

The Obedience of Faith: Barth, Bultmann, and *Dei Verbum*

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I

November of 2005 marked the fortieth anniversary of one of the most important foundational documents of the Second Vatican Council: *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*. Besides the basic teachings on revelation, faith, scripture, and tradition, *Dei Verbum* stands as a living testimony to the influence of twentieth century Protestant theology on the work of the ecumenical council that took place from 1962-1965. *Dei Verbum* evidences this influence in a unique way since it can be compared with a parallel statement on revelation formulated at the preceding ecumenical council in 1870, Vatican I. A direct comparison of these documents clearly reveals the development of several key ideas along the lines of Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann.

The present paper is a survey of the theological background found in the works of Barth and Bultmann that influenced the reformulation of faith as we find it in *Dei Verbum*. The bishops at Vatican II, and the catholic theologians upon whom they relied, were familiar with the distinctive contribution of Barth, Bultmann, and other Protestant

theologians.¹ Although the final doctrinal statements made at the council remain thoroughly Catholic, there is little doubt that they were inspired by a return to scripture and an emphasis on the total human response required by authentic Christian faith. Prior to Vatican II, much of the Roman theology of the Catholic Church emphasized an adherence to revealed truth through the profession of clearly formulated creedal statements. With *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II opened the doors for a more personalist formulation of faith highlighting the believer's adherence to God precisely in the person of Jesus Christ who elicits our complete faith and trust. The older theology of faith was characterized by the intellectual acceptance of what God reveals, while the newer theology asserted absolute trust and self-commitment to the one who reveals.

The following table compares the parallel texts from *Dei Filius* (Vatican I) and *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II):²

¹ *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 179.

² For the original texts, for *Dei Verbum* see *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis*, ed. Francisco Bil Hellín (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), and for *Dei Filius* see *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Hünermann (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1996), #3008. The translation above is my own.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Dei Filius</i> <i>Vatican I</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Dei Verbum</i> <i>Vatican II</i></p>
<p>Cum homo a Deo tamquam creatore et Domino suo totus dependeat et ratio creata increatae Veritati penitus subiecta est, plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium fide praestare tenemur.</p>	<p>Deo revelanti praestanda est <i>oboeditio fidei</i> (Rom. 1:5, 16:26), qua homo se totum libere Deo committit “plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium” praestando et voluntarie revelationi ab Eo data assentiendo.</p>
<p>Since man completely depends upon God as his creator and Lord, and created reason has been thoroughly subjected to the uncreated Truth, we hold that the full submission of intellect and will is to be given in faith to the God who reveals.</p>	<p>The “obedience of faith” is to be given to God who reveals, by which man freely commits his total self to God by offering “the full submission of intellect and will to the God who reveals,” and by assenting willingly to the revelation given by Him.</p>

The most striking difference between *Dei Filius* and *Dei Verbum* is the deliberate inclusion in the latter of a biblical phrase taken from Paul’s Letter to the Romans. The appearance of this phrase indicates a direct attempt by the council fathers to root Catholic teaching in Sacred Scripture. However, it is more than simply a matter of inserting a biblical phrase to contextualize the doctrine of faith within the Word of God. A closer examination of the text of *Dei Verbum* reveals strands of a certain “obediential theology” that had been developed in the scriptural commentaries and dogmatic treatises of Protestant theologians.

In paragraph 5 of *Dei Verbum* there is a considerable modification in respect to *Dei Filius* of that which is offered to God who reveals himself (“*obsequium*” in *Dei Filius* -

-> “*totum se*” in *Dei Verbum*)³ and the way in which it is offered (“*fide*” in *Dei Filius* --> “*oboeditio fidei ... quâ*” in *Dei Verbum*). The wording of *Dei Verbum* is a result of numerous petitions from the council fathers for a more biblical description of faith.⁴ The final formulation utilizes the Pauline expression found in Romans that played a key role in the theology of faith for Barth and Bultmann. At the same time, there is an anthropological shift underpinning the entire discussion of revelation and faith in *Dei Verbum*. Man not only subjects himself to God through faith on the basis of his total dependence upon him, but also fulfills the total realization of what it means to be a human person precisely by committing himself to God through faith.

In what follows, I present a synopsis of the obediential theological landscape as found in the work of Barth and Bultmann. I take these two thinkers as representative

³ Although “obedience” is not used in *Dei Filius* to describe the initial response of faith in God who reveals, it is used in reference to the necessity of grace in the act of faith. “Quare fides ipsa in se, etiamsi per caritatem non operetur (cf. Gal 5:6), donum Dei est, et actus eius est opus ad salutem pertinens, quo homo liberam praestat ipsi Deo **oboedientiam** gratiae eius, cui resistere posset, consentiendo et cooperando.” *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, #3010.

⁴ In the *Relatio* of the *Commissio Theologica* we find: “Plures postulant, ut praebeatur *descriptio fidei* magis biblica et personalistica, quae melius correspondeat descriptioni datae de revelatione ipsa.” Gil Hellin, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis: Dei Verbum*, 697. We do not want to suggest that the term *obsequium* lacks biblical roots. Indeed, there are numerous examples of its use in the Vulgate. However, in the specific context of *Dei Filius*, *obsequium* was not employed in view of a direct citation of scripture. In the Vulgate, *obsequium* is used to translate *latreía* from the Greek. Ratzinger and Rahner make direct reference to *obsequium* as *latreía* in Rom 12:1 (see below). In the *Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas uses the term “obsequium” to refer to any general service of one person to another. Drawing from the Greek *latreía*, Thomas denotes the specific *obsequium* rendered to God, in Latin, as *latria*. St. Thomas interprets the use of *obsequium* in Rom 12:1 as expressive of the offering of oneself through a life grounded in the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Cf. Henchey, “La formula ‘in obsequium’ nel linguaggio di S. Tommaso,” 454-456. *Obsequium* is also used in the New Testament to translate *leitourgía*, which, in Phil 2:17, takes the genitive case *tēs pisteôs*. Finally, *obsequium* is even used to translate “obedience” (*hupakoē*) in 2 Cor. 10:5.

rather than constitutive of the theology that influenced the final wording of paragraph 5 in *Dei Verbum*. I will highlight the distinctive interpretation of the expression “the obedience of faith” (*hupakoē pisteōs*) as evidenced in the exegetical and theological work of these two theologians. Obviously, their methodology and conclusions were not adopted at Vatican II without significant modifications. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church owes a debt of gratitude to Protestant theology for its reassertion of the indispensable role of scripture, and its insistence on the totality of the human response to God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ.

I will first consider Karl Barth’s theology of faith and the role of Pauline obedience in his system (II). Secondly, I briefly sketch how the theology of obedience fits within Barth’s ethical framework (III). I then turn to survey Bultmann’s more radical and existential theology of faith, again paying special attention to the place of the biblical notion of obedience within his overall system (IV). As with Barth, I sketch the ethical dimension of obedience as it appears in Bultmann’s work (V). Finally, I conclude with some remarks on the auspicious results of the mutual cooperation of Catholic and Protestant schools of thought in regard to the meaning of “the obedience of faith”, as well as the collaborative potential for further development in obediential theology.

II

Without attempting an exhaustive summary of Karl Barth's theology of faith and obedience, and in line with my primary intent of focusing on the role of Romans 1:5 in the obediential theology of faith, I limit my discussion to his interpretation of the phrase within scripture and illustrate how that interpretation relates more generally to his theology of faith.

Karl Barth's monumental theological research and highly original thought caught the attention of Catholic scholars in the twentieth century due to his systematic clarity and his broad inclusiveness of many early sources important to the Catholic tradition. His early existentially driven thought centered on the Word of God delivered to man through the scriptures. The act of faith in this context prescind from external conditions that would either necessitate the act or render it more reasonable. Barth's insistence upon an internal and distinctive revelation comes to light through his comparative analysis of the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia entis*.⁵ His interpretation of obedience in regard to faith will thus be determined by the relationship between human beings and God established through the autonomous Word of God.

Because of the radical uniqueness of the Word of God, Barth emphasized God's initiative in eliciting the faith-response. We cannot presume to possess an autonomous

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 95-138.

power that automatically elicits our obedience, for such, according to Barth, is the character of obedience offered to false gods.⁶ The essence of true obedience offered to God is only perceptible through a consideration of Jesus Christ. In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth delineates the Christian understanding of obedience in the following manner:

Christian obedience consists in this ... that by the grace of God there is a relationship of God with man. For what the Christian community can have specially as knowledge and experience of the atonement made in Jesus Christ, for the power, therefore, of its witness in the world, everything depends on the simplicity of heart which is ready to let the grace of God be exclusively His grace, His sovereign act, His free turning to man as new and strange every morning, so that it does not know anything higher or better or more intimate or real than the fact that quite apart from anything that he can contribute to God or become and be in contrast to Him, unreservedly therefore and undeservedly, man can hold fast to God and live by and in this holding fast to him.⁷

The core of Barth's distinctive theology of faith in earlier editions of the *Dogmatics* is the impossibility of a properly Christian knowledge apart from God, and the call to an openness to receive such knowledge solely through the action of God's grace. In the demand for a total disposition to receive the grace of God, Christianity distinguished itself from other religions, for it is grounded in the total disposition of the Son to the Father in the work of atonement.⁸ An important difference between the two types of obedience later leads Barth to reject the *analogia entis* in favor of the *analogia fidei*. On the one hand, both the believer and Jesus Christ live a life of obedience only through the presence of divine grace. On the other hand, whereas this grace was

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics (CD)*, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1953), 43.

⁷ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/1, 83-84.

⁸ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/1, 159.

experienced by Jesus Christ as *Deus homo*, a Christian experiences this grace only by opening oneself to an utterly “other” through whom the believer is sanctified and justified.⁹ “The One who is in this obedience,” writes Barth in reference to Christ, “as the perfect image of the ruling God, is Himself -- as distinct from every human and creaturely kind -- God by nature. In his mode of being as the Son, He fulfills the divine subordination.”¹⁰

Barth’s theology of obedience spans a wide spectrum of sources and includes an interpretation of “obediential potency” by which we can obey God only through God’s free gift.¹¹ In *Church Dogmatics*, rather than focusing on the role of freedom in the act of obediential faith, Barth concentrates on the doctrine of grace and the absolute openness necessary to accept that grace. Barth writes that “the real freedom of man is decided by the fact that God is his God. In freedom he can only choose to be the man of God, i.e., to be thankful to God. With any other choice he would simply be groping in the void, betraying and destroying his true humanity.”¹² Barth’s model was highly influential due to its emphasis on the passive aspect of obedience allowing for an infusion of divine grace by which God affects a specifically Christian knowledge in the believer.

⁹ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/1, 257.

¹⁰ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/1, 209.

¹¹ Barth, *CD*, vol. III/1, 133. For the roots of “obediential potency” in Thomas Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 115, a. 2 ad 4; II-II, q. 2 a. 3; III, q. 1, a. 3 ad 3.

¹² Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/1, 43.

Undoubtedly, Barth's greatest contribution to the theological development of obedience lies in his extensive treatment of the obedience of the Son of God. This comes as no surprise considering his enduring commitment to the *analogia fidei*. The only reference we have to obedience as it pertains to Christian life is God himself, and more specifically, God incarnate. Chapter 14 of his *Church Dogmatics* closely considers the centrality of the obedience of the Son of God in the subsequent theological enterprise of understanding faith.

Barth emphasizes that the objectivity of Jesus Christ is the firm foundation upon which his obedience rests, and not *vice versa*.¹³ The obedience flowing from his Sonship must be taken together with his absolute solidarity with sinful humanity.¹⁴ Furthermore, it is the obedience of self-humiliation in the incarnation which makes this solidarity possible, establishing obedience as the beginning and end of Jesus Christ's redemptive mission.¹⁵ By means of the absolute freedom leading Christ to take on human flesh, the perfection of obedience is attained and, as we shall see, becomes the origin of the obedience of faith.¹⁶ The obedience with which Jesus submits Himself to the Father is not limited to his incarnate reality, but is essentially based on his eternal

¹³ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 164-170.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 171 ff.

¹⁵ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 177.

¹⁶ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1. Barth admires chapter 2 of Philippians for the clear exposition of this point.

relationship of obedience as the divine second person of the Trinity.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is precisely in his obedience that Jesus Christ manifests himself as Son.¹⁸

Barth's theology of obedience to the Son is deeply embedded in a Pauline-centered approach which, Barth argues, is pertinent to all human beings at all times seeking the truth. The truth expressed by Paul, however, is above all a truth about God rather than a truth about human beings. The eternal significance of Pauline theology lies precisely in this christocentric insight.

Barth outlines this christocentric obedience in four aspects. Central to these four aspects is the fact that Jesus Christ is our savior precisely because he is our judge. The first aspect of Christ's submission is that he liberates us by displacing us precisely as judge.¹⁹ Second, Christ takes our place as the judged, becoming our sin in a real sense and thus opening up to us the possibility of true repentance.²⁰ Third, through his actual suffering and death, Christ takes our place in the objective judgment.²¹ His passion, therefore, is a historical and concrete reality both wholly unique and efficacious. Fourth, he takes our place in the establishment of the justice of God, the culminating

¹⁷ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 205.

¹⁸ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 209.

¹⁹ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 231-235.

²⁰ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 235-244.

²¹ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 244-253.

manifestation of which is his resurrection.²² Obedience is at the core of each of these four aspects, and it is only possible and efficacious in the person of Jesus Christ.²³

The christocentricity of Barth's theology of obedience is rooted in the treatment of grace, redemption, and righteousness in his *Römerbrief*.²⁴ Because this work is more theological than exegetical, it provides us a privileged insight into Barth's distinct theology of obedience flowing from Paul's understanding of faith.

The wholly transcendent commission of Paul's apostleship is the framework in which Barth begins his commentary on the introduction to the epistle. The theme of Paul's introductory address is that there is no worldly principle to which he owes his life's mission.²⁵ Obedience in the context of Rom 1:5 refers to the acceptance of this grace first in the case of Paul himself, and secondly in the case of all his listeners. Grace manifests itself as the witness to the faithfulness of God which itself is the principle to which we owe our obedience. Barth writes that "the fidelity of man to the faithfulness of God -- the faith, that is, which accepts grace -- is itself the demand for obedience and itself demands obedience from others."²⁶ The expression "obedience of faith" (*hupakoē*

²² Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 255-256.

²³ Barth, *CD*, vol. V/1, 258.

²⁴ Citations in the present thesis are taken from the Hoskyns English translation of the sixth edition. See Bibliography.

²⁵ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 29.

²⁶ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 31.

pisteös) is thus the connecting link between (i) God's faithfulness, which is (ii) received by Paul in the form of an apostolic commission, is in turn (iii) presented to his hearers through grace, and (iv) accepted by them through the same grace. Obedience is present in each of these links: (i) as revealed to man in the obedience of Jesus Christ to the Father; (ii) as Paul's obedience to a commission that is entirely of another world; (iii) the actual carrying out of that mission to a specific group (*en pasin tois ethnesin*); and (iv) the actual response of his audience to that grace.²⁷ What is constitutive and unique in the Barthian formulation is the primacy of God's fidelity for a proper understanding of obedience. The ultimate manifestation of his fidelity that grants grace to human beings to become obedient is precisely the obedience of Christ in his death as the means to his exaltation in the resurrection.²⁸

In his comments on Romans 5:18-19, Barth unveils his view on the universal and individual reality of the disobedience/obedience couplet. Although, unlike Bultmann, he deliberately maintains his distance from an existential interpretation of these passages, he continues to accent the concrete reality of the human capacity for choosing sin over righteousness, and therefore death over life.²⁹ The fall is detached from a single historical act and is rather placed in the sphere of displaying itself again and again in

²⁷ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 28-32.

²⁸ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 31.

²⁹ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 179-180.

human history.³⁰ *polloi* in verse 19 designates human beings as individuals, a plurality of “egos” of which Adam is the prime representative. Christ must act out his obedience as an “ego” in order for his life and death to have meaning for those who seek righteousness.³¹ It is on account of the human incapacity for attaining a purely natural knowledge of God that we are unable to render this obedience to God outside of Jesus Christ, the “ego” of the new order.³²

Barth returns once again to the preeminence of grace in the life of obedience in his comments on Rom 6:16-17. The objection Paul treats in this section regarding the freedom to sin under grace is considered by Barth an occasion to underscore the real transforming power of grace when we are completely under obedience to God. Barth writes:

The possession of grace means the existential submission to God’s contradiction of all that we ourselves are or are not, of all that we do or do not do. ‘Grace possessed’ means that we are presented *unto obedience* to the contradiction, and we are *His servants* ... There is no other existence running side by side with our existential existence. We are *servants*, slaves, existentially appointed *unto obedience*. We are servants *to God*, existentially appointed *unto obedience* ... We are in no position to say ‘Yes’ to sin.³³

Barth goes on to illustrate how each of the realities contrasted in Rom 6:16-17 is actually a “power unto obedience,”³⁴ so that the power to sin is diametrically opposed to the power of obedience to God, and the presence of one will verify the absence of the

³⁰ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 181.

³¹ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 181.

³² Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 181-182.

³³ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 216.

³⁴ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 217.

other.³⁵ It is only by looking upon the Word of God that we can be convinced of the power of obedience unto God in grace. "Looking on Him who has been crucified on their behalf, they are bidden to -- believe; yes! to believe in their power of obedience."³⁶

Barth's theology of obedience respects human freedom insofar as we are self-determining beings. While all participate *de iure*, all do not participate *de facto* in the obedience of Jesus Christ.³⁷ Barth claims that "on our side" we often do not explicitly acknowledge the efficacy and reality of Christ's obedience for us.³⁸ It is only a free determination of self that impedes us from moving from *de iure* to *de facto* obedience. Our free decisions must correspond to the decisive activity of grace, but this does not render the actual obedience of Christ a "mere possibility".³⁹ Neither does it eliminate the workings of grace in the movement from *de iure* to *de facto* obedience. Since God has already established us through the obedience of His Son, each is now able to decide for himself about himself. One can choose to be the being God has chosen him to be.⁴⁰ In defense of the "interpenetrating exclusivity" of grace and freedom, Barth writes:

"Without taking away from men their freedom, their earthly substance, their humanity,

³⁵ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 217.

³⁶ In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth affirms that in Jesus Christ obedience to God "*ist schon geschehen!*" Vol. II/2, 542.

³⁷ Oden, *The Promise of Barth: The Ethics of Freedom* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1969), 45.

³⁸ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/2, 511-533; 620.

³⁹ Barth, *CD*, vol. IV/2, 513; 52-55; IV/I, 157-161.

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD*, vol. II/2, 491ff.

without losing the human subject or making his action a mechanical occurrence, God is the subject from whom the human action must acquire its new, true name."⁴¹

Hans Urs von Balthasar summarizes Barth's concept of freedom:

... freedom is primarily a life lived in the intimacy of God's freedom. This freedom ... cannot be defined negatively, as merely a neutral stance toward God, as if freedom were merely presented with a 'menu' of options from which the *liberum arbitrium* would make its selection. On the contrary, when freedom is authentic, it is a form of living within that mysterious realm where self-determination and obedience, independence and discipleship, mutually act upon and clarify each other.⁴²

In the next section, we shall see how the distinctive relationship between freedom and obedience informs Barth's approach to general Christian ethics.

III

Barth not only discusses obedience in his treatment of the Trinity and faith, but also proposes obedience as an archetype for understanding Christian ethics. He proposes to outline a formal ethics based on traditional principles of good and evil, and of right and wrong conduct. He accepts that a necessary condition for discussing ethical norms, whether they be Christian or otherwise, is the fundamental determination of "what is good."⁴³ His unique contribution to Christian ethics, however, involves a new comprehension of these traditional concepts within a purely revelational theology. Ethical thinking must begin with a consideration about "what is good," but only insofar

⁴¹ Barth, *CD*, vol. I/1, 106.

⁴² Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 129.

⁴³ Barth, *CD*, vol. II/2, 533.

as “what is good” has been spoken to us through the revelatory work of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

Apart from this context, a truly obediential ethic is not possible insofar as there is no specification of an explicit authority to whom obedience is rendered. The content contained in the “what” remains fully operative, but not apart from the revelatory dimension manifested by Jesus’ action. If the content is in any way severed from the authority of Christ’s obedience, then obediential action is something other than Christian. Any attempt to elucidate general moral principles by philosophical ethics diminishes the absoluteness of an obediential response to God. “What is good” should be valued and acted upon only because God has decreed what is good and what is evil.⁴⁵

The Barthian freedom we have considered in the act of faith is also applicable to the ethical realm. True human freedom is not found in the face of various undetermined possibilities for action from among which we determine our future. Rather, true freedom is freedom *for* God.⁴⁶ It is a pre-ethical freedom discovered among the various undetermined possibilities for action. An individual is not determined to act according to a single good, but according to the summation of particular goods which are all good since, and only since, they have been commanded by God. Human freedom is thus a freedom *for* and *of* obedience to God’s command, *as well as* freedom from the bondage of

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD*, II/2, 537.

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD*, vol. II/2, 522ff.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD*, vol. II/2, 552.

the powers of darkness.⁴⁷ Jesus Christ himself rendered the perfect obedience demanded of us by God, but with the same degree of ultimate human freedom absolutely essential to a true obediential ethic.⁴⁸

We may conclude our survey of Barth by noting his firm grounding of the obedience of faith in the obedience of Christ. Although this speculative aspect is not entirely apparent in chapter 5 of *Dei Verbum*, it does assist us in arriving at a theological understanding of the gratuitousness of obedience emerging from a close reading of Romans and *Dei Verbum*. Furthermore, Barth's penetrating insights into the analogy between God's faithfulness and the obedience of faith are reflected in the intimate connection between revelation and faith in *Dei Verbum* 5.

IV

In the works of Rudolf Bultmann we find the most radical identification of obedience and faith in twentieth-century theology, to the extent that obedience becomes the operative criterion for determining the presence of faith. Bultmann interprets the terms "faith" and "obedience" to be interchangeable in the Pauline corpus.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD*, vol. I/2, 364ff.

⁴⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 274ff; cf. II/2, 539f. and 552ff.

⁴⁹ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959), 317.

The antonym of faith, again relying on Pauline vocabulary, is “boasting” or “self-assertion” (*kauchaomai*).⁵⁰ For Bultmann, the antinomy of these two Pauline terms establishes the basis for the radical nature of the distinction between faith as obedience and faith as works. Boasting is subsequent to works insofar as it is our realization that we have created ourselves to be what we believe we ought to be. However, boasting is also fundamentally prior to works in that it embodies our hopes and desires. In boasting, the human being asserts himself as the artifex of that which he is not now but could be through his own power. Consequently, there is an ontological basis for the Bultmannian contrast of *kauchaomai* and *hupakoē*. *Kauchaomai* is not so much boasting *in something* as it is boasting *for oneself*, and *hupakoē*, on the ontological level, is not so much obedience *to someone or something*, as it is complete self-abandonment *of oneself*.

The basic evidence of the synonymy of “faith” and “obedience” is found in the correlation of Romans 1:8 and 16:19 in the light of the expression *hupakoē pisteōs*. *Hē pistis humōn* in Romans 1:8 and *hē humōn hupakoē* in 16:19 express the one concept presented in Romans 1:5. Bultmann uncovers further evidence for their univocity in Thessalonians, Galatians, and Second Corinthians.⁵¹ Unlike Barth, Bultmann places the

⁵⁰ Bultmann equates this self-assertion with sin in such a way that sin is not moral depravity of action, but *superbia*, or wishing to be like God. Cf. “The Crisis of Faith”, in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era* (London: Collins, 1961), 59.

⁵¹ According to Bultmann, it is obvious that *pisteuein* includes the meaning of *to obey* from the fact that the acceptance of the Christian faith indicated by both *pisteuein* and *peithein* and that unbelief is

question of freedom in the forefront of the discussion concerning obedience and faith.

The will, rather than simply opening itself up to the workings of grace, must actually

reverse itself in order to expunge all that it desires for its own sake.⁵² Bultmann

understands faith as obedience in the following way:

Faith is obedience, because in it man's pride is broken. What is actually a forgone conclusion becomes for man in his pride what is most difficult. He thinks he will be lost if he surrenders himself -- if he surrenders himself as the man he has made of himself for the first time. Obedience is faith because it is the abandonment of pride, and man's tearing himself free from himself.⁵³

The reversal of the will is integral to the full realization of faith through obedience.⁵⁴ It is this reversal that assures the authenticity of faith so that it may be distinguished from works.⁵⁵ Bultmann is of the opinion that perfect obedience was impossible for the ancient Jew since the very notion of obedience was a "formal" principle rather than a principle involving the radical allegiance of the whole person.⁵⁶

By approaching faith in this way, Bultmann distinguishes himself from a purely

not only *apistein* but also *apeithein*. Cf. 2 Cor. 10:5 f. with 10:15. Furthermore, in the letter to the Hebrews, to believe the words which are spoken by God is to obey them. See Heb. 11:4-6, 8, 27f, 30f, 33. In Heb. 3:19 *apistia* is best translated as "disobedience". *apistia* means faithlessness in Rom. 3:3 and Heb. 3:12.

⁵² Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 314.

⁵³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), II, 154. Translation mine.

⁵⁴ Because faith is a reversal of the will, it can never constitute a foundation upon which the rest of the Christian life can be built. This reversal, insofar as it is a "deed," is in constant need of renewal. "Faith is never a foundation upon which we set ourselves up, but rather an ever new deed, new obedience, always uncertain, as soon as we reflect upon it, as soon as we speak of it, it is certain only as deed." Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, I, 37; cf. *Kerygma und Mythos* (Hamburg-Volksdorf: Riech, 1952), II, 202.

⁵⁵ Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 315. There are incidentally 10 occurrences of *ergon* in Romans (2:6; 3:20; 3:27; 3:28; 4:2; 4:6; 9:12; 9:32; 11:6; 13:12).

⁵⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 68.

existential interpretation of Pauline faith. Rather than an external principle that continually guides a Christian toward a goal to be realized in the future, faith is an eschatological reality standing at the beginning of Christian existence, and its presence needs to be ever renewed.⁵⁷ Faith itself “points toward the future,” but is not a “temporal, and therefore a temporary state.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere Bultmann states that “faith of course is no static possession. It is not simply the conviction of the truth of certain doctrines which can be appropriated once for all. The Christian faith is a certain direction of the will. It is only alive in us if its reality is proved ever anew.”⁵⁹ A faith verifiable by criteria outside the realm of existence would run the risk of classifying faith as an accomplishment and undermine its radical distinctiveness in regard to works. Bultmann notes that both Jews and pagans are tempted to verify true obedience through works which spring from the desire to verify one’s obedience rather than from obedience itself.⁶⁰ In the case of the Jews, false obedience was perpetuated through the

⁵⁷ Faith as “authenticity” is never completed. It is man as *Dasein* that allows him to always stand before himself, to constantly leave what is behind himself, and to project himself into the future. “...the crisis of faith is a constant one; for the will must always be involved in a struggle with the self’s will which refuses to recognize one’s limits. The summons must always be heard anew.” Cf. “The Crisis of Faith” in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 251. “If *pistis* is both *homologia* and *hupakoē*, then it is intelligible that not only the act of becoming a believer, but also the state of being a believer can be denoted by *pistis*.” R. Bultmann and A. Weiser, *Faith* (London: Adam and Charles, 1961), 88.

⁵⁸ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 320.

⁵⁹ R. Bultmann, *This World and the Beyond* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 149.

⁶⁰ “Therefore *pistis* appears to be genuine *hupakoē* which is the basic attitude demanded by God and made possible by God’s act of grace in Christ, as contrasted not only with the specifically Jewish, but also the specifically pagan attitude, that of the natural man in general, who imagines that he can hold his own before God by his own strength.” Bultmann and Weiser, *Faith*, 93.

trends of legalism and codification.⁶¹ If faith were not given to man in the saving event itself, it would be a work of man subsequent to the saving encounter of the event.⁶²

This is not to say that faith, as obedience, is not an act.⁶³ On the contrary, it is the radical and fundamentally determining act characterized by a self-abandonment resulting in the reversal of the will. Faith is an obediential choice which is “an act in the true sense: in a true act the doer himself is inseparable from it, while in a ‘work’ he stands side by side with what he does.”⁶⁴ This act results in a completely new understanding of oneself in light of the *kerygma*.⁶⁵ Knowledge of the Jesus Christ of faith can only be had within this *kerygma* which can never be left aside in the life of faith.

Bultmann writes:

Obedience ... is directed to the God whose existence is always presupposed. In its original and true sense, however, faith in Jesus Christ is not obedience to a Lord who is

⁶¹ “In consequence of the canonisation of tradition in the ‘Scripture’, obedient loyalty acquires the character of obedience to the Law, i.e. it is no longer really loyalty toward the activity of God experienced in history whilst trusting in his future activity in the same sphere.” Bultmann and Weiser, *Faith*, 50.

⁶² R. Bultmann, *Essays, Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 43.

⁶³ Bultmann makes a fundamental distinction between an act and a work: “In the case of the work I remain the man I am; I place it outside myself, I go along beside it, I can assess it, condemn it or be proud of it. But in the act I *become* something for the first time; I find my being in it...” R. Bultmann, *Essays*, 175.

⁶⁴ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 316.

⁶⁵ “‘Faith’ is the acceptance of the *kerygma* not as a mere cognizance of it and agreement with it but as genuine obedience to it which includes a new understanding of one’s self.” *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, 324. “Ultimately ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ are identical as a new understanding of one’s self, if Paul can give as the purpose of his apostleship both “to bring about the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5) and ‘to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (II Cor. 4:6; cf. 2:14: ‘God...who...through us spreads the fragrance of knowledge of him’).” Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, 326-327.

known already. Only in faith itself is the existence of this Lord recognized and acknowledged. Faith embraces the conviction that there is this Lord, Jesus Christ, for it. For only in faith does this Lord meet it. It believes on the basis of the kerygma ... the message is never a mere orientation which can be disposed with once it is known. It is always the foundation of faith.⁶⁶

Faith, which itself is the power through which we recognize and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, is also the means by which we live according to the law of love in respect to our neighbor. It is the obediential orientation of Bultmannian ethics, and the role of freedom within that ethical system, to which we now turn.

V

The radical obedience that is faith is not only precluded from the realm of works, but envelops the entire ethical dimension of the believer. The act of obedience that constitutes faith becomes the same act by which the Christian fulfills the commandment to love his neighbor. Rather than depending on external norms in directing the will in ethical action, the action itself must spring from the same total obedience involved in faith. On obedience in regard to ethics, Bultmann writes:

... so long as obedience is only subjection to an authority which man does not understand, it is no true obedience; something in man still remains outside and does not submit, is not bound by the command of God ... Radical obedience exists only when a man inwardly assents to what is required of him, when the thing commanded is seen as intrinsically God's command... when he is not *doing* something obediently, but *is* essentially obedient.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ R. Bultmann, "*pisteuô*", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 211.

⁶⁷ R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Fontana Books, 1958), 85.

Bultmann strikes a similar chord with Barth concerning the endowment of knowledge that comes only through the obedience of faith, although there is a possibility of different degrees and various levels of strength of knowledge in the scheme of Bultmann.⁶⁸

The obedience of faith taken by Bultmann to be constitutive of the living out of Christian virtue is the opening for a freedom entirely unlike the freedom experienced prior to faith. The freedom realized through faith is intimately tied to a freedom from such powers associated with the flesh (such as death), and the freedom to perform acts that may legitimately be called Christian virtue.⁶⁹ This freedom renders a “paradoxical servitude” enslaving the Christian to Christ, who in turn sets the person of faith free.⁷⁰ The freedom Bultmann describes is rooted in an existential understanding of the “new man” who has abandoned a complete determination of himself outside of the realm of Christian faith.

Bultmann approaches the dynamic relationship between freedom and obedience from the aspect of faith understood as both gift and act. It is only from this aspect that we are able to understand the absolute paradox of freedom in regard to the human being as self-determining and determined by Christ. Any discussion of a freedom that

⁶⁸ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 313.

⁶⁹ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 330-332.

⁷⁰ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 333.

antecedes the act of faith through obedience fails to reach the core of anthropological freedom. The will, rather than positively asserting itself in the obedience of faith, is entirely redirected and ultimately subsumed in the act of faith. In essence, the true freedom realized through the act of faith is in dramatic opposition to human freedom before the act of faith.

The most striking feature of obedience in the speculative and practical theology of Bultmann is that it constitutes a point of dramatic fusion between the response to God and the response to one's neighbor. The obedience of faith becomes the only principle for ethical action that conforms to the command to love one's neighbor. The dynamic relationship between faith and ethics always takes place in the present moment.⁷¹ Faith consists in the constantly renewed decision to be open to a future known solely by God. Consequently, the obedience through which we open ourselves to the future does not provide any external and hypothetical norms for situations in which we can project ourselves. In short, a general Christian ethics is impossible,⁷² and radical obedience in the ethical realm can never be an act of obedience to a general norm.⁷³

⁷¹ Cf. R. Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, 230f.; cf. Thomas O'Meara, *Rudolf Bultmann in Catholic Thought* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), 136-138.

⁷² Cf. Thomas Oden, *Radical Obedience: The Ethics of Rudolf Bultmann* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1964), 43.

VI

The foregoing survey of the obediencial landscape in the work of Barth and Bultmann reveals a theology of faith quite different in many respects from that of Catholic theologians in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century. The formulation of the act of faith that we find in *Dei Filius* falls short of capturing fully the biblical and personalist dimensions of faith. The faith response cannot be offered merely through an adherence to divine truths revealed to human beings by Jesus Christ. Faith rather entails the offering of one's very self to God through obedience to his divine Word revealed in Jesus Christ. Insufficient attention has been drawn to the distinctively Protestant contribution to the Catholic understanding of faith since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*. Conversely, the theology contained in *Dei Verbum* offers Christian theologians of all persuasions an elementary and concise expression of the dynamic relation of God's revelation to the believer's response of faith. The ever expanding range of philosophical approaches to natural theology, anthropology, and epistemology will only make continued cooperation among Catholic and Protestant theologians all the more important in the years ahead.