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“Theology After Gulag, Bucha, and Beyond”: How Can Karl Barth’s Theology Contribute to Reorientation in the Contemporary European Crisis? A Post-Soviet Case

Katya Tolstaya

In my contribution, I will link Karl Barth’s perception of religion and ideology to the ideologization of religion as a persistent problem of post-Soviet contexts.¹ Russia’s war against Ukraine and the accompanying ideological narratives in which religion is abused have reinforced the need to scrutinize confluences of religion and ideology.² My case study is intended as a contribution to work toward a reliable theology in times of turmoil, paving the way for a theology after this new war in Europe. My discussion regards only Barth’s notion of ideology and its surplus value for contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology. In its stress on God’s transcendence, Karl Barth’s theology offers one of the most impressive attempts to counter confluences between religion and ideology.

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I will explain my use of the notion of ideology (and indeed, religion) in Sect. 1.2. Before entering the case study, though, a general word on the Christian theological notion of transcendence is required. The basic Christian understanding of transcendence is that one can speak of God only in negative terms, transcendence being one of the most important “negative” attributes of God. Transcendence is a limit term, signifying that which, by definition, is indefinable or “wholly unknown and unknowable” (Le Poidevin 2010, p. xiii). In this way, Christian dogmatics speak of God’s negative attributes (“unknowable,” “infinite,” “incomprehensible,” “impeccable,” “non-being,” etc.). All these negative attributes try to describe that God is unknowable in essence and eludes any human experience or language.

Moreover, Christian theology understands God as absolutely transcendent, transcendence being the most important umbrella term for all these negative attributes of God. It is only from the “negative” understanding that theologians attempt to formulate a “positive” common ground of an affirmative or positive (cataphatic) theology. As to positive attributes, we speak of God’s love, omnipresence, and so on. The umbrella term for the positive attributes is God’s immanence. God’s immanence is still by definition from beyond, eluding our full understanding. It is only from the interchange with negative language about God, of course, that positive or cataphatic theology has taken shape in ecclesial, dogmatic, and doctrinal language.

It is on this edge between negative and positive theology where theological speaking becomes vulnerable and prone to slipping into ideology. For example, when theologians implicitly or explicitly claim to comprehend or recognize divine presence in our worldly matters and institutions and nations.³ Such a conflation of religion and ideology is exactly a sore spot in post-Soviet Russia, where church and state use each other for their own (geo-)political agendas and where the church supplies theological grounds for this conflation.⁴ As such, prior to the war, the Russian Orthodox Church had failed to offer a reliable theology which could help to overcome the traumas of 74 years of communist oppression and state atheism.⁵ Hence, it now fails to offer a reliable theology to face the Kremlin’s aggression and war crimes in Ukraine.

Strikingly, such a conflation of religion and ideology was precisely a point of criticism from the very beginning of Karl Barth’s work as pastor and theologian. His theology maintains its relevance and significance in different contexts where religion and ideology become conflated due to

his radical juxtaposition of God's incommensurability (as the *ganz Andere*) and human existence, history, and culture. Barth strongly criticized liberal theology and cultural Protestantism on this point during the time of his work on the second edition of his commentary on Paul's *The Epistle to the Romans* (Barth 2010, in text henceforth *Romans* II). His criticism is directly related to his concept of God and to his theological anthropology. In the face of the resurgence of religion and the overwhelming victory of propaganda in Russia, what can we gain from Karl Barth's theology? But also, what are the pitfalls for theologians that we can learn to avoid?

To answer these questions, I start with a few introductory remarks on the context of what I call "Theology after Gulag, Bucha and beyond": the legacy of dehumanization and the conflation of religion and ideology in countries of the former Soviet Union, primarily in Russia.

I proceed with a sketch of the background of Barth's response to the theological ideologization of religion during World War I (WWI): the stress on God's transcendence.

Then, I aim to show that Barth's theology itself contains inconsistencies in his treatment of God's transcendence. Barth's theology, while showing a strong sensitivity for ideological distortion on the one hand, tends to lead him to a loss of the actual "substance" of God's transcendence on the other. Briefly stated, Barth seems himself to confuse his concept of God with God. Strikingly, this theological observation has a methodological (hermeneutical) backdrop: it is *in the process* of theologizing that Barth mistakes his concept of God (epistemology) for God Himself (ontics).

Finally, I will outline further directions for disentangling religion and ideology. Eastern orthodox theology has surplus value for the disentanglement of religion and ideology. I will therefore point to Orthodox theological notions that can help in acknowledging transcendence without conceptualizing it.

I "D'OÙ PARLEZ-VOUS?" (RICOEUR)—FROM WHERE DO I SPEAK? DEVELOPING A THEOLOGY AFTER GULAG

With the question "*D'où parlez-vous?*" I am referring to Paul Ricoeur's standard question to his philosophy students in Paris in the 1970s.⁶ This question equally applies to theologians. After all, in the twenty-first century there is no doing theology from an ivory tower.

My interest in the conflation of religion and ideology is embedded in my project of developing the new research field of interdisciplinary and interreligious “Theology after Gulag, Bucha and beyond.” This project aims to introduce academic theology, and more specifically systematic theology, in the post-atheist, post-Soviet contexts. Overall, these contexts are characterized by a mass return of religion after decennia (74 years in Russia) of state atheism and religious persecution. At the same time, being educated academically in the protestant Netherlands and affiliated full-time with the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, I am challenged every day by teaching academic theology in one of the most post-modern, secularized societies. In my different roles as theologian, university professor with a Chair of Theology and Religion in Post-Trauma Societies, and vice-dean at my faculty, I am guided by the question: “How to do *reliable* theology in the twenty-first century?” To show that this is not just a fancy rhetorical question or figure of speech, let me qualify the term “reliable.”

1.1 *The Soviet Legacy: Dehumanization*

I will do so by referring to a phenomenon which can be summarized with the term “dehumanization.” Dehumanization is, of course, a characteristic of any situation of oppression. The dehumanization in the Soviet Union specifically consisted of a structural disdain for human life and dignity. The spectrum of dehumanization stretched from small things like the hour-long lines for food supplies in the 1970s to systematic issues like religious and ethnic persecution under Stalin. The 2015 Nobel Prize winner, Svetlana Alexievich, has described this spectrum with shocking clarity in her five books on Soviet realities (Alexievich 2016a, b, c, 2017, 2019). The extreme form of dehumanization was encountered in the Gulag.⁷

According to the testimony of writer and Gulag survivor, Varlam Shalamov, in the situation of extreme exhaustion in the Gulag “nothing human was left to a human being—only mistrust, rage and lies” (Shalamov 1994, p. 20). The ethical norm which applies in this situation is: “worse deeds exist than eating human flesh.”⁸ Perhaps the most terrifying lesson of testimonies of extreme dehumanization is that it involves anyone, regardless of background, social, educational, or any other condition.

While dehumanization is unconditional, it is also universal. It occurred not only in the Gulag, but it can also be encountered in any place and at

any time where human beings are exposed to extreme exhaustion. That means it happens at this very moment.

Dehumanization automatically leads to the question that connects theology with the other humanities: "[W]hat does it mean to be human?" From this focus it may be clear why the question "How to do *reliable* theology in the 21st century?" is not just a rhetorical one.

This notion of "reliability" has been brought in by Varlam Shalamov. He explicitly sets *reliability* as a standard for reflection. Shalamov is writing what he calls "the prose of the future," the only criterion of which is "reliability": "[P]rose of the future demands something different. Not the writers will talk, but men of profession who possess the writer's gift. And they will tell only about what they know, what they saw. Reliability—this is the power of literature of the future."⁹

If reliability is a criterion for literature, it is even more so for theology. Extreme dehumanization is a challenge for theological anthropology, but, for example, also for classical Christology, and for theology proper, especially for the notion of *imago Dei*, as in extreme dehumanization the image of God seems to disappear in man. After the confrontation with extreme dehumanization, it takes, therefore, much to be able to say, "See the Man (Ecce Homo)," or to repeat after Barth "God is God" and to be *reliable*.

Striving for reliability can be found in what Catholic political theologian Jürgen Manemann, in his attempt to do theology after Auschwitz, calls the creation of an "anamnestic culture, which keeps track of the forgotten victims" (Manemann 2002). In Russia we can find the practical application of an attempt of an anamnestic culture that seeks to overcome the tension between the individual and the general in the practice of naming the Gulag victims by name during the annual action of the Memorial Society "Returned Names" which, since 1991, has taken place on the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repressions (30 October). Because corporate commemoration risks obscuring the suffering of individual human beings, the singularity of any suffering is an important aspect for developing a reliable Theology after Gulag and beyond.

Another aspect of a reliable Theology after Gulag and beyond is being alert to the methodological conundrums in regard of one's own theological position and of the interplay between theology and the socio-political context in which it is done. In the next paragraph I will sketch the legacy of the religion-ideology conflation as a specific methodological issue to focus in the following paragraphs on the issue of awareness of our methodological position on the example of Karl Barth's theology.

1.2 *The Soviet Legacy: Conflation of Religion and Ideology*

The “dehumanizing” impact of Soviet ideology was devastating not only in the Gulag camps, but ideology also impacted and continues to have an impact on all strata of everyday social life.¹⁰ This also applies to the current war: a simple Google search for “война в Украине дегуманизация” (“war in Ukraine dehumanization”) currently provides hundreds of results and visual data.

The main background of dehumanization in the Soviet Union is its ideological project to create the ideal “Soviet man.”

Soviet ideologization began with a conflation of religion and ideology in twisting Marx’s theorem: “[I]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.”¹¹ In Soviet real life ideology determined both man’s consciousness *and* “being,” perception of reality *and* reality itself, spirit *and* matter. It operated with quasi-religious narratives like the Lenin cult and social rituals such as mass demonstrations and festivals. While everyday life was “desecrated” in all its dimensions, millions were made to believe they lived in the world’s best and liberated country.¹² In this way, ideology substituted religion.

After *perestroika*, the pressure of ideology waned, and people became more or less free to determine their “being” and perception of reality. But politically declared freedom does not free you from your legacy. Freeing oneself from ideology requires deep and systematic societal reflection. At least in Russia such reflection has never emerged as a societal movement. Russia has never distanced itself from its past (the USSR), and the institutional heirs of the “perpetrators”—the security forces—are still in power. In Russia in the 1990s there have been attempts to stimulate public debate about Soviet crimes and commemoration of the victims. Some attempts came from “liberal” Orthodox representatives who appealed to theological notions such as guilt, repentance, and reconciliation.

Since the reinforcement of Putin’s regime from the 2000s onward, however, the past, rather than being processed, is increasingly being ideologized and “rewritten” for political purposes. Sophisticated Soviet ideological mechanisms—patriotism, propaganda, myth-creation, substitution—have been adapted to the new political demands of the Kremlin and continue to permeate society, conditioning popular responses to past and present and ascribing “sacral” status to human constructs like nation, State, and Church. Accompanied by political persecutions of any

initiative for reflection by the free media and independent NGOs, this culminated in mass support for the war in Ukraine.

Obviously, the development of the events and narratives during the Kremlin’s “special operation” in Ukraine shows a total bankruptcy of anything like a coherent Kremlin ideology. Yet there are several Kremlin war ideologies that are framed in religious narratives, the most prominent of which is the narrative of *Russkii Mir* (“Russian World”).¹³ It has led to condemnations of the Kremlin and patriarch Kirill by international secular and religious authorities and to the perception of the Russian war in Ukraine as a metaphysical war.¹⁴ The shift in patriarch Kirill’s ideology, from “*Russkii Mir*” to “Holy Rus,” in turn testifies to the absence of any coherent line of thought also on this side. This ideology is reinforced by the Russian Orthodox Church’s prominent socio-political role and its symphony with the Kremlin political elites that employ “Orthodoxy” as an ideological tool. The Russian Orthodox Church is contributing to the state’s sacralization of patriotic ideology, for the past decade already, framing the war in Ukraine as analogous to World War II (WWII) as a “Holy War”¹⁵ and equating Ukrainian “fascists” with German fascists.¹⁶

This ideological climate makes for misrepresenting historical facts and distorting ecclesial and theological concepts in any questions of responsibility and guilt in the current war. In this conflation of theology and ideology patriarch Kirill can promise forgiveness of sins to any Russian soldier who perishes in Ukraine.¹⁷ On another occasion the patriarch, by referring to the authority of the sanctified princes Daniel of Moscow and Alexander Nevsky, whose saintly protection “guarantees that a country with such leadership will never commit war crimes,” can implicitly deny the Russian war crimes and call his flock to pray for Putin. Immediately after that, he proceeds with a subtle conflation of the previous saints with Putin: “Because if the person at the head of the Fatherland, at the head of the Army, is holy, or, maybe, even not holy, but a believer, an Orthodox, a baptized one, who is aware of his responsibility before God, the Church, the country, in this case, the country is guaranteed from all kinds of military adventures, the country can be sure that the sword at its hip will be taken out of its scabbard only when it is ethically, morally and spiritually justified.”¹⁸ In the process of such a conflation of religion and ideology and justification of the war, the so-called memory wars contribute to the military war (see, e.g., Adler 2018); de facto, Russian Orthodoxy is instrumentalized and the ROC’s socio-political capital exploited.¹⁹ In the end,

religion is further ideologized, generating a vicious circle. This is how the unprocessed past continues to be a cause of war.

It would, perhaps, not be difficult to make political statements on the present state of affairs, nor to give endless more examples. But the question that occupies us here is more intricate: how can one distinguish religion from the current political ideologies without framing “religion” again in non-religious—which in the end means ideological—terms? In other words, how to do reliable theology, and also, how is religion not ideology? To tackle this last question, I will now turn to Barth to see how he disentangles the religion-ideology conflation.

1.3 *How Is Religion Not Ideology?*

If we are to qualify the term religion, we can proceed by first clarifying the term ideology. With Evert van der Zweerde we can notice that “[t]he concept of ideology has a long history, in the course of which strongly different conceptions have been elaborated.”²⁰ It even would be an understatement if one recalls 16 definitions of the concept of “ideology” in the classical work of Terry Eagleton (Eagleton 1991, pp. 1–2). As here we are interested in surplus value of Karl Barth’s distinction of theology and ideology for contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology, I will make a rough own distinction between four usages.

Firstly, as a negative Marxist term. For Marx and Engels ideology consisted in “a false consciousness” formed in the interests of the ruling class: “The thoughts of the ruling class are the dominant thoughts in every epoch (...).”²¹ The concept of ideology as a false consciousness became commonplace in Marxist thought. According to this concept ideology is a distortion of reality, aimed at the implanting of the interests of the ruling class (Eagleton 1991, pp. 43–45; cf. 83).

However, under Lenin the “ideology of revolution” has become a positive notion. Therefore, the second usage is as a positive Soviet self-description. Raymond Williams refers to this different understanding of ideology not “as mere illusion”: “In fact, in the last century, this sense of ideology as the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group, has been at least as widely used as the sense of ideology as illusion. Moreover, each sense has been used, at times very confusingly, within the Marxist tradition” (Williams 1985, p. 153). This positive usage is not too surprising as this ideology is perceived as the ideology of the ruling class, the proletariat. It

is an instrument to realize the dictatorship of this ruling class, achieving the victory of socialism in one country. “Ideology means here a set of beliefs which coheres and inspires a specific group or class in the pursuit of political interests judged to be desirable. It is then often in effect synonymous with the positive sense of ‘class consciousness’” (Eagleton 1991, pp. 43–45; cf. 83). In the Soviet Union Marxism-Leninism was the state ideology, there were departments for ideology, ideology (historical materialism) was a mandatory academic discipline, and there was an Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. With the proletariat ruling, its ideology and propaganda are perceived not as distorting reality, but rather both are used for total mind control. By steering the perception of reality, a much more complex distortion results.²²

Thirdly, ideology can be defined in a neutral sense, trying to escape oversimplifications, as, for example, by the authors of the volume *Ideologies of Globalism*: “patterned clusters of normatively-imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations, carrying claims to social truth—as, for example, expressed in liberalism, conservatism, and socialism” (James and Steger 2010, p. xii). This approach is in line with a difference between the critical perception of the role of ideology as false (mythologizing or distorted) consciousness that requires scrutinizing epistemological truth-claims in the early Marx, Georg Lukács, and Frankfurter Schule on the one hand, and the turn to a concrete sociological and empirical approach to ideology in elaborating heuristics for analyzing concrete ideological processes and sociological functions of ideas, beliefs, and so on as, for example, in Althusser on the other. This difference can be shortly described as a shift from epistemologically to sociologically and empirically informed studies and material practices. Importantly also is that, differently to mainstream Marxism that perceives ideology as “false consciousness,” the link to material practices allows Althusser and his followers for a perception of ideology as a “productive force” (see Althusser 2020 (e-book), p. 16 ff.). In this regard, Eagleton speaks of:

two of the mainstream traditions we find inscribed within the term. Roughly speaking, one central lineage, from Hegel and Marx to Georg Lukacs and some later Marxist thinkers, has been much preoccupied with ideas of true and false cognition, with ideology as illusion, distortion and mystification; whereas an alternative tradition of thought has been less epistemological than sociological, concerned more with the function of ideas within social

life than with their reality or unreality. (Eagleton 1991, pp. 2–3. See also Hanninen and Paldan 1983)

Similarly, the editors of the volume *Rethinking Ideology in the Age of Global Discontent* are of the opinion: “Overall, and paradoxically, ideology can be seen either ‘as the very repository of prejudice and obfuscation’ [Giddens 1991, p. 21] or else a programmatic template for the good society, however understood” (Axford et al. 2019, p. 2). Today this neutral perception of “ideologies” is, for example, relevant in the context of debates on globalization, nationalism, and multicultural and multireligious society-building.

The fourth usage of the notion of ideology, which is relevant to this chapter, is as a negative theological term. Literature research on the typology of ideology has not provided me with any discussion of this sort, but it is exactly what I encounter in Karl Barth’s approach to the issue of religion and ideology. I will specify this application of ideology from an allusion to Marx, who claimed the proletariat was alienated from the means of production and therefore a revolution had to free the proletariat.²³ Analogously, Soviet ideology can be perceived as an alienation of an idea of the divine or transcendence from its original object, that is, from God. As it was the case with the appropriation of the means of production in the Soviet self-description, this alienation of the idea of transcendence from God meant ascribing transcendent features to earthly phenomena, such as the party and the communist leaders Lenin and later Stalin. This is how Soviet ideology became a productive force, by mimicry. Viewing ideology as alienation from God (and, theologically speaking, as an acknowledgment of God’s transcendence) provides a straightforward answer to ongoing scholarly debates about whether Communism (like fascism and Nazism) can be considered a “political religion”: these are not religion, because they are not about the divine or transcendent.²⁴

Assuming that “there are two principal approaches to defining religion: the substantive (what religion is) and the functional (what religion does)” (Slezkine 2017, p. 73), then, as indicated above, Barth’s theology in its prioritization of the “substantive” aspect for explaining its functional aspect is specifically suited for the criticism of this fourth kind of ideology.

In what follows, I will first introduce some of the theological-historical backgrounds and then highlight Karl Barth’s main argument against ideology. I will concentrate on the conflation of religion and ideology by tackling two questions: How can Karl Barth’s theology contribute to

overcoming this conflation? And, how can Barth help explore Eastern Orthodoxy's own theological resources for overcoming the Soviet legacy?²⁵

2 KARL BARTH'S BREAK WITH LIBERAL THEOLOGY: REASONS AND REMEDY

2.1 *Conflation of Religion and Ideology in Liberal Theology*

In his theology Barth was strongly spurred by the crises of WWI and of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Barth studied theology in Germany with famous theologians of that time, most notably Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. Precisely the conflation of religion and ideology, or "the collusion of mainstream theology with the ideology of war" (Webster 2006, p. 3), was one of the main reasons for Barth to break with the established liberal theology of his teachers in Germany, which was of great influence also in Switzerland. The first traces of Barth's inconvenience with this theology can be found in his correspondence and sermons from the early 1910s onward.

There is a well-known anecdote, recounted by Barth himself, that the actual impetus for his break with liberal theology was the 1914 Manifesto of 93 German intellectuals in response to the outbreak of WWI. The Manifesto justified the German invasion of Belgium and denied the war crimes committed in Belgium.

In his recollections of this Manifesto, Barth himself mentions the conflation of religion and ideology as the stumbling block. He wrote two similar recollections, one in the 1957 volume *Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, and the other in the 1968 *Afterword to the Schleiermacher-Selection*. I quote from the latter:

And then the First World War broke out and brought (...) the horrible manifesto of the 93 German intellectuals, who before the entire world identified themselves with the war politics of Emperor William II. (...) And with horror I had to find included among those who had signed the names of almost all of my German teachers (with the honorable exception of Martin Rade!). This, in addition to what German theologians made us read elsewhere, shook the foundations of an entire world of theological exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching which until then I had thought to be basically reliable.²⁶

In fact, only three of Barth's teachers—Adolf von Harnack, Adolf Schlatter, and Wilhelm Herrmann—signed the Manifesto. More importantly, in this quote we clearly see that, already in the early years, it was the reliability of theology and Christian faith that was at stake for Barth. On 31 August 1914 in a letter to Martin Rade, editor of the important journal *Die Christliche Welt* (“The Christian World”), who, as we saw, did not sign the Manifesto, Barth summed up his reaction to a number of contributions in the wake of the war declaration:

Is there at this very moment, if one would not prefer to be silent and not speak, anything else to be said than ‘repentance’? Yes! you say, and you let the angels in heaven rejoice over the German mobilisation, let German women pray their war prayers with drumbeat, let Fritz Philippi [a German evangelical pastor and writer, K.T.] speak of a holy war (...), make Paul an advocate of a religion of the fatherland (...) and—this disturbs me the most—you reprint Luther’s booklet on the war, which I must admit, in this context (...), with its mixture of naivety and sophistics simply turns my stomach.²⁷

The Manifesto and publications such as those Barth refers to reflect the spirit of sacralization of the nation, something Barth disapproved of his entire life. Such a sacralization of a nation is no other than ideological alienation from real transcendence which I briefly addressed earlier.

Let me illustrate this disapproval on another anecdote, about Barth’s encounter with the then well-known German liberal politician and Protestant pastor Friedrich Naumann in 1915. When Barth heard Naumann say: “Now we can see how well religion can be used for the purpose of war”, Barth replied: “What are you saying? Use religion? May one, can one do that?” Barth’s biographer, Eberhard Busch, notes that during this meeting Barth had a “PASSIONATE argument” with Naumann when he heard the latter saying “All religion is right for us ... whether it is called the Salvation Army or Islam, provided that it helps us to hold out through the war” (Busch 1976, p. 84; 96–97.) As one scholar put it: “For Barth this ‘selling out’ to German nationalism and militarism (...) was a sign of the bankruptcy of ‘liberal’ German theology, which became a strong ‘push factor’ that moved him to seek a new theological approach” (Kritzinger 2007, p. 1667).

2.2 *Ideology Then and Now: Immanent Concept of God?*

In many ways (to allow for a truism) our age of post-truths is hardly different from Barth's age, and we obviously have not learned enough from the great catastrophes of both World Wars and other disasters of the last century. We find a similar mode of ideologizing religion among conservative groups all over the world in the identification of nations as carriers of "traditional values," from the US to Eastern Europe to Afghanistan. Undoubtedly Barth would have had the same reaction as against Naumann, had he heard the speeches of many current religious leaders, for example those of Russian Orthodox hierarchs, primarily Patriarch Kirill. These speeches all appear as varieties of theological immanentism, not unakin to nineteenth-century liberal theology with its understanding of God's presence and activity in the progress of history, in culture, and in religious experience, an understanding that led some German theologians to the identification of God with nation. Around 1900, similar voices of theological immanentism were prominent in Russia as well. Just compare a statement by Adolf von Harnack: "Every German is Germany; Germany is in every German"²⁸ with an utterance often ascribed to Fyodor Dostoevsky's "To be Russian is to be Orthodox."²⁹ Does not Dostoevsky sound even more explicit? Is Barth right and does an immanent concept of God indeed allow for an easier identification of God and man or world? I will turn to the Orthodox concept of God at the end, for now stating that Russian Orthodox thought indeed has a tradition of theological immanentism that prepared the soil for the Soviet and post-Soviet conflation of religion and ideology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

2.3 *How to Do Reliable Theology: The Problem of Identification*

In breaking with theological immanentism, the belief in cultural progress, and religious experience, Barth and other dialectical theologians showed their reluctance toward what in the Protestant churches is called the "problem of identification." This problem presents itself when an immanent concept of God leads individual Christians or churches to view their theology as the absolute truth or pass off their cause as God's cause. The famous Dutch theologian Oepke Noordmans, for example, in a sermon in 1921 opposed "het euvel van de vereenzelviging," the "evil of identification," "in which for many the Christian principle became more or less the same as a political principle" (Noordmans 1990, p. 443).

For Barth, the God of the Bible is radically opposed to history and modernity. Barth broke with the liberal view that the history of European civilization is the blueprint of the New Testament expectation of the kingdom of God.

2.4 *Barth's Remedy: God's Transcendence ("God is God")*

In his critique of immanentism and identification, Barth regarded false religion as “projection” and “surrogate” (cf. Reeling Brouwer 1988, p. 279). Here a couple of words about the distinction between theology and religion in Barth are apt. Barth seems not to make an explicit distinction himself, and theology to him is in the first place a discipline and its ecclesial application, while religion is a broader cultural-historical phenomenon. Yet already in his 1919 Tambach lecture “The Christian in Society” (Barth 2012, pp. 581–624, cf. 574; 642) and even more expressly in *Romans II*, it is possible to discern such a difference. Religion has a critical function to ensure that neither a Christian believer nor a Christian theology ever loses the concentration on God. Tom Greggs notices in this regard: “Barth’s account of the category of religion is a theological (or perhaps more accurately, a Christological) appropriation of the critique of religion as applied to Christianity, and not to the other religions.”³⁰

Once it loses its only dominant—God—a Christian theology becomes ideology. He posits this lapidary in *Romans II*: “Whenever men ‘adopt the point of view of God’; whenever He is not everything and they nothing; whenever they desire to be and to do something in co-operation with Him; then, however stimulating their ideas, however noble their actions, God becomes—a notion [‘Gott’ ist eben Ideologie]” (Barth 1968b, pp. 73–74; Barth 2010, p. 107, cf. 175–176).

Religion draws its critical function from God, and not from culture or art or whatever human notion or occupation.³¹ As to the early Barth, religion has a dialectical function. As Tom Greggs observes:

The purpose of Christianity qua religion (...), is to lead people to its own non-sense which directs people back to grace. (...) Barth’s negativity about religion is always checked by its capacity to function in leading people to Christ. Thus, Barth’s approach to religion is never fully negative. He writes: ‘If religion is nebulous and lacking in security, so also is everything which is exalted to oppose religion. Anti-religious negation has no advantage over the affirmations of religion. To destroy temples is not better than to build them’

(Barth 1968b, p. 136). The critique of religion is—in *Romans*—firmly theologized in a Christological way, reflecting on the function of religion in leading people back to the need for grace in Christ. (Greggs 2011, p. 18)

From this critical function of religion, we can understand Barth’s repugnance toward theology of his German teachers even better. In view to Barth’s critique of Wilhelm Herrmann, Keith L. Johnson notes that the point at stake for Barth was that “Hermann has allowed his political ideology to shape his theology instead of allowing his theology to shape his ideology” (Johnson 2020, pp. 95–108, there 96). As we have seen, this situation fits the post-Soviet case neatly.

Barth’s protest against the blurring of theology and ideology is also the core of two famous later statements. The first statement is from *Church Dogmatics* I/2, § 17: “[R]eligion is *unbelief*. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man” (Barth 1980a, p. 327). This is one forceful passage where Barth at least implicitly seems to imply that theology is the discipline or endeavor to unmask this kind of “religion” as ideology (or as he formulates it here, as “unbelief”). Rinse Reeling Brouwer aptly describes the dialectical “problem of ideology in theology”:

First, Barth says: faith and ideology have nothing to do with each other. If the Christian faith nevertheless appears as a form of ideology (...) then it was unbelief! (...) Then, though, he also says: yes, but this completely new God does present himself among us in the form of religion (/ideology). (...) As with the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word, it had to be said that the revelation could take the predicate ‘history’ and could this way, vulnerably (...) appear as a history amidst of many other histories, it is said here, that revelation can take the predicate ‘religion’ (/ideology), and thus, vulnerably, can appear as a religion (/ideology) among many other revelations. (Reeling Brouwer 1988, p. 299)

This point is the reason for Barth’s other statement which he coined in his 1933 publication in the face of German Nazism, *Theological Existence Today*. As he wrote, after Hitler and Nazim’s rise to power, one should do theology *als wäre nichts geschehen* (“as if nothing had happened”) (Barth 2013, p. 280). Barth meant, of course, not that theology should not care about ideology, rather that God is the only mode of existence for theology to safeguard oneself against ideologies and the political instrumentalization of Christian faith as it was most fiercely done by the German Christians.

It was also this intention that inspired the famous Barmen Declaration from 1934, in which Barth had an important share.³²

So, next to his theological intuition, Barth has a strong theological *response* to the bankruptcy of liberal theology and the ensuing question how religion is *not* ideology. His response is the stress on God's transcendence. In paraphrase from *Romans II*, God is God and the world is the world. Barth later worked out this response in *Church Dogmatics* by stressing the three forms of the One Word of God (Proclamation, Scripture, and Jesus Christ). For him *this* is the critical potential of theology not to become an ideology, because theology has a function in relation to the Word of God. Man and God should be kept strictly separate; God is absolutely transcendent.

In Barth-studies, this turn from man to God has been called the "ontological turn": from the human subject to the divine subject. God is not the object of man, but man is the object of God. Any appeal to concepts like "culture," "people," or to a calling of a nation by God betrays the wrong point of departure, that is, from the world and not "from God."

So, for Barth, the only way to do reliable theology is to have God as the only point of departure and to be critical of one's speaking of God in this light. This is what we can learn from his theological method and thought.

My next step, however, is to learn from the pitfalls of Barth's shift of accents. Does Barth indeed succeed in keeping God and man strictly divided?

3 PITFALLS IN BARTH'S REMEDY OF GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE: CONFUSING METHODOLOGY AND CONTENT

As I will argue, he does not. My thesis is that while the main idea of God's transcendence led his theological effort, in the dynamics of his living thought he imports as it were his figures of thought into his theological content, his *concept* of God (epistemology). This way of methodology becomes distorted and the connection to the real God (in an ontic sense) is substituted by the existentiality of the author (I will return to this below). So, while precipitating a strong sensitivity and awareness for ideological distortion on the one hand, it tends to lead him to a loss of the actual substance of this transcendence (and the implications for speaking of transcendence) on the other. The main point of criticism thus concerns

the given that throughout his theological life, he suggests to literally be able to see “from God’s standpoint” and from there to judge over all that is human, politics, history, and culture.

Let me illustrate that by briefly looking at what happens in Barth’s theological analysis. I will give two examples, one from *Romans* II and one from *CD* III.

3.1 *Philosophical Categories and Barth’s Theological Analysis*

As heuristic instruments we can consider the delicate boundaries between and dynamics of the following categories, to which I already alluded to above: ontic, ontology, existentiality, and epistemology. These categories help to clarify how questions about the nature of reality (ontology) are different from but also related to questions about the nature and meaning of human existence (existentiality), and the question of how we can have knowledge of these things (epistemology). The following working definitions of the categories may be used:

1. Actual reality—ontic.
2. Individual historical existence—existentiality.
3. The ordering or theory of reality—ontology.
4. The ordering or theory of knowledge—epistemology. This roughly overlaps with what Barth and Barth-scholars signify as “noetic.”³³

To briefly anticipate the argument, in the process of theologizing Barth seems to mistake his concept of God (which belongs to the realm of epistemology) for God himself (which, when considering transcendence, belongs to ontics).

Barth’s famous tautological formula “God is God” was meant to emphasize God’s transcendence that comes “straight from above” (*senkrecht von oben*).³⁴ The “wholly other” God of Barth’s early theology, by definition, eludes human experience, concepts, and history. The categories epistemology, noetic, ontic, and ontology are used in Barth-scholarship without a clear demarcation, which in itself is telling of the issue I am addressing here. Whereas in Barth’s early period the categories are used implicitly, and the terms are practically absent,³⁵ in his later works Barth

himself demonstrates to distinguish between the categories. For example, in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 he writes in opposition to Kant's conception of God: "The absoluteness of God permits of no such systematisations. But behind this noetic absoluteness of God there stands decisively His ontic. This is decisive because in God's revelation it is really a question of His ontic absoluteness, from which His noetic absoluteness inevitably follows."³⁶ Overall, scholars point to the shift in Barth's theology during the 1920s toward a "change of subjects" of the modern paradigm, that is, from man to God, and consider his theology since the book on Anselmus (1931) as an "ontological thought form" (Te Velde 2013, p. 303).³⁷ Yet, when scrutinizing Barth's texts, epistemology actually seems to dominate, or better: we can observe a meshing of ontology and epistemology without a clear link to ontics (or to existentiality) in Barth's theology, which makes the theological and methodological validity of this turn questionable. At stake is nothing less than the ontic status of God in Barth's theology. For how does one reconcile God's absolute transcendence with the alleged human possibility to "think theologically (...) from God towards the world"?³⁸

3.2 *Barth's Meshing of Categories, Example 1: Rom. 14:13–15*

The first example comes from the commentary on Rom. 14:13–15, where Barth writes:

In fact, however, we are exhorted in the Epistle to the Romans to a particular line of conduct, not in order that we may 'take' God's standpoint, but solely that we may bear it in mind, consider it from all sides, and then live within this consideration. (Barth 2010, p. 687)

In view of the development of Barth's thought (as described, e.g., by Schwöbel and others), this statement expresses a thorough consideration. As might be expected of a theologian who has his dominant focus on God, for Barth, God really (ontically) exists: "God is absolute in both a noetic and an ontic sense" (Chestnutt 2020, pp. 95–108, there p. 98). But certainly in regard of transcendence, ontics means it evades any human "standpoint" or "viewpoint"; indeed, the term of a standpoint rather belongs to the category of epistemology. In addition, in *Romans* II God's absolute otherness forms the basis of his concept of God, that is—to apply the categories—the divine/transcendent permanently evades the

dynamics of the relationship between the ontic (reality), existentiality, ontology, and epistemology. But a careful consideration of God's standpoint "from all sides" or "bearing it in mind" and "living within it" is just as impossible as "taking" this standpoint in general. Man cannot consider God's viewpoint, nor bear it in mind, nor argue on that basis. There is simply no such "impossible possibility."³⁹ Any claim of this kind inherently contains a problem, even more so in view of the main point of Barth's own theology—God's radical transcendence.

However, the expressions "from God" (*von Gott aus*), "from the standpoint of God," and similar expressions appear many times in *Romans II*.⁴⁰

The *modus operandi* (the way he *does* his theology) that underlies these expressions is that by having his *dominant focus* on God, Barth argues from a viewpoint supposedly *from* God, and in practice meshes the categories of epistemology and ontology. At the same time, he presents this position as an existential one, rooted in the ontics of God whose standpoint he claims to "bear in mind." This, in effect, is an epistemological reduction; it is more than rhetoric and seems to result from some methodological unawareness of the danger of such a meshing. Strikingly, at the same time it actually reflects something which is very rare to grasp in a written text, namely the dynamics of a "living thought" of an author.

3.3 *Barth's Meshing of Categories, Example II: CD III/2, § 45*

But what about the "ontological turn"? While in the previous paragraph I used an example from the "dialectical" Barth, let us now consider a much later passage from *Church Dogmatics III/2, § 45*:

If we are to understand man as the creature of God, we must see first and supremely why God has created him. We must thus regard him from above, from God. (...) we must return to the fact that God has created him and how He has done so, regarding him (...) as this particular cosmic being. (...) In this continuation of theological anthropology we now address ourselves to all the problems which might be summed up under the title "The Humanity of Man." (...) It is as he is not divine but cosmic, and therefore from God's standpoint below (with the earth on which and the heaven under which he is), that he is determined by God for life with God. (Barth 1980c, p. 243)

Barth locates his discourse within theological anthropology (cf. Skaff 2020, p. 185). Obviously, anthropology should be concerned with existentiality, or at least with ontology, rooted in the ontics of reality (indeed,

according to Barth Jesus Christ is the “ontic basis” of creation, CD III/1, p. 28). But in the above passage it still is a discourse dominated by epistemology (“from above” again suggests a “standpoint”) with no clear relation to any other category. Barth elaborates his theological anthropology here under the claim to speak about the “real man” (*der wirkliche Mensch*, “being”) and the real God. While doing so he suggests to be able to perceive a person from God (*von Gott her/aus*) and from this humanly impossible position he then claims to be able to differentiate between God and “cosmic” man.

This transfer of ontics/existentiality into epistemology puts Barth’s utterances, which refer to ontics, existentiality and ontology (e.g., that human being “consists in participating in what God does” (CD III/2, p. 74); or that Jesus is “the very ground and sphere, the atmosphere of the being of every man” (CD IV/1, p. 53); and that we exist “in him” (CD III/2, pp. 148, 317)) under suspicion of epistemological reduction. It is therefore difficult to conclude with Adam J. Johnson: “No amount of biological, psychological, sociological and other insights will plumb the depths of human nature, for the answer lies not in ourselves as an object of study, but in the God who created and holds us in existence” (Johnson 2020, p. 148). Similarly, it is difficult to agree with Jeffrey Skaff who presents Barth’s theological anthropology in CD III/2. According to Skaff to convincingly ground “anthropology in Christology” (cf. Skaff 2020, p. 186, see also 187), Barth’s theology aims at balancing between all the relevant philosophical positions—naturalism, idealism, existentialism, and theism—without losing the dominant on God. As I have argued, this is indeed the only correct direction for theology, in this case for theological anthropology. But in Barth’s procedure, both man and God seem to remain “noetic” constructs or in other words, concepts.

Strikingly, Barth uses the specific expression “God’s standpoint” (*Standpunkt Gottes*) in *Church Dogmatics* in a sense that is opposite to its use in the quoted passage from *Romans* II 14:13–15, namely in CD IV/3, § 70. Here the phrase means that taking this position is a “human untruth” on the part of Job’s friends or, in other words, that Job’s friends are creating an ideology (Barth 1980d, p. 526). But this idea can also be found in *Romans* II (e.g., Barth 2010, p. 107).

This last point confirms that Barth is actually aware of the impossibility of taking a position “from God.” Above I already quoted a passage from *Romans* II where Barth states that God turns out to be ideology when

humans lose their dominant on God.⁴¹ Strikingly, also in a passage from his *Ethics* (1928–1929) Barth shows his awareness of the implications transcendence has for theological speech about God: He almost verbally acknowledges the risks of confusing one's concept of God ("Gottesbegriff") with a conceptual God ("Begriffsgott"). Citing Luther, he explains to be aware of the necessity for theology to use abstract language, but warns for mistaking this abstraction for the real God—a mistake dialectical theology is not exempt from. The theological dialectic:

is always in forgetting this and confusing the majesty or glory of God which it has in view with the majesty and glory of a supranatural and spiritual object concerning which, for good or ill, it has to speak, but which, if it is regarded as God, can only be an ultimate and supreme idol invented and constructed by man. (...) Theology must do all it can to prevent its concept of God from being confused in this way with God himself. (...) In basing itself on faith, theology—because of its unavoidable Erasmian trait—mis-trusts no one and nothing more than it does itself. Because of its unavoidable contemplation of the majesty and its unavoidable concept of God, which may at any time become an idol (...).⁴²

That Barth sharply identifies the mechanism here would plea for my thesis that the meshing of categories happens foremost in theological and exegetical *practice*, as *modus operandi*, and is caused by his unawareness of the methodological pitfalls implicit in his movement from man to God. To repeat my thesis, in the dynamics of what we can call his living thinking he, as it were, imports his figures of thought such as "*von Gott aus*" into his concept of God. Although he has a very keen eye for ideological distortions, he confuses his concept of God (epistemology) with God himself (ontics).

Barth's emphasis on God's transcendence therefore offers a remedy against the conflation of religion and ideology; the passages in *Church Dogmatics* where Barth argues "from God" in the above sense reveal, however, a constant epistemological dominant in his thought.

Therefore, while pointing out the direction to remedy the conflation of religion and ideology, the way Barth works out his focus teaches us about sophisticated methodological pitfalls: there is always a danger that you think to take or reckon with a standpoint of God, and then you are again close to conflating theology and ideology.

4 RESOURCES OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY: GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE AND UNITY OF CREATION

4.1 *God's Transcendence and Practical Knowledge of God*

So, while arguing that post-Soviet theology should learn from Barth, I also argue that it would be too easy to say, "If only the Russians read Karl Barth." (Of course, they should and indeed several parts from the *Church Dogmatics* and the entire *Romans II* have been translated.)

Here an extra word on methodology is required. The experience of dehumanization and the 74 years of Soviet regime need to be accounted for. Yet, most hierarchs and theologians in Russia want to return to the Church Fathers, the Orthodox Tradition, and the "pre-revolutionary" state—"as if nothing had happened." But they do so precisely *contrary* to what Barth meant with these words. For, to recall Keith L. Johnson's apt description, their political ideology shapes their theology instead of theology shaping their ideology. To borrow from the terminology of Charles Taylor, we as theologians have been "disenchanted" by our studies and have a different "imaginary" than our (theological) predecessors (see *passim* Taylor 2007). We can no longer see our heritage, our "Tradition," or even the Bible as a bag of corn from which to pick. Of course, we have to pick, but we have to be very careful in *how* we do it, *methodologically*.⁴³

In the discussion above, I tried to indicate this point by referring to the possibilities within Orthodox theology itself for doing reliable Theology after Gulag, in the direction suggested by Barth. Orthodox theology has various underexplored areas that constitute surplus value, such as the Orthodox specific sense of transcendence and the notion of the unity of creation. To conclude, these two notions may be hinted at.

In Orthodoxy, God is wholly transcendent and unknowable in essence, eluding all human concepts and understanding, but simultaneously, as is summarized in the liturgical words, God is "everywhere present, filling all things."⁴⁴ This understanding is crucial for Orthodox experience of the living God and divine presence (ontics), and for the practice of deification (or theosis) by co-working with God (existentiality).

The Orthodox concept of God is not pantheistic, but *panentheistic*, transcendent-immanent. This implies that, on the one hand, true knowledge of God in God's essence cannot be acquired in an intellectual way, nor through empirical observations or experience. On the other hand, God's presence in the world is immanent through his uncreated *logoi* (as

in Maximus the Confessor, 580–662) or in energies (as in Gregory Palamas, 1296–1359), which penetrate every entity, material and immaterial. Consistently aiming to acknowledge this transcendent-immanent quality, Orthodox theology is very cautious about formulating anything positive concerning the divine energies and restricts itself to a few hints. In an epistemological sense the immanent energies are fully “transcendent,” and perceptible only as existential experience that demands the whole person. The way to know God is not philosophy, but practice. The notion of the penetration of creation with divine energies presupposes the ontic unity of creation. There is Otherness within everything and thence interconnection of everything through the Other.

To bring the argument back to Barth’s interests at the time of writing *Romans II*, when Dostoevsky was of a major influence on him and Eduard Thurneysen (Tolstaya 2013, 2015), an expression of this holistic worldview can be found in Dostoevsky, in the teachings of Elder Zosima from the *Brothers Karamazov*: “[A]ll is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world” (Dostoevsky 1992, p. 271). This attitude underlies the awareness that “each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all” (Dostoevsky 1992, p. 246).

Systematically, there is a deeper connection between all of creation on a most fundamental, ontic level, and this immanent connection is equally as transcendent as Barth’s *totaliter aliter*.

So, nothing is wrong with immanence in Orthodox theology *per se*, but it goes wrong when, forgetting that it is *God’s* immanence, it becomes immanentism. This is the actual antidote to any “evil of identification” within Orthodox theology itself, and precisely the antidote lacking in most present-day theological thought in Russia and (often less crassly) in other post-Soviet countries.

4.2 *Unity of Creation as Potential for a Theology After Gulag*

This worldview of the unity of creation can help to overcome the problem of ideology and contribute to rethinking man’s place in creation and his complicity in guilt and in suffering. For instance, obviously, this theocentric starting point brings individual responsibility for other human beings and for the whole of creation into a totally different axiology than that which we find in many contemporary theologies. Individual responsibility for evil should be explicitly perceived as an intrinsic *ontological* given from

the ontic unity of creation. While in modern theology, even in *Theologie nach Auschwitz* and post-Apartheid theology, complicity in guilt is under-articulated ontologically and is therefore endangered to remain confined to mere ethics.

This worldview of the unity of creation also lays an ontological basis for solidarity in suffering without downplaying the singularity of any suffering. With this notion, Orthodoxy has a surplus value potential that allows for a contextualization of personal and not just of collective guilt. This gives Orthodoxy great potential in the post-Soviet context, which systematically denies guilt and complicity and the continuing impact of the dehumanizing past.

Allowing for a theology from the depths, *de profundis* (cf. Psalm 130) it is capable to confront the challenge of extreme dehumanization. But this should be a thorough discussion of a theological *locus*, such as the concept of God, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and so on, which has to be articulated and justified in relation to other *loci*.

To sum up, my argument in this chapter departed from the Soviet dehumanization, which is rooted in the conflation of religion and ideology, and I searched for critical theological possibilities to avoid this conflation. I found the answer in the imperative of theology to concentrate on God and only from there to approach and take part in political life. While Barth forcefully established this need and can give us an orientation, in this chapter I also demonstrated how Barth, in *doing* theology, did not escape a danger of making a concept of the real God. The direction to overcome this pitfall is methodological awareness of this danger. Moreover, in the Orthodox concept of God we can find a surplus value to overcome the danger of such a conflation. It is high time to search further for a reliable Theology after Gulag, Bucha, and beyond.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Frank Bestebreurtje, Christine Svinth-Værgø Pøder, Geert Verschuure, Peter Victor, and Evert van der Zweerde for their critical reading and useful suggestions.
2. The paper preceding this chapter was presented in October 2021 at the Open international workshop “European Crisis and Reorientation.”
3. This is one of the aspects, which makes the issue of human experience of divine/transcendent, think of God’s presence, miracles, prayers, and so on, so vulnerable.

4. Due to the loss of canonical jurisdictions in Ukraine the agenda of the Church is increasingly falling together with that of the state.
5. This is not to suggest any monolithic position within the Russian Orthodox Church. There are different, sometimes contradictory voices and positions on the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.
6. As referred to by Kearney (2010, p. ix).
7. I am investigating this phenomenon at length from hermeneutical, philosophical (ethical), and theological perspectives based on the testimonies from Gulag, Auschwitz, and blockade Leningrad in my upcoming book: Tolstaya (forthcoming).
8. Shalamov (1978a): “есть, наверно, дела и похуже, чем обедать человеческим трупом”; cf. Shalamov (2018 [1978], p. 148): “[N]o doubt there are worse crimes than dining on a human corpse.”
9. Shalamov (1978b): “проза будущего требует другого. Заговорят не писатели, а люди профессии, обладающие писательским даром. И они расскажут только о том, что знают, видели. Достоверность—вот сила литературы будущего” (not translated by Glad).
10. For an overall comparison, see, for example, Geyer and Fitzpatrick (eds.) (2009).
11. Marx (1971 [1859]). If the Nazi ideology was about humans worth living versus humans not worth living, Soviet ideology was about humanity and its bright future. As Evert van der Zweerde puts it: “If 10 per cent of those who went through Gulag died there, this implies that 90 per cent survived and re-entered Soviet society. (...) The end-product of Nazi camps was ash and golden teeth, while the end product of Gulag consisted of steeled subjects (...). The Gulag as a whole was not destructive but productive of life: it was a large bio-political factory” (Van der Zweerde 2022, p. 122).
12. This is, of course, not to say that the success of this strategy was steady over the 74 years of the Soviet rule; the peak of success was undoubtedly under Stalin.
13. See for explanation “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (Russkii mir) Teaching,” 13 March 2022, at: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>. Accessed 09 October 2022.
14. See, for example, Chapnin (2022a, b), Babynski (2022), Bluhm (2022), Bremer (2022), and Elsner (2022).
15. See already Scherbakowa (2010), Kangaspuro and Lassila (2012, pp. 377–400), and Cottiero et al. (2015, pp. 533–555).
16. One should not forget though that the huge gap between poor and rich and big cities and province makes people even more prone to ideological “triggers.”

17. Patriarch of Moscow: Any Russian Soldier who Dies in the War in Ukraine is Forgiven for his Sins. <https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarch-of-moscow-any-russian-soldier-who-dies-in-the-war-in-ukraine-is-forgiven-for-his-sins/>. Accessed 29 September 2022.
18. “Слово Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла в день памяти благоверных князей Даниила Московского и Александра Невского после Литургии в Даниловом монастыре” [“A Word of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill on the Day of Remembrance of the Blessed Princes Daniel of Moscow and Alexander Nevsky After the Liturgy at the Danilov Monastery”]. 2022. “Русская Православная Церковь. Официальный сайт Московского патриархата” [“Russian Orthodox Church. The official website of the Moscow Patriarchate”]. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5958411.html>. Accessed 18 September 2022.
19. See, for example, Bacon (1997, pp. 253–265), Curanović (2012), and Verkhovsky (2014, pp. 71–84).
20. Van der Zweerde, Evert (1994, p. 70). See pp. 70–71 for a complex conception, which sets apart ideology and ideological function and truth claims: “[I]deology (1) is a not a particular kind of theory, but a possible function of any theory to organize the commitment and action of social groups in two ways, namely *motivation* and *legitimization*; (2) entails three elements—a truth-claim, an exclusion of alternatives, and a transition from ‘theory’ to practice—at least one of which must be concealed; (3) is complementary to other forms of exercise of power; (4) is not ‘false’ and not functioning ‘at the expense of truth’, but under suspension (or exclusion) of the question as to the truth of the ‘theory’ involved—ideology does serve its purpose relatively independently of the truth and adequacy of the ‘theory’; (5) is not necessarily ‘believed in’ by its producers or addressees, but functions, again, relatively independently of ‘belief’; (6) is not an ‘evil,’ but an inevitable fact of any nonutopian society; (7) can be judged both negatively and positively, according to a number of parameters, and depending on the judge’s proper position.” Importantly also (p. 54): “A ‘theory’ is ideological only in as far as it *actually functions* ideologically.”
21. See Marx (1968 [1844], pp. 467–588). Cf. Marx (1978 [1845], p. 46): “Die Gedanken der herrschenden Klasse sind in jeder Epoche die herrschenden Gedanken, d. h. die Klasse, welche die herrschende materielle Macht der Gesellschaft ist, ist zugleich ihre herrschende geistige Macht.”
22. Obviously, the topic of ideology in (neo-)Marxism, (neo-)Leninism, the Frankfurter Schule, and beyond up to current days is endless. The classification I provide here has no claim to be complete. From the second half of the twentieth century Marxism has developed discussions of the role of ideology from sociological and empirical perspectives. Discussions, for

- example, around the so-called dominant ideology thesis show a very complex and dynamic potential of conceptualization of ideology based on works of thinkers like Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, and Jürgen Habermas. Cf. Abercrombie et al. (1980, 1990); see also Miliband (1978, pp. 161, 237).
23. See the notion of *Entfremdung* ("alienation" or "estrangement") in Marx (1844 [1932]), *passim*.
 24. See my discussion of the concept of millenarianism in relation to the Soviet case in: Tolstaya (2018). I repeat here this argument from this discussion.
 25. I have previously treated this issue in a Dutch article: Tolstaya (2019, pp. 273–284).
 26. Barth (1968a, p. 295). Cf. Barth (1957, p. 6): "Mir persönlich hat sich ein Tag am Anfang des Augusts jenes Jahres [sc. 1914] als der *dies ater* eingepägt, an welchem 95 deutsche Intellektuelle mit einem Bekenntnis zur Kriegspolitik Kaiser Wilhelms II. und seiner Ratgeber an die Öffentlichkeit traten, unter denen ich zu meinem Entsetzen auch die Namen so ziemlich aller meiner bis dahin gläubig verehrten theologischen Lehrer wahrnehmen mußte. Irre geworden an ihrem Ethos, bemerkte ich, daß ich auch ihrer Ethik und Dogmatik, ihrer Bibelauslegung und Geschichtsdarstellung nicht mehr werde folgen können, daß die Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts jedenfalls für mich keine Zukunft mehr hatte."
 27. The letter was published shortly after in: Barth (1914, p. 431).
 28. See Von Harnack (1916, p. 317): "Jeder Deutsche ist Deutschland, Deutschland ist in jedem Deutschen."
 29. This phrase is not to be found in Dostoevsky. Something close to this can be encountered in *The Devils*: "An atheist cannot be Russian. (...) A non-Orthodox cannot be Russian" ("не православный не может быть русским") (Dostoevsky 1974, p. 197). This phrase gave many an idea, though, to be formative for a nationalist line originating in Dostoevsky's Slavophilism, cf., for example, recently Slavoj Žižek: "In the context of Ukraine, we need to cast aside this naivety and stop justifying the existence of the few nationalists of collaborationists in the country. It doesn't matter how numerous they are. It's more important to understand why Russia would maintain the image of Ukraine as a country rife with Nazism. The answer is simple. Russia has nothing to do with Communism anymore, so it can't appeal to the October Revolution as its foundational myth. So, what is left for it to do? To appeal to World War II and, indeed, Dostoyevsky, whom I wholeheartedly despise, by the way (*laughs—Author's Note*). Dostoyevsky is the root of Russian culture's all horrors" (Vorotniiov 2022).
 30. Greggs (2011, p. 29). Greggs alludes here to *Church Dogmatics* I/2.
 31. Indeed, Barth's Christological concentration increases in due time (from *Romans* II to *CD*).

32. On the Barmen Declaration, see Barth (2017).
33. For example, Barth (1980b [1940], p. 538): “Gottes Allgegenwart [ist] nicht etwa nur noetisch (für unsere Erkenntnis), sondern ontisch (in ihrer Wirklichkeit) an die Besonderheit seiner Gegenwart eben in seinem offenbarenden und versöhnenden Handeln gebunden.”
34. Barth (2010 [1922]), for example, pp. 94, 115, 208, 336, 418, 424, 528, 592; Thurneysen (1921), for example, pp. 37, 62, 73.
35. At least, the search at *The Digital Karl Barth Library* (DKBL, at: <http://solomon.dkbl.alexanderstreet.com/>) gives 0 times for “*Ontik*,” 14 times for *Erkenntnistheorie* (epistemology), and 4 times for “*Ontologie*” for the period up to and including 1929.
36. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 311 (§ 28). “Der Einsatz, die Leidenschaft und der Ernst, mit dem man auch von dem in solche Klammer gesetzten Gott zu reden versuchen kann, gelten dann letztlich und entscheidend doch nicht ihm, sondern dem ihn einklammernden Höheren, repräsentiert durch den jeweils gewählten Oberbegriff. Die Absolutheit Gottes erlaubt uns keinerlei solche Einklammerungen. Aber hinter dieser noetischen Absolutheit Gottes steht entscheidend seine ontische. Entscheidend insofern, als es in Gottes Offenbarung real um Gottes ontische Absolutheit geht, der dann jene noetische notwendig folgen muß.” Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1, p. 350.
37. Te Velde (2013), for example, pp. 303–304, 320, 443; see also p. 327: “Barth takes the reality of God as the foundation of theology. He advocates the priority of the ontic over the noetic, and assigns to theology a fundamentally a posteriori method.” On the “change of subjects” (*Subjektwechsel*) in Barth’s theology, see among others Beintker (1987, pp. 190–191), Schwöbel (2000, pp. 29–30), Grube (2008, pp. 308–324), Eberlein-Braun (2011, pp. 83–84), and Bergner (2015, e.g., pp. 69 and 76).
38. Schwöbel (2000, p. 19): “If theology wants to remain true to Jesus’ message of the Kingdom, it cannot think theologically from the human standpoint towards God, but must learn to think from God towards the world.”
39. A phrase Barth uses in different contexts in *Romans* II: Barth (2010 [1922]), for example, pp. 114; 299; 508–510; 686.
40. A rough count led to some 50 places. See for a textual analysis and discussions of further examples Tolstaya (2013), especially pp. 329–333.
41. See above, Sect. 2.1, quote from Barth (2010, p. 107).
42. Barth (1981), accessed online. Cf. Barth (1978 [1928–1929], pp. 114–115): “Und nun droht die Gefahr, daß sie [die theologische Dialektik, K.T.] dieses vergißt, daß sie die *maiestas*, *die gloria Dei*, die sie meint, verwechselt mit der *maiestas* und *gloria* eines doch nur übernatürlichen, geistigen Gegenstandes, von dem sie wohl oder übel reden muß, der

ja als solcher wirklich nicht Gott, sondern gerade, wenn er für Gott gehalten wird, nur ein allerletztes, allerhöchstes vom Menschen erdachtes und angefertigtes Götzenbild sein kann. (...) Die Theologie muß alles tun, um ihren Gottesbegriff dieser Verwechslung mit Gott selbst immer wieder zu entziehen. (...) Indem die Theologie sich auf den Glauben gründet, wird sie gegen nichts und niemand so mißtrauisch sein wie—eben wegen ihres unvermeidlichen erasmischen Zuges—gegen sich selber, gegen ihre unvermeidliche *speculatio maiestatis*, gegen ihren unvermeidlichen Gottesbegriff, der doch auch jederzeit zu einem Götzen werden könnte.”

43. See on methodology in a conversation between theology and religious studies: Tolstaya and Bestebrurtje (2021, pp. 1–37).
44. The words belong to tone 6 verse of the 6th voice in the Doxasticon of the Great Vespers of Pentecost, this “Heavenly King”—prayer is used daily at homes and at public services (except for “the period from the Liturgy of Holy Saturday to the All-Night Vigil of the Pentecost”). “Царю Небесный” [“Heavenly King”] (n.d.) at: <https://azbyka.ru/caryu-nebesnyj>. Assessed 30 October 2022. Russian: “Царь Небесный, Утешитель, Дух Истины, везде пребывающий и всё наполняющий”; Church-Slavonic: “Царіо Небесный, Утешителю, Душе истины, Иже везде сый и вся исполняй”; Greek: “Βασιλεῦ οὐράνιε, Παράκλητε, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁ πανταχοῦ παρῶν, καὶ τὰ πάντα πληρῶν”; Latin: “Rex coelestis, Paraclete, Spiritus veri, qui ubique ades et omnia implet.” See also Ware (2004, p. 160).

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