered by God. It is in this platform where Barth treats the cosmos as a ‘theatre of life’ signaling a salutary end (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 133). The division of the waters tells of the creaturely reality God has set. The waters surrounding the land affirm God’s opposition to the mortal danger creatures are up against. The terrestrial ocean can exist only in its separation by the Word spoken to it. Here, the cosmos promises, proclaims, and prophesies the covenant. We are then assured that God will soon remove the current pandemic to make our land pleasant to live in. In the heavens, we can also see God’s undeniable covenant.

### 6.3. Hope in Staring Up at the Sky

The contrast between heaven and earth has huge implications in Barth’s theology. It mirrors the distinction between God and us; i.e., heaven corresponds to God and earth corresponds to humankind. Despite such a distinction, what is prime in Barth’s schema is the unity of both (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 18). In the covenant, ‘chaos, death and destruction’ stopped being the reality of the creature (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 134). When we stare at the sky, we are reminded of divine love, not divine wrath. If the latter is in exercise, then the waters of heaven would have crushed the entire universe—the beginning of the end of human beings. However, God did not will this, and will never do so. In the heavens, God’s throne of mercy is fixed; by looking at the heavens, we are comforted by the fact that God is indeed *pro nobis*. Mercy is what is appropriated for us, not condemnation or abandonment.

All that means is that the ‘stability of the firmament’ parallels the stability of God’s covenant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 134). The firmament is God’s proclamation of the Yes against

the No vis-à-vis our today and tomorrow. This binary analysis alerts us that the divine favor can never be influenced, let alone thwarted, by anything outside of God. What is sovereign is the covenantal grace from God's throne—the *locus in quo* of what is truly real and lasting, not the chaos-reality. Universal flooding is a thing of the past. What is predetermined for now and later is what Barth terms as (*Weltwirklichkeit*) 'world-reality' (Barth 1959, III/1, p. 150). What is foreordained is the world under control (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 134). No matter how sinister the threat is against humankind, it remains 'overhanging'—not the *is* nor the *is to come*. Barth alludes to the restricted threat as a sort that can be tied with the present pandemic. No matter how lethal and global its effect, it is restrained by God. It cannot be the last word for us. This assurance is repeated every weekend.

#### 6.4. Hope in Celebrating the Sabbath

In Barth's doctrine of creation, the seventh day or the Sabbath is a reminder of God's freedom as Creator and Deliverer (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 221). The rest God offers is reminiscent of the freedom to create and to save. It is also here where Barth finds joy in being united in Jesus Christ in creation and redemption. Sadly, the Sabbath has become a dividing issue in Christendom, which, I believe, should have been a topic for spiritual refreshment.<sup>27</sup> When Barth states that, on the Sabbath, the Creator 'completed the work', it warrants our deliverance (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 218). This might illuminate the end of evil at the hand of the Almighty. God disturbs the status quo of the world to cease what confronts creation.

The being of Jesus Christ in creation, as Barth conceives of it, has twin features, namely, the revelation of God's freedom to rest on the Sabbath and the revelation of God's love by resting in it (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 213–15). The former amplifies the joy to rest *with* humankind and the latter magnifies the compassion *for* humankind. By choice, God refrains from the creative activity for he has found the recipient of his love. The Sabbath then stands as the weekly memorial of the covenant (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 217).

With the covenantal God, we are the 'object of His love' as we are included in the being of Jesus Christ. He is the 'proper counterpart' of humankind. It is in his human nature (the true humanity) where God fellowships with us. The Sabbath, for Barth, marks 'the end of the way of toil and conflict' for humankind (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 218). This explains why it is a rest day. In it, we recognize God's triumph over the world. To secure such blessed assurance, we are summoned to partake in God's rest by ceasing work every seventh day of the week. In so doing, we affirm that our story is fastened with God's story. This is the true essence of covenantal history. This is where rest in God is consummated.

Barth continues that the Sabbath *is* the 'covenant of grace' due to the perfection of creation in Jesus Christ (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 218–19). There is a particular kind of spontaneity in the established rest addressing our pernicious restlessness. It is in the Sabbath where we can shout in faith that the chaos-reality no longer applies as it is overturned by the world-reality.<sup>28</sup>

## 7. Evaluation

After considering creation with the covenant, our task now is to engage theodicy vis-à-vis the creation as a doctrine of faith and a secret. The material indicates that creation is of faith because: (1) it is a source of assurance; (2) it is providential, not accidental; (3) it bears the divine intention, plan, and order; (4) it is where the threat is overcome; (5) it is the avenue where Jesus Christ is understood as the Representative; (6) it points to the world-reality. Therefore, Karl Barth's conviction in the Christ-event is the bedrock of confidence.

Creation is a secret for the following reasons: (1) it is part of the eternal history; (2) the synthesis of its negative and positive aspects is elusive; (3) it testifies that life is not perfect despite the divine intervention; (4) the weekly rest imprinted in it is hardly experienced; (5) Christ's role in it is yet to be fully appreciated; (6) the chaos-reality remains potent

in it. In other words, in Barth's assertion, it is beyond human comprehension why the circumstances in creation do not compromise the covenant.

Might it not be for Jesus Christ, all certainties in the world are just illusions. We have nothing to be afraid of today, especially tomorrow. Our care is attested by Christ's intercession. The *analogia fides* is not an exclusive concept as it complements the *analogia entis*. Even if God is known in Christ the creature, hope can be found as well in the created quantum.

## 8. Conclusions

In sum, the reality of the human creature, also of the created world, is rooted in the Creator's set reality. Whatever is set can never be unset. This is so, for God creates such reality maintained by grace. God's covenant has huge implications on the talk about theodicy. No matter how chaotic the current reality is, it does not have the final say. What is final is the order reality meant for us; that we are cared for primarily and ultimately. The covenantal fellowship, therefore, is where Barth anchors his security. He invites us to acknowledge this in faith—to enjoy the present as we look forward in optimism.

Jesus Christ is the *Weltwirklichkeit* firmly and consistently opposing the *Chaoswirklichkeit*. Although countless lives perished and will perish in the latter, what is lost will be regenerated in the former. It is in him, and him alone, where we are directed to hope as we consider the creation and its renewal. In Christ, we are summoned to participate in creation care.

In handling the problem of theodicy, Mozart calls to remembrance once again the peace that emanates from the incomparable Perfect. Amidst COVID-19, let the Symphony in G minor invite us to envision that what appears so is not all there is.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not Applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not Applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not Applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A city-wide quarantine was first enforced in Wuhan, China on 23 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 stands for coronavirus disease 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War, and the outbreak of the Spanish flu.

<sup>4</sup> Whenever the term 'the creature' is used, it pertains to the human creature.

<sup>5</sup> Barth defines 'saga' as a tale or story; it is an 'indication of the distinctive genre' (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 42). Barth qualifies it as 'biblical history' in contrast to legend, anecdote, and myth. 'In what follows I am using saga in the sense of an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space.' (ibid., p. 81).

<sup>6</sup> In the citation of Gen 1–2.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to (De Vera 2020, pp. 85–86).

<sup>8</sup> Greek: πρωτότοκος. Col. 1:15b. (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> Barth cites Gen 1:1–2: 4a. Cf. (Dawkins 2015, p. 43).

<sup>10</sup> Concerning Gen 2:1–3.

<sup>11</sup> Barth himself says that 'there is no actual hint in Gen. 1–2' of the concept creatio ex nihilo (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, 103).

<sup>12</sup> Przywara asserts that the analogia entis, in principle, preserves God's distinctiveness by upholding pure transcendence whereas Barth insists that it is a formulation that somewhat makes God analogous with the creature (Hart 2011, pp. 396–97).

<sup>13</sup> For more insights, read (Anderson 2018, pp. 15–16).

<sup>14</sup> This theological decision began when he was pastoring a Reformed church in the town of Safenwil, Switzerland from 1911 to 1921 (Busch 2012, p. 60).

- 15 This is to be understood in Barth's reaction to the Thomistic formula of analogical metaphysics of causality in speaking of God's creative activity (White 2009, p. 242).
- 16 Univocal causation applies to the Father and the Son because there is a shared nature between them, whilst equivocal causation applies to the Creator and the created since there is no sharing of natures between the two. It is also in this context where the categorical difference between the Creator and the creature is a positive statement in rendering creation in light of the covenant. Here, Barth construes that the creature is a part of the Creator (as the Son of God being eternally the Son of Man) but not God; though it is not God, it can never be apart from God in virtue of the being of the Son. In this case, Barth's take on analogy is dynamic, not static, because he conceives of it christocentrically. It is also in this platform where the creature realizes its participation with God in the Son's participation in creation (Excursus in Barth 2009, III/1, p. 53).
- 17 Refer to Gen 1:28. For more insights on the received concept of participation, see (Doolan 2008, pp. 175–76).
- 18 Barth's distaste for the analogy of being stems from the assumption that God is known in what the created world offers (Barth 1986, p. 33). He rather employs the term *analogia relationis* to speak of the Creator's free relation with the creature (Barth 2009, III/1, p. 195).
- 19 For a contrasting view, read (Johnson 2011, pp. 83–85).
- 20 Gen 1:3.
- 21 The study of evil in Barth's theology is beyond the scope of this manuscript. He discusses evil in-depth in §50.
- 22 Evil is 'nothingness' (das Nichtige), in the sense that God, according to Barth, did not will it and will never will it since it is not included in what God has passed over and not willed. Barth does not even associate evil with a proper existence, i.e., creature, but he rather considers evil in his doctrine of election as a non-being (yet real). So das Nichtige is deemed as a 'paradoxical and negative language'. (McDowell 2002, p. 319).
- 23 Hebrew: *אֵין*. See Gen 1:1a.
- 24 Greek: *ὡς τὸ ἀληθινόν*. See John 1:9.
- 25 Read Isa 45:7.
- 26 Gen 9:11–17.
- 27 Barth holds to Sunday as the Sabbath because, for him, the Sabbath is the first day of humankind. (Barth 2009, III/1, pp. 218, 228). Conversely, I hold to Saturday as the Sabbath since it is no doubt the seventh day of the week.
- 28 Barth cites Gen 2:3.

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