

Article

“A Special Form of Derangement”: Karl Barth’s Approach to Sport Rooted in Prayer

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Abstract: In *The Christian Life*, his unfinished volume of *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth describes sport as “a special form of derangement”. Barth identifies sport as a lordless power, an element of society that humans believe they control, but ends up dictating the terms of engagement. Situating his discussion of these powers in his discourse on the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Barth calls on Christians to revolt against these things. Readers may shake their heads at Barth’s rhetoric regarding sport and the labeling of it as ‘lordless power’; however, in situating his remarks on the topic in the Lord’s Prayer, Barth provides a new lens through which Christians might view sport. This paper focuses on Barth’s approach to sport, suggesting that Christians can, through invocation and correspondence, rebel against the lordless power that is sport. It begins by situating Barth’s approach to sport within the context of the sport and Christianity interface, the wider corpus of Barth studies, and his own work. After assessing Barth’s writings on sport, the paper shifts to a discussion of what Barth suggests God does and what we, as humans, are called to do when we pray “Thy kingdom come”. The paper concludes with reflections on how Barth’s approach to sport, rooted in prayer, can affect our understanding of the subject.

Keywords: sport; prayer; Karl Barth; *Church Dogmatics*; Lord’s Prayer; lordless powers

1. Introduction

Karl Barth is one of the most influential theologians of the past century and, in recent years, there has been an increase in research and publications on his work. While scholars have discussed Barth’s approach to play (DeCou 2013, 2019), few have discussed his view on sport per se.¹ This may have something to do with the limited time which he spent on the subject. Barth makes passing references to sport and competitive games in *Church Dogmatics*² III.4 as he lays out his doctrine of creation. He specifically addresses it in the unfinished fragment of the dogmatics, entitled *The Christian Life*, but in total, Barth spends less than five hundred words on the topic. In his discourse on the petition “Thy kingdom come” from the Lord’s Prayer, Barth (2017) labels sport, amongst other things, a “lordless power”, something humans believe they can control, but which ends up controlling them. Barth contends that when we seek to control such forces, we not only rebel against God, but against ourselves. Using dramatic language, he concludes that, in sport, “It should be obvious that we have here a special form of derangement. Man has lost and continually loses his true majesty” (Barth 2017, p. 322). Barth argues that we, as followers of Jesus, are called to revolt against these powers. With so little attention paid to the subject, it is understandable why a Barthian approach to sport has not previously been analyzed in detail. However, when Barth’s writing on sport is viewed in the wider context of his discussion on prayer, it becomes apparent that a Barthian approach can add a new layer to the theological understanding of and engagement with sport. This is the focus and suggestion of the present paper.

We begin by situating Barth’s approach to sport within the context of the sport and Christianity interface, the wider corpus of Barth studies, and his own work. Turning to the text, the lordless powers will be addressed, specifically seeking to understand what



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Barth means by the concept and how sport fits within this category. After assessing Barth's writings on sport, the paper shifts to a discussion of what Barth suggests God does and what we, as humans, are called to do when we pray "Thy kingdom come". The paper concludes with reflections on how Barth's approach to sport, rooted in prayer, can affect our understanding of the subject.

2. Situating Barth's Approach to Sport

Within the literature surrounding sport and Christianity, as well as writings on his own works, Barth's approach to sport is barely mentioned, with more time being given to his understanding of play. In the sport and Christianity literature, Johnston (1997), Ellis (2014), and Harvey (2014) all reference Barth's approach to play through his writings on Mozart. Barth saw in Mozart someone who embodied play, recognizing the tension present that allows one to show mastery of something while being childlike, holding joy and suffering together, and experiencing the freedom of creation in a unique manner. Furthermore, Johnston (1997) dips into the *Church Dogmatics* to discuss Sabbath, and Ellis (2014) does the same to highlight notions of time in relation to play; but there is no acknowledgement of Barth's writings on sport in either work. Similarly, little attention is paid to sport in commentaries on Barth. DeCou (2013) specifically mentions sports as a lordless power but does not elaborate on this further. This is a common pattern within writings on the lordless powers, where sport is briefly alluded to as one of the powers within a wider narrative on the subject (see Ernst-Habib 2022; Hargaden 2019; Gorringer 2019). However, looking at writings on Barth's approach to popular culture helps shed light on why this may be.

DeCou (2013, 2019) notes that Barth is often seen as a divisive figure when seeking a theology of culture. She suggests that this "grows out of a very real skepticism on Barth's part towards the possibility of a theology of culture that could avoid the deification of human achievements" (DeCou 2019, p. 609). DeCou goes on to point out that where Schleiermacher anthropomorphized, Barth emphasized a Christological framework which prioritized the Word and the uniqueness of Christ. This notion will be important as we go forward, particularly as it relates to Barth's critique of sport. While the wider conversation on Barth's approach to culture is not a central concern of this paper, it is interesting to note that Michael Novak, author of the seminal text *The Joy of Sports*, offered a critique of an article on Barth's approach to culture published in 1972. Novak's response barely addressed the article, focusing instead on how he sees Barth as one with a narrow theological framework that is embedded in the Swiss culture he resided in, and not a multi-disciplinary approach that speaks to the US culture Novak inhabited. In the same edition of the journal, Markus Barth, Karl Barth's son, provided a response to Novak, agreeing with some of his critiques (Novak 1972). Markus Barth stated, "Many things which in America are called part of 'culture' would be defined by my father as barbarism, as examples of extreme boredom or of the absence of any sort of value" (Barth 1972). While there is no reference to sports here, Markus Barth's comments set the tone for his father's writing on the topic.

Within his works, Barth addresses sport or competitive games in two areas. He briefly mentions both in *CD III.4* and, as previously mentioned, explicitly names sport as a lordless power in *The Christian Life*. Both volumes are considered part of Barth's special ethics, meaning his assessment of human being and action in relation to God's command (Nimmo 2017, p. 175). In his introduction to *The Christian Life*, Zeigler (2017, p. 3) notes that the question "What shall I or we do?" was central to Barth's ethical framework. He states that for Barth, ethics requires God's action and a human response. In this view, ethical action is not the dominion of one group but a mutual engagement between the two parties. Zeigler suggests that this is seen through the concepts of prayer and invocation. Before addressing the lordless powers, it is important to briefly assess Barth's approach to sport and competition in the *Church Dogmatics*. *CD III.4* concludes Barth's doctrine of creation, focusing on ethical questions facing humans. Discussing the importance of being healthy, Barth ([1951] 2010, p. 357) defines health as "the strength to be as man. It serves human existence in the form of the capacity, vitality and freedom to exercise the psychical physical

functions, just as these themselves are only functions of human existence". This section of Barth's definition is rather basic, good health is both mental and corporal. However, Barth ([1951] 2010, p. 357) adds that there is more to health than this, stating:

We can and should will it as this strength when we will not merely to be healthy in body and soul but to be man at all [. . .] man in the satisfaction of his instinctive needs, man in use of his reason, in loyalty to his individuality, in the knowledge of its limitations, man in his determination for work and knowledge, and above all in his relation to God and his fellow-men in the proffered act of freedom. We can and should will this, and therefore we can and should will to be healthy.

For Barth, the desire to be healthy is not merely about satisfying our basic physical or psychological needs, but about our entire being and action as individuals who are in communion with God and others. It is important to note Barth's emphasis on knowing oneself, in who we are and our limitations, and the need to engage with one another, as these elements will be components of our discussion on Barth's approach to sport. As Barth teases this out, he categorizes sport as a form of 'hygiene' that is meant to help an individual stay healthy. However, he is quick to state that the benefits of hygiene do not provide a blanket acceptance of the activity, particularly as it relates to competition.

Barth's aversion to competition is addressed in his discussion of the active life. For him, the active life is the way humans freely live out and act in obedience with God's command, specifically in relation to work, which Barth understands to be our response to the divine's call. Writing on the difference between competition in sport and work, Barth appears to be comfortable with a form of competition that is self-contained, limited to the time and place in which the contest is occurring, and seeks to distinguish who performs better at a mutual or comparable task. In this, there is value in recognizing and celebrating those who perform better, either in work or sport. This is echoed in Harvey's (2014) argument that sport is a self-contained phenomenon. However, Barth recognizes that "the sphere of human work, however, is not a playing field. Indeed, even on the modern playing field it has long since ceased to be a question of merit for the best performance" (Barth [1951] 2010, p. 539). He continues, "But the prize in the race of work and the same thing seems to be more and more characteristic of competitive games- is an end in itself" (Barth [1951] 2010, p. 539). While this last line may not seem important, earlier in this section Barth states emphatically, "The command of God does genuinely demand the active life, namely, that man should set his mind on something and accomplish it. It does not allow him to understand and treat his existence as an end in itself" (Barth [1951] 2010, p. 473). In marking competition as, characteristically, an end in and of itself, Barth states that this cannot be the calling for our life.

For Barth, competition that moves beyond the comparison of ability and engagement in a set or limited scope of time or place focuses too much on a specific result, namely one that benefits an individual or their team at the expense of another. Barth ([1951] 2010, p. 541) elaborates on this when discussing work:

Work under the sign of this competition will always imply as such work in the form of conflict in which one man encounters another with force and cunning, and there cannot fail to be innumerable prisoners, wounded and dead. Work under this sign will always be an inhumane activity, and there an activity which, in spite of every conceivable alleviation or attempt at relief and order, can never stand before the command of God.

While Barth does not reference sport specifically here, it is not a stretch to see this description in sport as well. Barth's writing suggests that there is always a winner and loser, with the victor gaining at the expense of the loser; but is this always true in athletic competition? In some ways it is correct, the winner asserts a form of superiority over the other; however, is this an inhumane act? What about a competitive game where both teams leave with respect for one another and a recognition of what occurred on the field? Barth's critique of competition provides a first glimpse of his binary view of this subject, leaving

little room for subtlety or nuance. This becomes a common pattern in Barth's writing on sport.

Barth ([1951] 2010, p. 363) also takes issue with sport being prioritized over other social issues, arguing that it can do very little to aid in a healthy life if "such general conditions as wages, standards of living, working hours, necessary breaks, and above all housing" are not in place. He warns that more programs that provide things such as sport or access to medicine should not be offered to provide a healthy life, but rather that the general living conditions of all should be a priority. It is acknowledged that Barth is writing at a time when sport may well have seemed something of an irrelevance to many given the myriad of social needs of the day. Yet, similar to his critique of competition, there is no room here for subtlety or contextual nuance. Would Barth begrudge a program aimed at helping low-income children be active and healthy if it did not also address elements surrounding their living situation or parent's employment? While speculative, Barth's critique exposes the lack of subjectivity in his approach to the topic. In both critiques, Barth is not completely against sport, but, rather, provides barriers where sport may either hinder a Christian's calling or be prioritized over other important societal elements. These components become important as we turn to consider sport as a lordless power.

3. The Lordless Powers

Within paragraph 78 in *The Christian Life*, entitled "The Struggle for Human Righteousness", Barth approaches the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come". He does not mince words, quickly proclaiming that humans are involved in conflict and that Christians must participate in a "specific uprising" (Barth 2017, p. 290). This uprising is not against a person or group, but rather, "the disorder which both inwardly and outwardly controls and penetrates and poisons and disrupts all human relations and interconnections" (p. 296). What is this disorder? Barth calls them the lordless powers. Put simply, they are things that humans believe they can control, but that, in reality, they cannot. On the contrary, they take control of the individual. He concludes that when people seek to control such forces they not only rebel against God but against themselves. DeCou (2013, p. 171) contends that "The lordless powers become masters over us when we take our merely human achievements too seriously, having taken ourselves too seriously." While DeCou's point is valid, there is something deeper here. The lordless powers grip us in a manner that is not only serious, but which feels all consuming, as if we cannot live without them. Prather (2014) suggests that the lordless powers are humanity's attempt to master God, and in this we find our undoing. When we allow the lordless powers to reign in our life, we give over at least part of our identity to them and, by implication, admit that we would not be fully who we are without them.

Barth then names these powers specifically. This is a diversion for Barth, who did not provide specific case studies in the *Church Dogmatics*. He begins by discussing things such as politics, mammon, and intellectual ideologies before transitioning to the chthonic powers, which occur exclusively on earth. Speaking of the chthonic powers collectively, Barth states that when humans were given dominion of the world, freedom and possibility were present, as long as people continued to serve God. However, when a person "slips out of this service, [they] thereby forfeits the lordship that should be [theirs over the natural forces]" (Barth 2017, p. 319). In doing this, humans seek to achieve their own wants and goals. Barth (p. 320) says it is in this moment that the powers begin to take control:

Still his slaves, they [the forces] now confront him as robots which he himself has to serve, and not without being forced to fear their possible pranks. In satisfying his earlier wants, they fill and excite him with new ones which he never experienced before but which he cannot deny or suppress in view of the enticing possibility of meeting them.

After this brief overview, Barth analyzes four chthonic powers: fashion, sports, pleasure, and transportation. Unlike previous analyses of the specific powers, he only poses questions relating to each category. Throughout his analysis, Barth sounds like an elderly

person bemoaning the nature of social change, complaining about a culture he no longer feels comfortable within. Nevertheless, he poses questions that are legitimate and require consideration.

Barth is quick to castigate sport, describing it as “the playground of a particular earth-spirit” (p. 321). In a statement that echoes his critiques from *CD III.4*, he notes that maintaining a healthy body no longer motivates modern sport. This appears to be a crucial element for Barth because sport risks being an end in itself as opposed to an aid to seeking an active life living out God’s calling. He then moves to four key assertions. First, he states that sport is a “public matter of the first rank” (p. 321), and suggests that it has been this way in ancient and modern times. Second, he suggests that there is an enthusiasm and passion in fandom that is not easily understood. Third, he argues that sport is an industrialized and commercialized venture like any other commodity. Finally, he states that, in his view, people pay attention to sport more than world politics. In the case of all four, Barth’s assertions are posed in a form of a question, seeking to get to the bottom of the issue. These questions challenge sport, but also recognize the place that it has within society. In this there is almost a concession; Barth cannot deny the business element of sport, its popularity, or the amount of attention it gets in the newspapers. At this point, a subtle shift occurs in the critique. Barth begins to probe deeper into the meaning of why sport is so important to many. He asks why people fuss over things such as winning or losing the World Cup, citing how after Brazil’s victory in 1958, Pelé received over two hundred proposals for marriage, and West Germany, finishing fourth, almost fell into an “irritated national mourning” (p. 322)? He then asks what glory, (specifically citing the Greek word *doxa*) is found in winning the Tour de France or Tour de Suisse? He goes on to ask why we, as humans, have the desire to make heroes of people who triumph, either in competition or in achieving some physical feat (such as climbing Mount Eiger)? Barth then goes further asking, who dictates this? Is it primitive or something we control and desire because we want to be like them (sporting heroes)? He concludes by asking what majesty comes from winning a medal at the Olympics? These final questions revolve around the isolation of an individual or team, either by making them into something greater than the rest or adding a majesty to them that was once not present. In all these examples, the individual is lifted up in a manner that is not a part of the created order because they were victorious in competition or an athletic endeavor. This supports DeCou’s (2013) argument that Barth’s concern with culture comes from its anthropocentric nature. Barth admits that there are many riddles and questions around sport, concluding the section saying “It should be obvious that we have here a special form of derangement. Man has lost and continually loses his true majesty” (p. 322). Throughout the *Church Dogmatics* and other works, Barth constantly refers to God’s majesty as something that differentiates the divine from the creation. However, he does not appear to address human majesty to any significant degree in any of his writings. While one may suggest this is the *imago Dei* made manifest in creation, Barth states that Jesus is this divine image and that humans do not carry a special imprint of God within them (see Franke 2006). For now, I would like to suggest that understanding majesty may be connected to Barth’s doctrine of creation and his critique of sport.

Barth understands the human as a covenant partner with God, seen through Jesus Christ. As is consistent throughout Barth’s writing, the Word of God and revelation of Jesus take primacy in understanding who we, as humans, are as creatures. Barth posits that Jesus is for God and for others, and that, in our journey as covenant partners, we too not only live for God and others, but with them as well (See Nimmo 2017). In being elected in Jesus and covenant partners with the divine, humans are called outside themselves to live into the grace of God made manifest in history (Barth [1948] 2010, pp. 165–66). As a result, our acts of freedom are in correspondence with this divine Word and grace. One struggles to see these elements in Barth’s critique of sport. The commodification of the body, the exaltation of the individual (or team) to a form of minor deity, and the hysterical fervor of fandom appear to be in direct conflict with this understanding of creation. All this occurs as sport

becomes bigger than other world events, and a commodity that we struggle to control. For Barth, to engage with sport in a manner that prioritizes it over the command to serve God or journey with one another is to separate ourselves from God, using our freedom to assert dominion over something we ultimately cannot control. In turn, our relationship with one another and the divine are distorted, causing hierarchies and divisions that go against the Kingdom of God. This element is consistent with his critique of competitive games in *CD III.4*, where he notes that sport, when contained to a comparison of skill, is not an issue; but, rather, it is when it becomes an end in itself that problems arise. The disconnect with our call may be a place where our majesty is lost. Barth's critique of sport relies heavily on sport being an end in itself. In this, Barth warns against the individualism or commodification of this act and how it pushes us away from our divine call to be in correspondence with God and one another. However, Barth's critique is also so absolute that it misses the potential benefits of sport when it is not simply a competitive end in itself.

In his assessment of a healthy life in *CD III.4*, Barth points out that to be healthy is not only to be physically active, but to understand who one is as an individual by living out the call given by God, recognizing personal limitations, and engaging with others. All these elements can be found in and through a sporting experience. However, there is no recognition of this in his commentary on sport as a lordless power. Where Barth's approach to sport is lacking is his total rejection of the phenomena in its current form, as opposed to delineating between how one can leverage this activity to remain healthy and engaged with others or the divine. If commodification and the pervasive individualism of many sporting competitions have the potential to decrease our majesty, keeping sport in appropriate perspective only strengthens an individual's understanding of themselves, others, and the call placed on their life by the One who created them. Barth's concerns regarding sport remain valid, but in his hostility toward the activity, he misses an opportunity to affirm sport as an avenue for the active and healthy life previously promoted in his writing.

As Barth concludes his discussion on the lordless powers, he states that these things cannot be overlooked or explained away. He recognizes the difference in the subjects discussed, stating their commonality is that "they do not work for man but against him. In spite of all his dreams and expectations, they bring him no help" (Barth 2017, p. 326). How can we overcome such a power? Barth suggests that we are called to rebel through invocation.

4. Combating the Lordless Powers through Prayer

For Barth, challenging sport and all the other lordless powers begins by invoking God through the Lord's Prayer. Specifically, praying for God's "Kingdom to come" recognizes the limitations of humans in this fight. He contends that we, as humans, cannot combat the powers without the divine for we cannot bring about the Kingdom on our own. Rather than hindering the human, Barth (2017, p. 328) states that this allows us to experience an "authentic freedom" predicated on our correspondence with the divine. Barth understands God's Kingdom as a unique and powerful reality that can alter the world. This transformation occurs through God coming near us in Jesus. Therefore, to pray "Thy kingdom come" is to recognize the unique event that is the divine's Kingdom and its presence in the past in Jesus, the current ability to experience this, and the future reality of the Kingdom to come. This circumstance is not something we fully comprehend or that can be explained, rather we live in this tension.

In his monograph on Barth and prayer, Cocksworth (2015) asserts that Barth believes that a Christian's ethical action is embodied in prayer. Cocksworth argues that invocation is seen through correspondence, meaning the separate yet intertwined nature of the divine and human relationship. This takes place not only through invoking the name of God in prayer, but also in the manner which we, as humans, act and how these actions correspond to God's command. Cocksworth (2015, p. 95) goes on to state that, "Invocation, therefore, can be seen to combine [Barth's] unqualified insistence on the priority of divine agency with the subsequent human participatory response in a mysterious reciprocity of divine and human agencies, united in Christ's own invocation of God as Father". For Cocksworth,

this connection, through invocation, prayer, and correspondence, makes transformation possible. This aligns with Zeigler's (2017) observation of Barth's approach to ethics, specifically in the intertwined nature of divine and human action. Therefore, when we invoke the divine, we are not just compelled to act, but act in a manner that "corresponds to God's action, life and mission" (Cocksworth 2015, p. 114). It is in this alignment with God that the human is able to revolt against the lordless powers.

Barth argues that invocation leads to action, specifically working for human righteousness. Comparing this to God's perfect righteousness, Barth (2017, p. 371) states that because we cannot match this perfection, humans are:

... empowered to do what they can do in the sphere of relative possibilities assigned to them, to do it very imperfectly yet heartily, quietly, and cheerfully. They are absolved from wasting time and energy sighing over the impassable limits of their sphere of action and thus missing the opportunities that present themselves in this sphere.

We may feel the need to be perfect in our witness, to be the individual who is the catalyst for change, who manifests God's righteousness and grace in the space we are called to serve, but that is not possible, and it is not what God expects. Rather, our rebellion against the lordless powers occurs in a manner that is manageable, which infuses Christ's love and God's grace in a space where this is not normative. It is exactly through these little acts of righteousness that Christians witness the hope found in Jesus and invite others to do so as well. Barth (2017, p. 379) calls all Christians to this missionary task, however, it is contextually appropriate in their circumstance by proclaiming:

The experience, however difficult, of hoping seriously, joyously, and actively in little things, of doing the relatively better relatively well, will not only be salutary for them but will drive them truly to great hope, to new prayer that God will take his great step not merely to better but to best: 'Come, Lord Jesus'.

Barth concludes by arguing that the fight against the lordless powers is not something to be carried out alone, nor is it seen in bold or grand gestures. It is done in correspondence with the divine, invoking God, and responding in turn. It is done in an active manner that speaks to the joy we have in God's grace and love. It honors what God has done for us in Jesus and affirms our journey with one another. It proclaims that the greed, power imbalances, cheating, sexism, racism, and individualism seen in our world will one day be no more, when "Thy kingdom come" is not a past or future event, but only the eternal present reality. Christians who participate in sport are called to take part in this rebellion. Through correspondence with the divine, they are able to share the great hope of what can be and will be when God's Kingdom is present, and the lordless powers control us no more.

5. Concluding Thoughts: Toward a Barthian Approach to Sport

On the face of it, Barth's critique of what sport has become in the world is not earth-shattering. One need not look too hard on any sports news website to see stories that should concern us deeply and cause us to push for change and reform. Unfortunately, it feels as though meaningful change rarely occurs before a game or tournament begins, with the concerns previously raised consigned to the background. The notion that this behemoth called sport has become something untamable and that we cannot fully grasp does not need to be further justified. Barth is also not alone in his critique of sport from a Christian perspective (see Higgs 1995; Higgs and Braswell 2004; Hoffman 2010). However, Barth's approach to sport, situated in prayer and correspondence, provides a different lens for Christians to approach their rebellion against this lordless power. While broad, I would like to suggest four areas where a Barthian approach can help shape a Christian relationship with sport.

First, Barth is clear that, for the Christian, sport should not be an end in itself. When Christians make their own athletic performance or fandom a primary aim of existence, they

separate themselves from the God who formed and called them. While Barth takes this to the extreme, he is correct in asserting that the Christian cannot have sport as their primary focus in life. In this, a Christian's life in sport should always be kept in context and not the only facet of an individual's existence. Second, competition should not create minor deities or hierarchies that elevate some at the expense of others. This echoes DeCou's (2013) contention that the anthropocentric nature of culture and, at times, theology, comes at the expense of the Christological focus Barth espouses. As Barth states, how is one's glory or majesty enhanced by winning a race or a medal? There has been much conversation about performance-based identity and the detriment it can have on individuals, particularly in sport (see Amos 2006; Jones et al. 2020; Lipe 2020; Null 2008). Christians affirm that a person's value is not based off what they do, but who created and redeemed them. When we, as Christians, see our own value, or the value of others, in their performance, we feed into this anthropocentric system. Barth challenges us to look behind our desires to raise up others, confronting our limitations, and seeking to live as we were created. One area for further study related to this claim is Barth's explicit reference to the Greek term *doxa* (majesty) in *The Christian Life*. Further analysis of how Barth references the term and how it is used in the Bible would add depth to the conversation surrounding Barth's approach to sport. In these first two points, the Christian is asked to keep sports in some form of perspective. As previously mentioned, Barth states that once the lordless powers have hold of an individual, we are at the mercy of their desires. Participation in sport should not come at the expense of another, be an avenue that glosses over abuse or corruption, and does not have the same priority or importance as the divine call. These elements are present in sport, and Barth calls us to fight them by praying "Thy kingdom come". In this regard, another area for further investigation is how Barth's understanding of *Mitmenschlichkeit* (co-humanity) in the *Church Dogmatics* can influence our understanding of the lordless powers and a Christian response to sports (see McInroy 2011).

Third, a Barthian approach to sport is one in which the Christian is both liberated and empowered through prayer. Barth reminds the reader that it is not our job to be God; only God has the power to transform a situation and bring the Kingdom forward. Rather, when one invokes God, asking that God's Kingdom come, they are reassured of God's drawing near. In this, the believer affirms God's action in Jesus and the promise of what was, is, and one day will be. In this reassurance, those participating in sport are liberated from saving it and empowered to turn toward one another in hope. As a result of this, Christians can speak against a performance-based mindset that states human value is based off of field results or the amount of revenue that is brought in through a team or competition. Christians in sport can be lights who illuminate the darkness of greed and abuse that seeks to gain at the expense of another. They can proclaim that there is something greater than sport that we, as humans, are called to, witnessing to the love of God and fellowship with this being and one another. Prioritizing this witness in sport pushes against the current cultural approach to sport and provides Christians the opportunity to share the mission and love of God with all in their context. It is not easy, but constant turning to God in prayer affirms we are not alone in this fight. Finally, this message of hope is transformational and proclaims that a different way is possible. When we, as Christians, pray "Thy kingdom come", we seek to expose the control and harm brought by this lordless power, rebelling against its grip on society. Through our small actions and witness, we can bring hope to this space, shine a light on its shortcomings, and proclaim the goodness of God which can be experienced by all. In doing so, we not only hope to transform sport, but hope that God will transform us as well.

While brief, Barth's writing on sport provides a unique lens through which to look at the topic. While not overall positive, is not completely negative; rather, Barth seeks to put modern sport in perspective. Primarily, it challenges us to prioritize prayer and recognize that we can be witness to God's love and hope in our context. No one individual can defeat a lordless power or bring God's Kingdom to Earth. However, if we are willing to be faithful in our call and keep sport in perspective, we each have the power to fight

against the plights in sport that separate us from God. By doing so we affirm our hope in the One who can and will redeem all, when God's Kingdom comes forever.

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Notes

¹ As this paper focuses on Barth's relationship with sport, it will not analyze Barth's understanding of play. Allen Guttman (2004) famously differentiated sport and play from one another by commenting on the regulated and competitive nature of sport, whereas play is more spontaneous and open to possibility. While a brief distinction, we will use this to separate the two, with this paper focusing on how Barth understood competitive sport and the larger phenomena of sport we see in our society.

² Additionally referred to as *CD*.

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