

# Discovering a Dynamic Concept of the Person in Both Psychology and Theology

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*In the past century and a half scientists have increasingly perfected their tools for the study of human persons. Little surprise, then, that the relatively new field of modern psychology has steadily grown in influence. Traditionally, there has been a good deal of animosity between modern psychology and Christian theology. This has been especially true of the psychoanalytic tradition begun by Freud and carried on by a number of his followers. Does this longstanding antipathy need to remain? Post-Freudian object relations psychology has developed from Freud's insights into the unconscious processes which influence human behavior. But object relations has, for the most part, rejected Freud's biological reductionism. Object relations theories have built upon Freud's foundational discovery of the importance of childhood, while pushing back the veil from the infant's relations to the parent. Could there be analogies here between what the object relations psychologists are uncovering and what the Bible tells us about ourselves? I propose that such is the case if one compares the theological doctrine of the person found in the writings of Karl Barth with certain aspects of object relations psychology.*

That the continued application of scientific methods breeds a temper of mind unfavorable to the miraculous, may well be the case, but even here there would seem to be some difference among the sciences. Certainly, if we think, not of the miraculous in particular, but of religion in general there is such a difference. Mathematicians, astronomers and physicists are often religious, even mystical; biologists much less often; economists and psychologists very seldom indeed. It is as their subject matter comes nearer to man himself that their anti-religious bias hardens.<sup>1</sup>

**T**he above quotation by C. S. Lewis illustrates the extent to which he possessed powers of observation which were every bit as keen as his power of expression. But allow me to use his quotation to raise a crucial question. Why should it be the case that the closer the sciences get to *man himself*," the farther they stand from religion? Some seem to not be troubled by this anti-religious bias of modern psychology. Yet I find it puzzling. If anyone cares to read the Scriptures carefully, they would not have to read far to see that the God to whom the Scriptures attest is far more often than not described in highly personal categories and metaphors. So personal is the God of the Old and the New Testaments that one might innocently expect to find that just the opposite should be the case. In other words, the nearer science gets to the study of human persons, the *nearer* it approaches God. There is little evidence for such a relation if we go back to Freud and study his instinctual theory of human personality. But could this relation begin to appear if we look at some of the theorists who departed from Freud? I believe so.

The anti-religious bias among the human sciences poses a problem for those who believe in both Christian revelation and the efficacy of the scientific enterprise. Unfortunately, all too little has taken place to change the unhappy impasse which Lewis describes. The tendency for science and religion to differ sharply over what it means to be human continues right to the present day. The problem comes to a head where we discuss the relation between psychology and theology. If we can find between them no common grounds for what it means to be human, then the world of human sciences would remain severely cut off from the discipline of theological anthropology, and vice versa. This would perpetuate an unhappy dualism which separates spiritual from physical realities in a manner thoroughly unacceptable to biblical anthropology. For those who believe in the unitary nature of reality as provided by the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, it is only natural to expect that there would be certain analogies which disclose themselves as the theologian reflects upon revealed truth and the scientist seeks further understanding about the nature of human psychology.<sup>2</sup>

How have we arrived at the place where the scientists who study human beings are more commonly anti-religious than those who study the sun, moon, stars and atom? Could it be that certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality clouded the scientific investigations of the human person from the outset? Could it be that certain concepts were aggressively borrowed from physical sciences and applied to human studies without appropriate consideration given to the uniqueness of persons? Is it possible that Freud and other early psychoanalytical theorists borrowed concepts from the physical sciences which were themselves being challenged within the physical sciences at the very time Freud and other reductionists were borrowing them? I believe so. In fact, I would argue that it was precisely the bias toward a biologically reductionist understanding of the person which kept Freud and some subsequent psychoanalytical theorists from seeing the essentially relational nature of psychological development. However, Freud's theories were not only adopted- in many cases his successors significantly revised them. In Britain, psychoanalytic theories underwent a profound change as they became anglicized through the Tavistock Clinic in London, and further north in Edinburgh, Scotland in the theories of Ronald Fairbairn. On British soil the post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories of *object relations*" were born. In certain strains of post-Freudian object relations psychology the reductionist blinders were removed. No longer could the instinct of sexual attraction be said to explain everything about human behavior.

I propose that there are some very intriguing analogies which can be found between Karl Barth's theological anthropology and the anthropology of the post-Freudian psychoanalytical school known as *object relations*" psychology. I will develop my argument by beginning with the development of Freud's concept of the person.

### **The Evolution of the Concept of the Person in Freud's Theories**

Freud began his inquiry about the nature of the human person as a scientist with a particularly strong anti-religious bent.<sup>3</sup> He studied in Vienna under Hermann von Helmholtz and Ernst Brücke, and was largely positivist and reductionist- greatly influenced by the laws of thermodynamics and exchanges of energy. Helmholtz had

provided the mathematical formulation for the law of conservation of energy. Energy equilibrium would thus play an enormous role in all stages of Freud's theories.

So reductionist was Freud's early scientific training that he began in 1895, in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* to reduce all emotional states of human beings to their neurological origins. (The essay was only published posthumously.) At first Freud was elated with his *Project*, but, within a few weeks his elation turned sour, and he described the *Project* as *rubbish*. Subsequent reflection had taught Freud that the workings of the human mind could not be directly correlated even to so complex and intricate a system as the human nervous system.

Finding synapses and neurons inadequate, Freud next believed that human mental functioning could be explained in terms of instincts. (If biochemistry won't do, then try biology.) Here is where Freud found a much more fitting key with which to unlock the human soul. Id, libido, sexual instincts: these were the reality of the human person and would soon reveal their patterns. Sexuality (*eros*), according to Freud, evolved through three distinct phases: oral, anal and genital. (Later was added the aggressive instinct, or death wish (*thanatos*)). But Freud continued to push against the limitations of instinctual psychology- even though instinct provided the very bedrock of his psychological theory. Essentially, Freud asked why we don't act like a gland"- that is, without inhibitions? Rape and murder were rampant in Freud's time, as always. Nevertheless, even when pure and unbridled, the instincts in and of themselves could not explain *everything*. Ubiquitous as instincts may be, something restrains them. If instincts were not bridled, civilization could not exist.

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Freud realized that another reality must be present within the psychology of each individual. Something must monitor the instincts. Hence, he theorized that the *self*" or ego (*Ich*) provides some sense of control over the instincts. So, *ego*" psychology began to develop. And yet the self was pitted against itself in a powerful manner: wanting to act out impulses which were nevertheless socially unacceptable. Hence the *super-ego*" was what Freud named as the primary restraining agent, with the ego mediating between the super-ego and the instinctual impulses. Especially important to Freud was the Oedipus complex, with the develop of attraction to opposite sex parent and rivalry with the same sex parent.

Condensing Freud's enormous volumes into a few strokes, one could say that in the first stage of Freud's theoretical reflections neurology was the measuring stick of human behavior (c. 1900), in the second stage biology (c. 1900-1920), and in the third stage psychology (1920-1939). Freud arrived at the third stage by paying an increasing amount of attention to patient's dreams, guilt complexes, sexual-neurotic problems and feelings toward their parents, finally developing his famous endopsychic structural triad: id, ego and super-ego.

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Now it is important to note that in this third stage Freud began to take account of interpersonal human *relations*. It was not isolated instincts, always seeking equilibrium, but real people interacting that were indispensable to Freud's most developed theory of the person. The childhood relationship to the father was especially important for Freud (especially around 4-5 years of age).

With post-Freudian psychoanalytical theorists like Ronald Fairbairn (and later carried on by others such as Heinz Kohut and Donald Winnicott), the idea of attraction being purely instinctual and sexual began to be questioned. Ronald Fairbairn asked whether it could be that *interpersonal attraction* is really the most compelling force in the human being, and that sexuality is merely one way in which attraction can be expressed?

Fairbairn, while acknowledging the seminal importance of libido theory, proposes:

...it would appear as if the point had now been reached at which, in the interest of progress, the classic libido theory would have to be transformed into a theory of development based essentially upon object-relationships. The great limitation of the present libido theory as an explanatory system resides in the fact that it confers the status of libidinal attitudes upon various manifestations which turn out to be merely techniques for regulating the object-relationships of the ego.<sup>4</sup>

While the distinction which Fairbairn is making sounds merely technical, it is an important one for psychoanalytic theory. Instead of libido, Fairbairn proposes to explain the human person on the basis the interactions between human persons. Fairbairn argues:

My point of view may, however, be stated in a word. In my opinion it is high time that psycho-pathological inquiry, which in the past has been successively focused, first upon impulse, and later upon the ego, should now be focused upon the object towards which impulse is directed.<sup>5</sup>

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The important thing about object relations theory for this discussion is that it incorporates a truly dynamic understanding of the person into its anthropology. It does not attempt to explain the person merely in terms of an impulse which resides within, but incorporates the fact that the foundational structure of a personality is always shaped within a social matrix.

In Fairbairn's view, none of the erotogenic levels is automatically or satisfactorily explained by itself, because even in Freud's theory raw libido could not explain itself; it only made sense as it bore the mark of an interpersonal relation (which, as we have seen, was mostly focused upon the Oedipus complex and its resolution). *This is why Freud was forced to posit the theoretical existence of such non-instinctual entities as the ego and super-ego: they represented a repository of the interpersonal conflicts which were impressed upon the individual during the resolution of the Oedipus conflict.* Fairbairn's theory of sexuality, however, depends upon successful object relations; it recognizes, but also transcends, the stages of erotogenic development defined by the instincts. Fairbairn infers: Libidinal pleasure is not the end in itself, but the sign-post to the object.<sup>6</sup> Classical libido theory was built upon the false assumption of auto-eroticism, not object-eroticism.<sup>7</sup>

The differences here between Fairbairn and Freud signifies something about the human person which is highly significant. I believe they necessarily lead to two very different conclusions with regard to the nature of the human person. For Freud, the *sine qua non* of human existence was found in the instincts: component instincts which succeeded one another during the stages of psychological development. Everything that is constitutive of human ontology derived from the pleasure principle. In other words, human beings, for all their apparent complexities, are ultimately driven by their glands. For Fairbairn, the instincts are never an end in themselves, but always a means of either expressing or repressing an object relationship. In other words, glandular realities must be taken seriously,<sup>8</sup> but there is something deeper than a mere sexual attraction when one human being encounters another. Sexuality is one channel for the expression of human attraction, but there is an even more fundamental force at work than glandular drive when human beings interact.

Let us take for example the presenting problem of a 13 year old child who continues to suck his thumb. The thumb sucking is public and starts to become an embarrassment both to the child and his parents. According to Freudian theory, the child has arrested his sexual development at the oral stage. But an object relations approach assumes that there is from the start more than a misdirected drive. There is something amiss here with

interpersonal dynamics which caused the child to seek oral gratification long beyond the time when such a type of practice is usually needed.

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Object relations theory is an attempt to shift modern psychology from an organic to a dynamic interpersonal model: from picturing the person as an organism seeking satisfaction, to seeing the person as a human being in search of meaningful relationships who uses various organs as means of seeking pleasure and also establishing such relationships. In normal human development the instincts are thus subservient to the forming of meaningful *relationships*. On the other hand, in Freud's psychoanalytic theory *relationships* are nearly impossible because all object relations are primarily the direct effect of the libidinal instinct.

Object relations theory therefore reopens the door for human beings to love and be loved, reintegrating the psychological factors into the somatic realities.

Now let us take the most influential theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, and look carefully at his theological anthropology.

## **The Person in Karl Barth's Anthropology**

Like object relations, Barth's doctrine of the person is *dynamic*." This of course needs further explanation, because the term *dynamic*" refers to much more than the mere fact of material or physical motion. It applies rather to the uniqueness of an interpersonal encounter. The reality which comes into being in interpersonal dynamics is something which German speaking cultures refer to as *Begegnung, encounter*."

### **Interpersonal Relationship as History"**

In order to further clarify what I mean when I describe Barth's anthropology as *dynamic*," I present a study of Barth's usage of the important theological term *history*." Barth gives the word *history*" (*Geschichte*) a technical meaning. A *history*" involves encounter: a relationship of one with an other. Barth explains:

In contrast to the concept of history (*Geschichte*) is that of a state (*Zustands*). There are states that are very much in movement, developing through many changes and varied modes of behavior. The conception of a stiff and motionless uniformity need not be linked with that of a state. But the idea of a state does involve

the idea of something completely insulated within the state in question, the idea of a limitation of its possibilities and therefore of its possible changes and modes of behavior. It is never capable of more than these particular movements. Even the concept of the most mobile state is not therefore equivalent to that of history.<sup>9</sup>

Barth explains that a plant can have no *history*, "as such. It may grow, it may move and take in nourishment, and eventually die. But a plant has no history because it always functions within the fixed circles of change which are characteristic of its own state of existence. On the other hand, a history is introduced when something happens to a being at the deepest level which enables him or her to transcend his or her biologically determined orientation. Therefore, a history does not describe what happens when an entity makes changes intrinsic to its own nature, but only when some other being impinges upon an individual, eliciting a response. Barth reasons:

The history of a being begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor.<sup>10</sup>

This is a highly complex and difficult topic to grasp. Perhaps it is so difficult because we rarely think in terms of interpersonal relations, even when we study human persons. Our thinking about persons tends to be based on a somewhat crudely constructed Newtonian concept of ourselves. We tend to view ourselves as more or less autonomous billiard balls, bouncing into one another and exchanging momentum. But Barth's concept here goes much deeper: he argues that we actually influence one another on a deep ontological level when we encounter another human being. In other words, when one human being encounters another, something is called into existence which formerly did not exist.

Barth's anthropology, like the many anthropologies developing within the various strains of object relations psychology, is therefore **dynamic**."

## **The Human Person as a Being in Relation to Others**

And from what resources does Barth develop this "dynamic" theological anthropology? He derives in anthropology from Scripture- especially from his Christology.

### **Jesus, The Man For Others**

As evangelicals, we have tended to focus mostly upon the divinity of Jesus. This is understandable, since the modern attacks upon the divinity of Jesus would tear the fabric of Christian faith in two, and render the Gospel merely something like a sentimental distortion written by grief-stricken first century followers of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the humanity of Jesus remains an equally important aspect of Christology. If we have tended to overlook the humanity of Jesus, it is- probably because we have tended to overlook our own humanity in modern life. Barth explores the facets of Jesus' humanity with unparalleled vigor.

In the humanity of Jesus, in his being as a man for others, Barth finds the basis of human encounter. Jesus was not first for himself, nor for a cause or ideal. Jesus was first and foremost a man for others. Barth says, What interests him and does so exclusively, is man, other men as such, who need him and are referred to him for help and deliverance."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in the life of Jesus we see the living embodiment of a man who is for others. Jesus is not properly understood in isolation. He is, rather, one who encounters his brothers and sisters. He lives to them and with them and for them. He is sent and ordained by God to be their deliverer. Nothing else? No, really nothing else."<sup>12</sup> Jesus is ontologically related to the human race. By this Barth means that Jesus could be no other than a man for others. He could not be indifferent and still be Jesus. His relation to others is not accidental, but essential and primary because it flows from the eternal love of the Son for the Father.<sup>13</sup> Jesus is not able to look upon human suffering and sin with stoical indifference; the afflictions of others affect him in his innermost being.<sup>14</sup> Jesus helps others not from without, or even beside, but from within, taking their place and creating something new from nothing. Jesus' being is both from and to his fellow humans. Barth says:

If we see him alone, we do not see him at all. If we see him, we see with and around him in ever-widening circles his disciples, the people, his enemies and the countless millions who have not yet heard his name. We see him as theirs, determined by them and for them, belonging to each and every one of them. It is thus that he is Master, Messiah, King and Lord.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Jesus in his divinity is from and for God, and Jesus in his humanity is from and to his fellow man" (der Mensch).<sup>16</sup> These are not at odds with one another but closely correspond. There is similarity between the divine and human in Jesus: hence the I of Jesus is determined by the Thou of God the Father, but also the Thou of his fellow humans. Jesus' being for God and for his fellow man" are treated by Barth in light of the Chalcedonian formula regarding the two natures of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Heart of Trinitarian Anthropology: *Analogia Relationis***

Here we come to the inner core of Barth's anthropology. Barth's development of yet another technical term, *analogia relationis* (*analogy of relations*) may one day prove to be his most lasting contribution to modern theology. We must, however, undergo a major paradigm shift with regard to classical conceptions of being in order to appreciate the significance of the analogy of relations.

Just as there is correspondence between the humanity and deity of Christ, there is also a correspondence between human love and divine love described as the *analogia relationis*. The *analogia relationis* is Barth's alternative to the Thomistic, *analogia entis* (*analogy of being*) which supports so much of Catholic theology. In other words, Barth insists that if we are to talk about the human person in biblical terms, we must use the language of relations, not simply that of being."

The need to shift theological thinking from being to relations may have some parallels in the scientific shift from classical physics to relativity and quantum theory. The concept of complementarity in micro-physics presents an analogous problem to the question about

being and becoming; how can a physical phenomenon like light have qualities of both a wave and particle?

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The paradigm shift in Barth's thought is perhaps analogous to the shift in the new physics. Once the shift is made, the possibility that there could be a *being* which is apart from *relations* is nonsense, as is the notion that light must be either wave or particle, but cannot be both. Being and relations are simultaneous to one another. Being is inseparable from the relations which constitute any human person's existence: all of which relations are simultaneous, multi-leveled and complex.

Another analogy can be found in the discovery by microphysics that matter is inseparable from motion. When it comes to thinking about what makes human beings tick, our minds tended to run toward a kind of Newtonian understanding of motion in which external forces act upon distinct particles in absolute time and space. Yet the Newtonian paradigm holds true only within certain limited parameters of physical reality based on the classical physics. On the other hand, the more modern theories on the nature of light and subatomic particles are influenced by the dynamic thought of relativity and quantum mechanics- and as such have a wider application. The Newtonian framework is not false, but fails to adequately describe the full picture. Might it be worth our time to probe for some analogies here? I think so.

Just as the basic building blocks of the universe have turned out to be best described as pulsating fields of energy, so the human reality may turn out to be best described as an encounter- or rather, a history of many encounters. There are thousands of encounters going on within the composite history of each individual human. There are the encounters with parents, then other or wider family, society and the world (including the natural environment). For Barth, the most important encounter is with God, then follows the encounter with others, self and time. All of this is Barth's way of interpreting what it means for human beings to be created in God's image and likeness.<sup>18</sup> In other words, we mirror or reflect God's dynamic character. Just as he is the triune God who encounters himself as Father and Son in the Spirit: performing mighty acts in the salvation of Israel, and ultimately encountering us through his Son, so each human individual is a being in becoming, a relation who by definition exists only as she/he acts in relations to God, self and others.

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Of course, the *encounter*" which Barth describes applies, not to mere motion, but to interpersonal relations (there is an undeniable difference between all personal and impersonal realities). The point I wish to emphasize here is simply that we can no longer attempt to find out what something is by analyzing it in isolation from the things to which it normally relates. In physics, the further the physicist probes in trying to find the thing in itself, the more the basic qualities of the thing tend to be absorbed into a whole series of relations to other things. In similar fashion, but on an altogether different level, Barth has argued that the isolated self cannot be fathomed in and of itself. The true self can only be understood by apprehending the vital spheres of relations to which it belongs. We can see, therefore, why Barth would consider the solitary self to be living an unnatural existence, on conceptual as well as biblical grounds. Barth attacked the pronounced individualism of modern Western societies with a peculiar vigor.<sup>19</sup>

This dynamic anthropology is further explained by Barth's discussion about I and Thou.

### **I Am As Thou Art**

The problem of self-conscious individual identity is expressed by Barth with the question: What is meant by "I?" In speaking of "I" the individual does not only make a distinction, but also a connection. "I" does not make sense in isolation, but only in relation to "Thou." Here Barth once again employs the technical term "encounter" (which was developed by the Jewish philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber). Barth, however, makes some important modifications of Buber's I and Thou.<sup>20</sup>

In the logic of interpersonal encounter, human dialogue must take place between an I and a Thou. What does Barth mean by "I"? "I" does not make sense in isolation, but only in relation to "Thou":

The declaration "I" in what I say is the declaration of my expectation that the other being to which I declare myself in this way will respond and treat and describe and distinguish me as something like himself.... Thus the word Thou," although it is a very different word, is immanent to "I."<sup>21</sup>

For Barth, the I is relationally understood in the sense that the I always stands over and against the Thou. I is in relation to Thou, and I cannot say "I" without also saying "Thou." The self-sufficient I is an illusion, because, as Barth points out, even the concept or thought of I implies relation to another: to a Thou, who necessarily stands over against myself as I. The I and Thou are related because I stands over and against Thou- and only in distinction to Thou does I have an identity. In developing this interpersonal ontology, Barth takes issue with the isolated *cogito*<sup>22</sup> of Descartes:

A pure, absolute and self-sufficient I is an illusion, for as an I, even as I think and express this I, I am not alone or self-sufficient, but am distinguished from and connected with a Thou in which I find a being like my own, so that there is no place for an interpretation of the I am" which means isolation and necessarily consists in a description of the sovereign self-positing of an empty subject by eruptions of its pure, absolute and self-sufficient abyss.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the I is not absolute, but is defined both by distinction and connection with the Thou. The necessary relation between I and Thou is one of the chief descriptions of a dynamic anthropology. It is "dynamic" because it always entails the active relation of one person to another.

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We can now begin to see more clearly what Barth means when he refers to a dynamic anthropology. It is "dynamic" in the sense that it refers to a necessary relation between persons. It is important to see that Barth does not derive such an anthropology from anywhere else than from a theological foundation. Specifically, Barth derives his doctrine of the person from his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Concerning God's being, Barth states:

Entering into this relationship, he makes a copy of himself. Even in his inner divine being there is relationship. To be sure, God is one in himself. But he is not alone. There is in him a co-existence, co-inherence and reciprocity. God in himself is not just simple, but in the simplicity of his essence he is threefold- the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...He is in himself the One who loves eternally, the One who is eternally loved, and eternal love; and in this triunity he is the original and source of every I and Thou, of the I which is eternally from and to the Thou and therefore supremely I. And it is this relationship in the inner divine being which is repeated and reflected in God's eternal covenant with man as revealed and operative in time in the humanity of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

Because the relational nature of God is reflected in the humanity of Jesus,<sup>25</sup> and thus is the determination or destiny of every human person, it follows that the person who corresponds to, and reflects, the being of God (*analogia relationis*) bears the stamp of God's own dynamic character. Each human person then is destined to be in relation: to be I and Thou. I implies Thou, and Thou refers back to I. I and Thou are not coincidental or incidental but essentially proper to the concept of "man."<sup>26</sup>

Barth says this I and Thou is illustrated most succinctly in sexual polarity.

## **Some Similarities Between Barth and Object Relations Psychology in Their Concept of the Person**

If we are searching for analogies between both Barth and object relations psychology, what do we find?

### **Being is Doing and Doing is Being**

The first, and most important parallel between Barth and object relations is the emphasis each has placed upon interpersonal relations in constituting the person. Both Barth and object relations show how the person is shaped by a social context: by relation to an "other." In each case the person is defined not only by what mental faculties or instinctual energies an individual might have, but also by what the individual *does*- especially in relation to an other (or others). Both show, on their respective level of inquiry, how interpersonal relations are the fundamental building block of an individual's personhood; each individual person is shaped by their peculiar history of interpersonal relations.

In Barth's anthropology, relation to God is the primary relation. We might say that God is the primary external object. This relation has some important implications for the development of individual consciousness. It is only in the relation to God as an "object" (*Gegenstand*) that consciousness begins to develop: that cognition, volition and affection take on a valid existence.<sup>27</sup>

In object relations self-identity develops only within the history of complex social interaction. The child is born within a social matrix, and the self develops likewise. For Barth, of course, the social coefficient of knowing and being has a theological foundation. From Barth's theological perspective the social matrix of human personhood reflects the relational character of the triune God. God is a being who is in relation to himself: not just within the economic Trinity, but also within the immanent Trinity. In other words: God does not pretend to be triune, nor become triune, merely to save us- he actually is a triune community eternally. This is one of the basic tenets of Nicene orthodoxy.

Therefore, the human person who reflects God's nature cannot be actualized as fully human apart from a right relation to the Creator, other creatures, self and time. Modern psychology, of course, cares nothing for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Since knowledge of the Trinity is knowledge which comes about only as a result of revealed truths, then it is outside the proper bounds of psychology. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised by our discovery of the striking analogies between theological reflections upon the biblical data, and a psychologist's reflections upon the data presented in early childhood relations to parents.

### **The Psycho-Somatic Unity of the Whole Person**

The social development of human consciousness highlights another similarity between Barth and object relations: both insist upon the unity and integrity of the person as a whole, rejecting any dichotomies between body and soul, mind and matter, or psychological self (ego) and instinctual self (libido). The explicit holism of both Barth and object relations shows the extent to which both attempt to discover the unity of the theoretical and the practical person, the biological and the psychological. There is little that smacks of idealism in either anthropology. Their respective anthropologies are not merely derived *a priori* but give a good deal of respect to the empirical observation of the person's physical existence. On the other hand, neither fall into materialism. Rather than idealism or materialism, a deep seated realism runs through both the thought of Barth and object relations psychology. Barth's realism leads him to respect both the revealed nature of the person as it is interpreted in the person of Christ, and the physical existence of the person- which the Scriptures clearly indicate has an equal importance with the spiritual and psychological realities. Once again, the Trinity plays a major role in Barth's understanding of the person. This means that the incarnation of the Son must shatter the traditional categories which separated soul and body, instincts and reason: replacing them with a hearty affirmation of the dynamic interdependence of each with the other.

The psycho-somatic unity of the person has some very important implications for the relation between science and theology. It profoundly influences the ways in which we see ourselves both through the lens of modern science and that of faith. Listed below are some of the issues in need of further reflection.

## **A Dynamic Anthropology Breaks out of the Deterministic Mold**

Barth's and object relations psychology's concept of the person are dynamic in the sense that the person is not construed as a closed system determined by antecedent causes and tending toward a state of equilibrium. They are dynamic in the sense that neither allows the reductionist criteria to stand. They are dynamic because the person in each case is open to an almost infinite variety of creative options in respect to their possible interactions with other persons. While certain patterns of human behavior can be observed within the field of interpersonal relations, there is nevertheless an overriding openness to the almost infinite variety of possibilities which obtain between human persons who engage in relations one to another.

## **Getting Beyond the Old Dualisms: The Hierarchical Structure of Reality**

At the heart of biblical anthropology the Scripture is always concerned about the *whole* person in relation to God. Also, at the foundation of the modern human sciences and medicine a similar view is beginning to prevail. The endless and mostly fruitless speculations as to whether the biological or the psychological components are primary have begun to give way to newer paradigms which accept biological priority, and psychological supremacy. These paradigms are usually constructed upon models which reject both dualism and reductionism - arguing instead that reality is structured as a

bidirectional hierarchy in which things are ordered according to their complexity - beginning with physical, and graduating upward to the chemical, biological, social, and psychological components. At the highest level, all the lower levels are not excluded, but included.<sup>28</sup> What makes the hierarchy bidirectional is that the components at the lower level have priority, while the higher level components exert a certain amount of control over functions at the lower levels.

These hierarchical paradigms have gained increasing acceptance in the human sciences. Yet they are mostly belated theoretical attempts to explain the practical death of anthropological dualism: a death which has been a self-evident fact of modern medicine for many years. For example, do we not live in a world today in which increasing numbers of psychological illnesses are susceptible to treatment with chemical drugs? Do we not also live in a time when the psychosomatic origins of many physical illnesses have been revealed? Can we ignore the fact that highly sensitive instruments can register amazingly slight electrical impulses in the human central nervous system which correlate to certain emotions? There is, therefore, no going back to the naive but attractive notion that the psychical and somatic run down parallel tracks- as if they were simultaneously at a similar milestone but never intersecting one another and exerting a mutual influence. *If Christian anthropology continues to endorse anthropological dualism, to which it has traditionally adhered, it will find itself defending a position which is both scientifically untenable and biblically indefensible. Such a position which will continue to push many of the thoughtful people of our age headlong into either materialist or spiritualist monism, both of which have enormous shortcomings.*

In my view, Barth's anthropology presents a viable alternative to the prevailing dualistic anthropologies of most Christian theologians. These dualisms surfaced not so much from the biblical data itself as from the Hellenistic perspective which theology had largely adopted.

### **Dynamic Anthropology: Could It be Analogous to a Field Theory?**

The employment of field theory in describing the relational nature of the person is advocated by T. F. Torrance. He comments on Clerk Maxwell's field theory:

We must now take up Clerk Maxwell's concept of the *field*...and not least the concept of relational thinking which he found, for example in the teaching of Sir William Hamilton. Evidence for this is apparent in Clerk Maxwell's 1856 essay on analogy where he showed that analogical resemblances and differences are embedded in the structural patterns of nature throughout the universe. Analogies are sets of relations which bear upon each other and point beyond themselves and thus supply us with fundamental clues for heuristic inquiry beyond the limits of empirical and observational knowledge. Hence, he claimed, "in a scientific point of view the relation is the most important thing to know." Clerk Maxwell insisted, however, that the relations he referred to were not just imaginary or putative but real relations, relations that belong to reality as much as things do, for the interrelations of things are, in part at least, constitutive of what they are. Being-constituting relations of this kind we may well speak of as "nto-relations."<sup>29</sup>

By inference then, Torrance is saying the same thing which Barth said above: a relation is not peripheral or incidental to human ontology but is constitutive of the human essence. This is what Barth has said on a theological level and what object relations confirms by its empirical studies of human psychological development.

Barth clearly stands within the stream of theological reflection which views the individual in terms of relations rather than isolated particles- which Freud's theories borrowed from the physical sciences of his day.

Torrance continues:

In the Reformed theological tradition the notion of the person is held to be controlled by the person-constituting and person-intensifying activity of God in the Incarnation, such that union with Christ becomes the ground for interpersonal relations in the Church. Relations between persons have ontological force and are part of what persons are as persons- they are real, person-constituting relations.<sup>30</sup>

The relational structure of both Barth's and object relations' anthropology allows them to understand the person as a reality which is analogous to the modern field concept developed by Faraday and Maxwell.<sup>31</sup> The field" is, according to Torrance, a better model for a dynamic anthropology than the more mechanistic terms which, for example, describe human persons as if they could be explained in exclusively in terms of instincts or other biophysical causes.

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I have argued that both on a theological and psychological level, human persons are best described by their interpersonal relations. All of this has been in order to create a dialogue between the theological understanding of the person and the studies of modern science applied to human psychology. It is increasingly the case that when we study human persons in a modern conceptual framework that we study not only individuals in isolation, but also take into consideration the various relations which constitute their normal environment. Human persons are connected to the other living things in the world. In other words, each person is the recipient of certain biological, genetic, and social factors. Theological anthropology has for too long neglected the physio-biological realities of our existence, thus isolating itself needlessly from the various disciplines which have a healthy respect for our physical realities. One strength of Barth's theological anthropology is that he considers the biblical data seriously, and breaks away from the exaggerated asceticism which maintained a firm grip on theologians from Augustine right up to the present. What makes us peculiarly human, according to Barth's interpretation of the Bible, is not the mere fact that we possess intelligent souls. Rather, we are chemical, neurological, biological and sexual creatures who are called into a unique relation to our Creator via the Redeemer. If in fact we are distinguished from the other creatures by our superior intelligence, it is only because intelligence itself is a dynamic event- teased out in relation to our Creator, our parents, society and the world.

We *are* indeed biological creatures who are connected to our parents and the world in which we live. However, we are connected to our ancestors and others by *interpersonal*

*relations, not just by impersonal causes.* It is precisely where the relation enters in that we begin to reflect upon what it is that makes us peculiarly human. Christian anthropology can make its way forward in the 21st century if we will explore dynamic paradigms which attempt to integrate both the biological and the psychological-spiritual elements of what it means to be human. Such dynamic anthropologies are biblical, and perhaps they hold the promise of increasing the dialogue between theological anthropology and the human sciences.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> See W. Jim Neidhardt, *Relational Disclosure: Analogies in Judeo-Christian Theology and Natural Science*. 1991. p. 3f. (As yet unpublished to this author's knowledge.)

<sup>3</sup> Freud was a gifted neurologist who entered the medical profession mostly because there were no research positions open in neurology when he graduated.

<sup>4</sup> *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1952. p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> *Psychoanalytic Studies*, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Psychoanalytic Studies*, p. 33. Cf. Rom Harr, *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), who says: "The deepest human motive is to seek the respect of others."

<sup>7</sup> *Psychoanalytic Studies*, p. 34. The primacy given to inherent auto-eroticism applies primarily to Freud, of course. But it also applies to Freud's followers such as Karl Abraham. *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), p. 496.

<sup>8</sup> It should be emphasized that object relations psychology does not overlook the biological realities of human existence, nor does it reject the importance of sexuality. Rather, it merely objects to the reification of the instincts," as Donald Sutherland describes. See Fairbairn's *Journey into the Interior* (London: Free Association Books, 1989) p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter CD), III/2, p. 157f.

<sup>10</sup> CD III/2, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> CD III/2, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> CD II/2, p. 209. Barth cites Lk. 2:11, Dan. 7, Phil. 2:6f., 2 Cor. 8:9, Heb. 12:2; 2:14, 17f.; 4:15, as evidence that Jesus is a deliverer for humans.

<sup>13</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> See Barth's word study on *CD*, III/2, p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 216. An interesting objection to Barth's emphasis upon the dynamic and interpersonal character of human personhood is that he overlooked the need for an individual to remain distinct from the group - as well as to be connected to it. On the level of everyday life, Barth was quite strongly individual, but might there be in his theology a tendency to overemphasize human interconnectedness at the expense of individuality- especially in light of Jesus' frequent withdrawal from the masses? See Mt. 8: 18, Mk. 1:35-45. This objection is worth considering- and yet, it could be argued, especially from the passages in the Gospel of Mark (which refer to the supposed "Messianic secret") that when Jesus withdrew from the masses he was actually seeking a deeper communion with, and guidance from, the Father. He was not necessarily seeking isolation for its own sake. The one moment of real isolation was the hell of the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27: 46, Mk. 15:34. But, conceptually, neither should the individual be pitted against the group, as though they were exclusive. A genuine encounter is primarily defined by its capacity to enhance individual identity while at the same moment leading to communion, one with the other.

<sup>16</sup> Rather than the term man" (*der Mensch*), Barth sometimes uses the more inclusive term "cosmos," (*der Kosmos*) to refer to man and his historical setting. Jesus does not redeem man, understood abstractly, but man in the cosmos. See *CD III/2*, p. 216.

<sup>17</sup> Both the positive formulation of the Christological Councils (*vere Deus, vere homo*), and the negative adverbs describing the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, have been employed by Barth to illumine the understanding of real man." The Chalcedonian formula especially serves as a limit and guideline for Barth's Christological anthropology. Barth's affirmation that "man is soul of his body- wholly and simultaneously both, in ineffaceable difference, inseparable unity, and indestructible order," has *mutatis mutandis* an unmistakable Chalcedonian ring to it.

<sup>18</sup> See *Genesis* 1: 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> See especially *CD III/2*, pp. 319 ff. Cf. also, Barth, *Fragments* Grave and Gay tr. E. Mosbacher (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> The language of I and Thou is sometimes referred to as dialogical personalism." In his analysis of "dialogical personalism," Wolfhart Pannenberg thinks that Barth is the evangelical theologian closest in thinking to Buber, especially in volume III/2 of the *Dogmatics*.

<sup>21</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> "I think"- with the logical implication that therefore, "I am."

<sup>23</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 245 ff.

<sup>24</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 218.

<sup>25</sup> Barth cites John 17: 5-21. He concludes that here "the divine original creates for itself a copy in the creaturely world." *III/2*, p. 221.

<sup>26</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 248.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to clarify that Barth is not endorsing some sort of immediate mystical encounter between an individual and God. For the most part, Barth believes the encounter with God is mediated through the things and persons which God has created. Of course, the encounter between the individual and the Living Word can never be overlooked in Barth's christocentric theology. The latter enables the former to take place.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Hector C. Sabelli and Linnea Carlson-Sabelli, "Biological Priority and Psychological Supremacy: A New Integrative Paradigm Derived From Process Theory," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 146:12, (December 1989). In order to push beyond the old stalemate of: either biology or psychology," the authors look back to the philosophy of Heraclitus for more dynamic and integrative paradigms. I see no reason not to include the spiritual" at the highest level of the hierarchy.

<sup>29</sup> *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1984) p. 229 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Transformation and Convergence*, p. 230.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to Torrance, see also W. J. Neidhardt, "Thomas F. Torrance's Integration of Judeo-Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Key Themes." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (June 1989) pp. 87-98; esp. 93 ff.