KARL BARTH
CENTENARY ESSAYS
Edited by S.W. Sykes
Karl Barth: Centenary Essays
Karl Barth (Photograph by Max Ehlert, reproduced by permission of Camera Press, London)
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A note on the text

Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* will be referred to throughout using the abbreviation *CD* followed by the volume number (in Roman numerals) and the part number (in Arabic numerals). The *Church Dogmatics* is published in the English translation by T. & T. Clark (1936–75). *CD, I/I* is cited in the later (1975) translation.
What can a small collection of essays usefully do to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Karl Barth, the most prolific of all the major theologians of the twentieth century? It plainly cannot do justice to the many-sidedness of his achievement; but it can do something to nudge the contemporary discussion of his significance into the more promising of the available channels. One of the major problems in coming to terms with any great thinker is the speed with which the richness and complexity of the original achievement is replaced by the slogans, the 'isms' or general terms, which serve to 'locate' the phenomenon on some convenient map of the intellectual territory. 'Barthianism' was already notorious in Britain and America in the 1930s; 'dialectical theology' and 'Neo-Orthodoxy' have also lodged themselves as appropriate terms in general histories of the period. Barth himself disliked all these labels; indeed, like Kierkegaard before him, he disliked the very thought of having produced disciples. But it is precisely Barthianism that has become the major obstacle to the intelligent discussion of Karl Barth.

The essays in this volume are all concerned with the kind of dialogue with other systems of thought which would prevent in-house sterility in the debate about Barth. Professor Dalferth insists that Barth must be understood as a kind of philosophical realist, and thus keeps open a debate about Barth's relationship to contemporary philosophy which at
least some have all-too-prematurely wanted to close. Barth’s attempt to express how the Christian religion understands itself is, so Dalferth argues, capable of quite reasonable defence. If there be such a subject as ‘the philosophy of religion’, it is surely not in a position to conduct its investigations on the assumption that philosophy itself may – or even must – predetermine the nature of ‘religion’. A significant area of conversation between Karl Barth and the modern development of religious studies is thus also opened up. Professor Gunton seeks to show the way in which Barth responds to the Enlightenment challenge to nourish the sources of human autonomy, and defends the view that Barth’s thought is fundamentally respectful of human freedom. This essay offers important criticisms of Barth’s doctrine of God, and thus keeps a dialogue open with Barth’s sterner critics who have frequently objected to the apparent obliteration from his theology of the reality of human experience; but it does so in a way which refuses the alternative, ‘enlightened autonomy’ or Barthianism.

My essay and Professor Rosato’s are concerned with the dialogue with Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholics have been notably prominent in positive appreciation for Barth, as have certain Anglicans of Anglo-Catholic background. Why should that be the case? The obvious reason is that Barth picked up Calvin’s insistence on the contemporary authority of God speaking in the Church through ministers of the Word and Sacraments. The question arises how that is to be related to the modern problem of ‘managing’ a large ecclesiastical organisation; a dialogue is needed with the church’s temperamental authoritarians. Moreover, as Professor Rosato shows, one can very easily develop replies to the questions which Barth posed of the theology of Vatican II, replies which must be taken into account by the Protestants among Barth’s modern admirers. Both essays have, therefore, in mind a dialogue between Barth and contemporary ecumenism.
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Dr Roberts has addressed himself to the socio-cultural elucidation of the role of Barth’s theology in Anglo-Saxon territories. Here again is a dialogue in danger of being cut short by superficial remarks on 'post-War Barthian pessimism'. From an exceptionally thorough review of the literature, he has excavated some deeply embarrassing expressions of English self-satisfaction, and by drawing attention to the independent importance of the Barth of The Epistle to the Romans, he has added considerable complexity to our picture of Barth’s reception in the English-speaking world.

That these are among the more profitable channels for any future consideration of Barth’s significance is the claim of this collection, a claim which must plainly at the same time disclaim any completeness. There are questions here which are either being developed or deserve to be developed, and none of them ought to lead into a sterile confrontation between Barthian disciples and the rest.

Yet in continuing to insist that Karl Barth’s thought must be gone through, not bypassed, as does Dr Roberts, following John Bailie of twenty-five years earlier, the authors undoubtedly run the risk of being corporately classified as Barthians. There is, indeed, a serious question here, which arises not least because Barth himself adopted a stance of confrontation among his own contemporaries, and with respect to a venerable tradition of philosophy. Barth’s view of reality constitutes, he believes, an attack on our common understanding. As Professor Dalferth remarks: ‘What we take to be concrete, he calls abstract, and what to us looks at best highly improbable to him is the surest of realities.’ It is reasonable to ask whether Barth himself does not invite his readers to similar confrontational exercises, to declaring ourselves either to be for him or against him, either to see through his spectacles or not at all.

There is a psychological dimension to this question of which one must take stock before passing to more fundamental matters. One can quite simply be put off Barth by the tone he
adopts: Wittgenstein, to whom some passages were read in 1930, remarked: 'The only impression I get is one of great arrogance.' Hans Frei has written with great perception of the need for distance from Barth, as a prerequisite for a proper critical account of his complexity. A complicated person, and 'not always genial in his personal relations', Barth was forceful and single-minded in his views, driving 'toward a logic of extremes' which would often be 'simultaneous and mutually contradictory'. He could be 'frustratingly, even infuriatingly contrary and stubborn', a man for whom 'overt force of character and the exercise of vocation, rather than internal self-consciousness, self-probing or the tensions of 'self-transcendence' were the hall-marks of being human and of his own humanity'. Even long-held friendships went sour on him, and he was forced to adopt self-irony as a protection against the impact on others of his forcefulness. Barth tried to exorcise his demons 'by mocking them either in deliberate exaggeration or in transparently, tongue-in-cheek denial'; but, Frei remarks, 'ritual exorcism by humor all too often reaffirms the tenant rights of the very demons seemingly expelled, especially in the case of forceful personalities'.

The psychological issue is only important because, and in so far as, it obtrudes itself upon the pages of Barth which we read. Two examples among a host which could be cited must suffice. The first is the correspondence which the 37-year-old Barth had with the most distinguished German Protestant Church historian of the day, the 75-year-old Adolf von Harnack. Despite the fact that this was one dispute which did not issue in open personal rupture, one cannot read Barth's excessively prolix contributions to the debate without a profound sense that he had no intention of clarifying Harnack's position with a view to elucidating its weakness. Rather the episode is one in which a few brief slogans serve as a foil for the extensive exhibition of Barth's own viewpoint. Harnack speaks for modern readers when he complains at one point: 'I miss a succinct answer.'
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The second example – one of many which could be taken from the *Church Dogmatics* – is found in the development of the fundamental presupposition for a Christology. Here, after a passage in which Barth discusses the charge of intellectualism brought against patristic Christology, he affirms that ‘modern Christology’ has committed the unpardonable error of attempting to inquire into the statement, ‘Jesus Christ is very God and very Man’, and thus has transmuted it into something devoid of mystery. In so doing it has, he asserts, made impossible not merely any understanding, but even any discussion between modern and primitive Christology. Here, the ‘logic of extremes’ has insisted on turning what is undeniably serious disagreement into a presuppositional matter, in the end an epistemological question apparently only settled by irrevocable decision.

Both of these examples concern, in the end, the status and relevance of historical study for Christian theology. Barth’s self-admitted lack of interest in the biblical historians of his own day looks, from our perspective, deeply puzzling. But, as Dr Roberts is at pains to insist in his contribution, a political interpretation of theology is essential, not so as to render harmless the position for which Barth was contending, but, on the contrary, in order to understand it at some human depth. Barth himself later wrote that his encounter with Harnack was only explicable if one took into account the problems of ‘the roaring twenties’. We trivialise the imperatives that drove Barth into confrontational attitudes if we refuse to take seriously the social and political extremities confronting European civilisations in those fateful years; not least because of the unresolved continuities between those times and our own.

Much more could be said about the psychologically alienating character of so much of Barth’s work. To have acknowledged it is by no means to have transcended it; but at least it is important to say, even on an anniversary, that one does not necessarily like the man revealed in the writing. To clear
this minor hurdle from the scenery is merely to confront all
the more starkly the issue of faith with which Barth confronts
us. We may do this obliquely by means of a quotation from
manuscript material left by Ludwig Wittgenstein after his
death:

What inclines even me to believe in Christ’s Resurrection? It is as
though I play with the thought. – If he did not rise from the dead,
then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. He is dead and
decomposed. In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no
longer help; and once more we are orphaned and alone. So we have
to content ourselves with wisdom and speculation. We are in a sort
of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and
cut off from heaven. But if I am to be REALLY saved, – what I need
is certainty – not wisdom, dreams or speculation – and this certainty
is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my heart, and my soul,
not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions,
as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my
abstract mind. Perhaps we can say: Only love can believe the Resur-
rection. Or: It is love that believes the Resurrection. We might say:
Redeeming love believes even in the Resurrection; holds fast even to
the Resurrection. What combats doubt is, as it were, redemption.
Holding fast to this must be holding fast to that belief. So what that
means is, first you must be redeemed and hold on to your redemption
(keep hold of your redemption) – then you will see that you are
holding fast to this belief. So this can come about only if you no longer
rest your weight on the earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then
everything will be different and it will be ‘no wonder’ if you can do
things that you cannot do now. (A man who is suspended looks the
same as one who is standing, but the interplay of forces within him
is nevertheless quite different, so that he can act quite differently than
can a standing man.)

This fragment is dated 1937; that is, it falls between the Trac-
tatus (of 1921–2) and the completion in 1945 of part one of the
Philosophical Investigations. The passage was only published
in 1980, together with a preface which warns readers against
separating the notes from Wittgenstein’s philosophy as a
whole. Plainly the fact that Wittgenstein himself did not
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publish it, and the exploratory character of many of the other passages, imply that it can only be used with the utmost caution as an adequate expression of Wittgenstein’s own viewpoint. I quote it however for its value in reminding us that we must by no means isolate Barth from the universitas litterarum of the inter-war years.

In general it must be remarked that it makes no sense of any major theologian of consequence to present his thought as simply the antithesis of whatever might happen to be the dominant canons of rationality of his day. Karl Barth has repeatedly been written up as though he embodied all that contemporary philosophy despised or ignored, and he was himself at least partly responsible for this tendency. The piece entitled 'Philosophy and theology', contributed in 1960 to the Festschrift for his younger brother, Heinrich, contains one of the most uncompromising expressions of an undeniable theme of his, Karl's, lifelong battle with philosophers; namely, that there is not just a tension, but a separation and contradiction between the starting-points of philosophers and theologians. The whole piece is written, it must be said, in self-conscious commentary on Kant's equally blunt depiction of contradictory commitments in his Conflict of the Faculties, where theology and philosophy (here meaning the whole of the humanities) are vividly presented as engaged in a struggle for precedence. This late essay of Barth's is not, I believe, Barth at his best. A much more subtle relationship between philosophy and theology is sketched in the earlier piece, 'Fate and Idea in Theology' (1929), and it is to this essay that Professor Dalferth turns in his argument that Barth is, philosophically speaking, discernibly a type of realist.

What is certain is that Barth did not believe it possible to defend the rationality of theology by any kind of sceptical or relativistic manoeuvre. In referring to Wittgenstein as an important factor in understanding why it is that Barth presents himself today as a more interesting and credible theologian
than he may have seemed in the 1950s and 1960s, it is important to be clear that we are not endorsing the so-called 'Wittgensteinian fideism' which made its appearance in the latter part of the 1960s. That discussion now appears to have been but the opening round of a persisting set of inquiries in both the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of the social sciences about the necessity, limits and dangers in understanding a religion or culture 'from within'. These developments make it possible for a rigorously modern-minded theologian at least to re-examine *in meliorem partem* Barth's defence of the autonomous character of a theology inseparable from prayer and Christian existence.

The same considerations bear upon the modern interest in narrative, whose range of applications includes not merely the domain of literary criticism but also historiography, sociology, social anthropology and psychology. As Dr Roberts points out, there are difficulties in the deployment of this category in theology. Moreover, theological interest in the nature and function of myth long precedes Barth's theological labours. But it must be observed that when Barth uses the term 'framework' to speak of the story of the covenant between God and humanity, he is using one of the terms which Wittgenstein deploys in reflections upon foundational presuppositions or the scaffolding of our thoughts. The Kierkegaardian reflections on certainty and faith contained in the extract above culminate in the vivid image of a person suspended from above, in whom the interplay of forces (*Kräftespiel*) is quite different (*ganz anderes*) from those within someone who is standing. The entry into, and embracing of the Christian narrative, is precisely that recontextualisation of the whole of life, which makes of every part of it a potential sacrifice of praise.

Although Wittgenstein was highly esteemed, his influence was by no means dominant even in English philosophy, and still less in America, apart from certain pockets. Kierkegaard was respected more in literary than in philosophical circles.
For English-language theology to be receptive to Barth required something of a revolution in attitude, since to a very large extent theology had traditionally validated itself at the bar of historiography and scientific methodology. The former it had done persistently and not without success in biblical and patristic research; the latter, in the long succession of natural theologians and scientific metaphysicians which continued to the days of C. E. Raven and A. N. Whitehead. Against such a background, it was irresistible to present Barth as the complete antithesis, a theologian who valued neither historical criticism nor natural theology; and this was how he was initially perceived and to a large extent dismissed. T. F. Torrance's heroic and sustained dissent from this early negative reaction, though it challenged the verdict, nonetheless appealed to the same procedures of validation. Barth was represented as a theologian of nature (not a natural theologian), whose methodology is consistent with modern scientific method. Torrance has been at pains, therefore, to re-educate the theological world in 'the new scientific view of the universe' which is no longer that of a closed continuum of cause and effect, but a radically contingent or created reality. The fruitfulness of this approach is by no means clear if for no other reason than that theologians are, regrettably, generally not well enough informed about the present state of cosmological theory.

The change of climate which has enabled Barth to be reheard in contemporary Anglo-Saxon theology is the result of the rise to prominence of the debate about the status of the social sciences. To this debate Wittgenstein was early perceived as having made a highly significant contribution, and the anti-positivist strand in his thought has been sustained in a variety of subsequent contributions. It is still possible to hold that we might want to penetrate a particular culture or religious stance in its own terms, and not thereby commit ourselves to moral relativism, nor to a standpoint of Olympian detachment, as
though we were already in secure possession of the key concept with which to interpret what we find. On the contrary, we could take seriously the self-understanding of agents in another culture precisely because we were anxious to make intelligible the contrasts between their thoughts, practices and ways of living, and ours, holding both to be in principle corrigible.20

On this account Barth is important to us precisely because his utterly serious attempt to interpret Christian faith from the inside had such a profound effect in modern European Christianity. He resolutely refused to admit that his participation in the culture of his day required any curtailment of the standpoint of a practising Christian within a specific church. On the basis of the still lively argument about other cultures, no matter at what distance we may stand from Barth’s own viewpoint, the cheerful and confident Christianity for which he contends is at least interesting. It presents, in words which one sceptical British philosopher employed about a work of Helmut Gollwitzer, a friend and colleague of Barth’s, ‘a faith worth disbelieving in’.

On this account, we find also ourselves able to respond to Barth without feeling the necessity of yielding to the demand that we either embrace or reject him as a whole. This is to take seriously his own denial that his thought constitutes a system, and to see him, as he requested, as providing advice (consilium), which may be to some degree (aliquatenus) faithful to its object.21 To what degree it is for us to decide, confident that both his and our views of the matter are in principle corrigible.22

One correction of a Barthian trait follows from this argument. However justified Barth may have been in declining to concern himself with the historical–critical research of his day, the sociological and social-anthropological directions of modern biblical scholarship are another matter. Resistance might be well grounded so long as the goal of research was
thought to be the excavation of the most primitive, or indeed original traditions behind the text of the Gospels, on the questionable assumption that what was hypothetically reconstructed was, nonetheless, potentially more authoritative than the text itself. It is not necessary to deny that there is an important task for historical inquiry in order to perceive the limitations of this proposal. Historical research is necessary to the Christian faith because issues of fact are relevant to the truth-claims about Jesus; his story is, in principle, falsifiable. But it does not follow from this that the conjectural reconstruction of ‘what actually happened’ is the most authoritative source for Christian faith, nor that the earliest responses to Jesus are the most profound. Barth had every reason to question or even to ignore the deliverances of research implicitly conducted on this understanding.

The same complaint, however, cannot be pressed against inquiries designed to redescribe the social world of early Christians. Such research attempts to interpret the Christian as an agent in a particular time and place, but subject to perceptible constraints. It does not abstract the history from the thought, nor the thought from history, and it takes with full seriousness the task of the Christian as communicator in a symbolic world. Its relevance to contemporary thought is indirect, and its attitude towards the text is respectful, because the text is both evidence for a particular social world, and constructs a world of meaning. In the long run, for a Christian theologian to refuse to be interested in what happened in the first century would be to adopt a docetic Christology. The choice in practice is only between unreflective imaginative reconstructions of the past, and educated ones. In presenting the reason why the reading of Karl Barth has become more interesting in contemporary theology, we are compelled substantially to challenge at least one feature of the conventional profile of the Barthian.
NOTES

1 See below, p. 28.
8 *CD*, 1/2, p. 132.
9 In a personal letter to H.-Martin Rumscheidt; see *Revelation and Theology*, p. 204.
14 The potential of this theme for fruitful deployment in every branch of the study of human action is best exhibited in Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (London, Duckworth, 1981).
15 It should be noted that a clear and important distinction has been drawn between the significance of story as 'raw material' for theology, and the project of so-called narrative theology, by Dietrich Ritschl in 'Story' als Rohmaterial der Theologie (Munich, Kaiser, 1976), esp. pp. 38–41.
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16 CD, II/2, p. 136.
22 I have attempted to locate these considerations in Barth's thought in *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London, SPCK, 1984), pp. 196–208.
The title of this piece, 'Karl Barth's eschatological realism', is a deliberate mixture of theological and philosophical vocabulary. It is an intentional way of provoking response to the scandalous character of Barth's position. He is, I shall argue, an unashamed realist. He believes eschatological realism to be the only theological position worth defending. And he defends it by expounding rather than by justifying it. In a world which increasingly views Christian faith and theology with condescension or even contempt, he made it perfectly clear that the job that really wants doing is to expound the Christian faith rather than to justify it; or, in any case, that the justification required is identical with exposition. For him to do theology, not to justify doing theology is the prime task of a church theologian as he wanted to be. And the exceptional single-mindedness with which he pursued this task is the secret of the monumental theological achievement of this 'God-intoxicated man', as he has been described, who started his career as a theological enfant terrible and ended as being proclaimed the Church father of the twentieth century. Thus what I propose to do in this chapter is to make as explicit as possible the scandalous nature of his theology and the continuous challenge which it poses to most of our ways of doing theology.

When Barth entered the theological scene in 1919 with his
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Epistle to the Romans he shocked the contemporary world of theological liberalism and historically minded religious idealism by contradicting virtually everything in which it believed. For him it was a fraud to base Christian theology on either a historical and comparative approach to religion which claimed Christianity to be the queen amongst religions, or else on private value-judgement, personal decision, or inner experience of the autonomous subject which, as he saw it, turned Christian faith into a matter of taste or distaste. The bankruptcy of these sorts of theology which, in various ways, had made their peace with modern culture he saw as having been revealed by the way in which many of their leading exponents reacted to the First World War. Their support of the military aggression in 1914 for him was proof that theology of this sort lacked nothing — except a backbone and a basis in reality. It had, as it were, gone culturally native and lost its capability of critical theological judgement by concentrating not on God but on our constructions of God out of our (religious) experiences.

With the latter criticism Barth was no doubt in line with the widespread realist revolt against the prevailing idealism of the time. But it was a very peculiar sort of realism which he championed throughout his long career, and which increasingly isolated him from other brands of theological realism as much as from the theological idealism and historicism against which he reacted. It is this peculiar realism which this chapter explores. In the first part I shall try to show (1) that Barth holds a realist position; (2) that he is what I call an eschatological realist; and (3) how he relates his eschatological realism to our common experience and intersubjective reality. In the second part, I shall then try to place his theology within the development of Protestant theology since the Reformation and analyse, briefly and no doubt superficially, its internal structure and theological method.
Ingolf U. Dalferth

THE REALISM OF KARL BARTH

There are many understandings of ‘realism’, not all of which are relevant to the sense of the term as it is used here. For the purpose of our discussion I shall describe a realist position as comprising (versions of) the following three ontological, semantical, and epistemological tenets.4

1 Ontologically, the realist holds that there is a reality independent of the human mind and our social constructions of reality. Although we have access to the world only in and through our symbolic — and as such socially determined — constructions there is more to the world than our ways of world-making. Reality exists independently of, and is more complex than, even our most elaborate symbolic representations of it.5

2 Semantically, the realist holds that truth is not to be reduced to verifiability. The contextuality of our theories does not deprive our descriptive vocabulary of its referential status or deny that our terms can be co-referential across theories. We may correctly refer and yet be radically mistaken as to the nature of that to which we refer. To be a realist about reference does not contradict being a relativist about referential terms or a ‘fallibilist’ about knowledge of the referent.6 Similarly our assertions about such referents may be true independently of our ability to show them to be true. This is not to claim that it is words which refer and language which mirrors the world, but that it is speakers using words who refer and thus more or less adequately mirror the world.7 We may be in error but that is the risk of attempting to state the truth and the reason for aiming at improving our grasp of the truth. And although there may be as many true constructions of reality as we are, to ‘grant that there is more than one true version of reality is not to deny that some versions are false’.8

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3 Epistemologically, the realist holds that the reality to which we refer and about which we speak in our theories may at least approximately be known as it truly is. This is not to say that we can dispense with theoretical contexts and frameworks of categorical assumptions or that our theories will ever adequately describe the world. But precisely because the world informs our theories, we can truly know without having to claim our knowledge to be immune to revision. We possess real knowledge, not only of observational regularities (as positivist empiricism has claimed), but also of underlying structures to which our theoretical terms refer and which may never be susceptible to direct observation,9 to say nothing of personal knowledge and of the self-knowledge that grounds and centres all other knowledge and which is not based on observation at all. However, all this is only possible because reality is intelligible, that is, disclosed in a way that allows us to reconstruct it symbolically. Thus the intelligibility of reality is the objective ground for our ability conceptually to reconstruct it.

Now if we accept this necessarily crude exposition of realism, it is hard to deny, and has elsewhere been shown,10 that Barth is a thoroughgoing realist. He holds all three tenets of realism which I have outlined:

1 Ontologically, it is beyond doubt for Barth that in theology we do not talk about a private or a social fiction but about a reality which precedes everything we say about it and which cannot be exhausted by anything we can say about it. God’s saving action in Jesus Christ is true independently of our believing or not believing it.

2 Semantically, for him theological statements – for example about the inner life of the Trinity – ‘refer, to inaccessible entities, and . . . are true and meaningful (if, indeed, they
are true or meaningful) solely in virtue of that reference, independently of any experiences that we might have or means of verification that we might employ.\textsuperscript{11} The reference is grounded in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and safeguarded by the continuous teaching of the Church through the centuries, and the historical chain of reference-preserving links leading back to the beginnings of the Christian faith as documented in the New Testament. Thus the context for the referential claims of theology is the Christian community, its interpretative tradition, and its range of experience far exceeding the experience of the individual theologian or Christian. Yet to be realist about reference is for Barth not to claim infallible knowledge about the referent. Theological discourse is 'reality depicting'\textsuperscript{12} without purporting to be directly descriptive. It claims to represent inaccessible reality, but it does so without claiming to be representationally privileged. There is no propositional security in theology: 'Dogmatic propositions, dogmas, and dogma have this in common: They are not the truth of revelation. Dogma aims at the truth of revelation and dogmas and dogmatic propositions seek to do so (and do, with the proviso that by the grace of God they come to do so through watching and prayer).\textsuperscript{13}

3. Finally, in his major methodological treatise \textit{Fides Quaerens Intellectum}, Barth wholeheartedly endorses the epistemological thesis that we have real knowledge of the object of faith, but that the object is determinative of the knowledge, not vice versa. The ontic necessity and rationality of the object of faith, as he calls it, has priority over the corresponding noetic necessity and rationality of our understanding the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{14}

This is the epistemological premise of his massive \textit{Church Dogmatics} which after thirty-seven years and some 9,600
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pages in print remained a torso. In theology, we have to start from what is and try to understand how it can be as it is, and not from a transcendental analysis of what for us can be. It is the methodological procedures of scientific inquiry, not of philosophical reflection, which Barth accepts as his model for theological method. Faith and the revelation of God are the data from which he starts and whose inner rationality he seeks to elucidate in terms of the axiom of possibility by reconstructing the grounds of the possibility of the factuality of revelation and faith: given the fact that God has revealed himself, how is he to be thought of as being able to reveal himself? And given the fact of faith, how is it possible for us to have faith? Of course, God's revelation is not a public datum like the cat on the mat. It is given only in the mode of human testimony to it and thus accessible to theology only through the Church's credo and a careful listening to the witness of Scripture. But it is not identical with any scriptural formulations or credal propositions: the Word of God, to which Scripture testifies, cannot be identified with any frail human attempt to comprehend it.

And here we come to the heart of Barth's realism. He does not simply rely on what Putnam has called the 'linguistic division of labor', that is, on authoritative members of the Christian community, e.g. the Apostles, to ground the referring expressions of theology. No human authority is reliable enough to do this. There is only one authority trustworthy enough: Christ himself. He grounds the reference of Christian talk of God, logos, spirit, revelation, faith, life, and everything else. And he does so not as the Jewish rabbi who died long ago, but as the risen Lord who is alive and present now. For, as Barth puts it: 'wherever men really speak really of God' they do so because 'Jesus Christ in the power of His resurrection is present.'

Thus Barth is not merely a theological realist. He is a realist of a very special kind. It is to a closer examination of this that I now turn in the second step of my argument.
Barth’s theological realism is a decidedly eschatological realism. That ‘Christianity which is not entirely and completely eschatology . . . is entirely and completely contrary to Christ’,\textsuperscript{17} he had learned from the remarkable historian of the early church, Franz Overbeck (1837–1905)\textsuperscript{18}. This sceptical patristic scholar had acutely criticised modern Christianity and its attempts to harmonise Christian faith and modern culture as being totally incompatible with the original Christian faith. In the light of Christ’s resurrection, which they regarded as the beginning and the promise of a general resurrection, the first Christians expected the present world-order to be doomed to imminent annihilation and sharply contrasted the old reality and the new of the coming kingdom of God. Overbeck saw no way of overcoming this incompatibility in that either we remain Christian and thus must shut ourselves off from the modern world, or we live in this world and so cannot remain Christian. But Barth, on the other hand, had learned from Kutter, Beck and – above all – from the two Blumhardts,\textsuperscript{19} that it is possible to be true to the eschatological nature of the Christian faith without leaving or ignoring this world. ‘Jesus is victor’ – this motto of the Blumhardts he accepted to be the starting-point and guiding principle of all Christian existence and theology. Accordingly, the reality with which theology must deal, is ‘the reality of the risen and living Jesus himself, acting and speaking as a distinctive factor no less actual today than yesterday’.\textsuperscript{20} It is the reality of the resurrection in which the eschatological kingdom of God became manifest and which, in the proclamation of the gospel, continually represents itself by the power of the Spirit.

‘We are here facing the fundamental challenge of Barth’s theology, his assertion that there is this extraordinary reality, the risen Christ, whose presence is endlessly rich and fruitful for understanding and for all of life.’\textsuperscript{21} From the publication of
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his *Epistle to the Romans* in 1919 to the very end of his life, Barth did not waver on this fundamental point: the reality to which theology refers is the eschatological reality of the risen Christ and the new life into which we are drawn by the Spirit. To state this clearly and to work out its implications was his main concern, as is shown by a number of characteristic features of his theology of which two will be mentioned here.

In the first place it follows from this that theology refers not to a reality past but a reality present—present, however, neither in the sense of a historical past remembered by us, nor in the sense of a permanent presence of timeless eternity. Rather, it is the personal presence of the risen Christ, the revelation of God's love towards us, who freely makes himself present to us through the Spirit by interrupting the continuities of our life and calling us into community with the living God. It is a presence, as Barth put it in the *Epistle to the Romans*, 'in which God encounters us not as something over against us but immediately and creatively, in which we not only see, but are seen, not only understand, but are understood, not only comprehend, but are comprehended.'

In short, it is the presence of Christ communicating with us in which we come to know God and not merely something about God. Secondly, the epistemological model of theological knowledge true to this personal co-presence of the risen Christ with us is not knowledge by description but knowledge by acquaintance, not propositional knowledge based on the authority of the Church's teaching but personal participation in God's self-communication which precedes and grounds all human testimony and teaching. There is no knowledge of God worthy of the name that is not provoked by God making himself present to us. And the same is true of knowledge of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not an author of books. He communicated his message of the coming kingdom of God directly in situations of co-presence with his audiences, using parables 'to show the nearness of God and incite the hearer to decide for
God'. This communicative structure of his message is the clue to its proper understanding: God has come close, he is present and wants everyone to become aware of his presence. Precisely this situation of direct communication is continued by the Spirit after Jesus' death and resurrection when the medium itself became the message. Accordingly, true knowledge of God and Christ is rooted in the power of the resurrection and results from being drawn into the eschatological presence of God by the power of the Spirit. This is the reality to which all theology refers.

Now it is far from self-evident that this is a reality at all. Viewed in the light of our common understanding of the world the eschatological reality of the resurrection, on which Barth bases the whole of theology, is something 'positively not-given' and cannot be inferred from anything given in our mundane experience. But precisely what appears to be most unlikely if not downright impossible according to our common understanding of reality is — as Barth puts it — the 'real reality', i.e. the reality which determines what is to be counted as real and what isn’t. The eschatological reality of the resurrection which Christians confess in the Credo has ontological and criteriological priority over the experiential reality which we all share. The truth-claims of the Christian faith are the standards by which we are to judge what is real, not vice versa.

This is not quite the common-sense approach to the problem. In fact, it constitutes a massive and conscious contradiction to everything thought epistemologically acceptable in the light of the post-Enlightenment restriction of meaningful truth-claims to the formal truths of logic and mathematics and the empirical truths of science and history. In the critical post-Enlightenment atmosphere, the long realist tradition in theology from Augustine to Hegel had foundered and came to be replaced by anti-realist theologies such as Schleiermacher's. If, as Schleiermacher had argued, the Christian faith is to be understood as
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a specific determination of the feeling of absolute dependence and thus a particular historical type of the religious self-expression of pious self-consciousness, then in theology we do not talk about, say, God, but about the Christian experience of God. Every theological statement has to be construed in terms of the self-expression of Christian consciousness, and whatever doctrine falls outside the range of possible Christian experience (such as the Trinity) is to be rejected. This amounts to no less than saying that theological discourse fails to refer, because all it does is to spell out in a systematic way the content of non-transparent or opaque expressions of the Christian consciousness. For example, it unfolds not the fact that Christ has risen, but that Christians believe Christ to have risen, and it explains this belief in terms of the particular religious experience of the Christian community. This momentous change of theological perspective from Christ to Christian faith in Christ is clearly signalled by the title of Schleiermacher's systematic theology which is called not a dogmatics but an exposition of The Christian Faith.

It is this whole approach which Barth uncompromisingly rejects. In theology we attempt to say something about God, not merely about human experiences of God. Therefore theology has to construe Christian discourse as being referentially transparent. That is, for Barth the that-clause in the sentence 'Christians believe that Christ is risen from the dead', is to be interpreted extensionally, not intensionally. We may validly infer by existential generalisation that someone has risen from the dead. And we may substitute other expressions for 'Christ' such as 'son of God' or 'lord' referring to the same person without changing the truth-value of this sentence. Of course, we may be wrong and this possibility of being in error is the risk the Christian realist takes. But if it is true at all, we cannot be mistaken about that to which we refer, although we may be mistaken in our articulations of it. Christian discourse is reality-depicting without claiming to be
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directly descriptive. Barth's theology reflects both sides of this.

To some, this has looked like a return to a naive pre-Enlightenment orthodoxy. But it is not. In an important essay in 1929, Barth has attempted to spell out the difference between his position and traditional versions not only of Neo-Protestant idealism but also of old-Protestant realism. Like the latter, he is realist about the reference of Christian talk of God. But he differs from it in his account of the anchorage of this reference. In theology, according to Barth, we do not assume the 'subjective or objective reality' of God. We do not use the term 'God' to refer to something given in 'our outer or inner experience', an aspect or dimension of the objective empirical or historical reality over against us or the subjective reality of ourselves as cognitive, moral and religious subjects. Barth's position is more subtle and transcends the common alternatives of theological objectivism and theological subjectivism in which he believes theology has become trapped. When we talk of God, we refer not to a reality coextensive with nature, history, or human experience, but to 'the truth in reality', not to what is given in or can be inferred from the given realities of our actual world, but to the true or real reality utterly beyond anything accessible to us by experience and reflection.

It is this combination of a strictly referential account of the language of faith with an explicit rejection of both realist (i.e. metaphysical or empirical), and idealist (i.e. empiricist or historicist) accounts of reality which is characteristic of Barth's theology. It not only marks it off from most other theologies of his time but also accounts for many of the peculiarities of his position. The following examples illustrate the point:

1 It explains the 'hermeneutics of contemporaneousness' which he practised in his exegetical work to the dismay of
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professional biblical scholars because it allowed him to take his place alongside the biblical witnesses and not in the position of an onlooker.

2 It explains why he became so 'terribly indifferent' to 'historical questions' and refused to grant any specific theological significance to the historico-critical approach to Scriptures. Instead he engaged in a realist reading of the biblical narratives and produced, especially in the later volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*, one of the most sustained narrative theologies that has appeared to this day.

3 It explains why Barth's theology is so ill-disposed towards the working out of a conceptually clear-cut dogmatic system. He did not build layer upon layer but continually attempted 'to begin once more with the beginning'. Thus his theology is full of revisions and discontinuities without, however, impairing the even greater continuity of its fundamental orientation.

4 It explains why Barth rejects every theology whose main concern is to answer problems posed by natural reality and our shared human experience instead of expounding the reality of God's revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5 It explains the strong christocentric bias of Barth's theology. For a theology which is as strictly keyed to the eschatological reality of the risen Christ as is Barth's, there are in principle two, and only two, closely related ways to proceed: either it starts from the second article and is worked out in christological terms, or it starts from the third article and is worked out in terms of the doctrine of the Spirit. Barth took the first approach mainly for two reasons: on the one hand, Christology, unlike the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, has a highly developed doctrinal structure which provided him with conceptual models for the working out of his theology; on the other hand, the doctrine of the Spirit had been compromised by idealist
philosophers and theologians who, as Barth saw it, had turned it into a thinly disguised theological anthropology. However, as is shown by his permanent wrestling with Schleiermacher, he was never fully decided on the question whether taking the Holy Spirit as a starting-point might not be the more effective way of working out a theology true to the eschatological reality of the resurrection.31

The upshot of all this is that Barth claimed every time and every person to be immediate to the eschatological reality but unable to grasp it unless the Spirit opens his or her eyes to the final revelation of God in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. This basic conviction made him extraordinarily sensitive to and critical of all other religious, ideological or political claims to immediacy and revelation and explains the uncompromising clear-sightedness of his theology during the Nazi régime. It also allowed him, undisturbed by historical distance, to work out his dogmatics in direct dialogue with Scripture and theologians of all times which resulted in a 'magnificent grasp and representation of materials drawn from the Christian tradition',32 and which made his dogmatics one of the most significant ecumenical achievements of an individual theologian in our century.

To sum up, Barth is a realist who construes theological discourse to refer not to what is given in, with and under our experiential reality, but to that which is not in our normal reality given, i.e. the eschatological reality of the risen Christ. But, so his critics asked, does this not amount to 'a total disjunction and alienation of his theology from natural reality'33 and the wider fabric of religious, scientific, social and economic relations? How is what he calls 'reality' related to 'the texture of reality as normally experienced'?34 To be sure, during the twenties, in the high time of what has come to be called 'dialectical theology' or 'theology of crisis', Barth revelled

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in stressing the radical difference and utter contrast between the eschatological reality of God and the natural reality of our world. But even that was only one side of a two-sided coin. As time passed, and as the demands of situations changed, the emphasis though not the fundamental orientation of Barth's theology changed correspondingly. This became obvious when, in the late twenties, he began his monumental dogmatic attempt to work out in detail the theme of the presence of the risen Christ and his relation to the world in general. To this I turn next.

Reality and the real

Barth calls the eschatological reality of God's saving action in his revelation the 'real reality', the Word of God the 'concrete reality' (concretum), and Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, the 'most concrete reality' (concretissimum). This is to be taken literally. Compared to this most concrete reality everything else is at best abstract reality, that is, reality abstracted from this most concrete reality. It is held, as Barth puts it, by God and 'by him alone above the abyss of non-existence . . . It is real in so far as He wills and posits it as real'. That is to say, it would not even be abstract reality, if it were not an abstractable dimension of the only concrete reality there is: the coming of God in the particular history of Jesus Christ in which, by the power of the Spirit, we are all integrated so that this particular history is the pre-history and post-history of all our individual lives. We exist abstractly if we ignore this concrete eschatological context to which our lives owe their reality. Precisely by concentrating on this concrete reality of God's eschatological coming in Christ and by expounding it as the basis and frame of all reality is theology realist.

Now this view of reality is quite a claim. It is – in Barth's own words – an 'attack' on our common understanding of
realities. What we take to be concrete, he calls abstract, and what to us looks at best highly improbable, to him is the surest of realities. This — by common standards — blatant act of standing facts on their heads has been diagnosed as Barth's undigested platonism or theological positivism. But this does not go to the heart of the matter. Barth 'takes up an exposed position minimally supported by the prevailing culture and maximally in agreement with mainstream Christianity', by attempting a thoroughgoing reconstruction of the relation of God's eschatological self-presentation of Christ to our common reality in terms of the central doctrine of classical Christology, the doctrine of the **hypostatic union**. The use of this Christological model as an ontological paradigm is the clue to his conception of reality and marks it off from three common theological positions:

1 Contrary to all *theological separatism*, he insists on the unity of reality and the unity of truth: theology differs from other disciplines in the sort of questions it asks about reality but not in the reality about which it asks questions.

2 Contrary to all *metaphysical constructivism* which attempts by way of abstraction to get beyond the contingencies of our world to a necessary structure behind it, Barth insists on the concrete self-representation of God's eschatological reality which is known not by inference but by perception and awareness of the way in which it makes itself present. The metaphysical approach grounds abstract reality in even more abstract reality. But the real is concrete, and the only fully concrete reality is God's self-concrescence with that which is different from himself in Christ.

3 Barth also rejects *theological immanentism* of a kenotic kind. God has not entered our world by emptying himself into it. Rather our world enters God by being continually included into him through judgement and grace.
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thus becoming real in the first place. Neither God's immanence in the world nor a deification of the world but the eschatological assumption of the world into God — that is Barth's answer to our question.

This, however, is to say that our world is permanently in the process of becoming real (or unreal, for that matter) by its eschatological assumptio in Deum. Taken by itself it is nothing but an abstraction of the only concrete reality there is: God's self-realisation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the foundation of all this in the eternal will of God and its consequences in and for our world. It does not follow from this that what we experience as real is not real or only seems to be so. Rather it is a preliminary, penultimate, abstract reality which as such is in permanent danger of relapsing into non-existence. In short, our world of common experience is an enhypostatic reality which exists only in so far as it is incorporated into the concrete reality of God's saving self-realisation in Christ. Taken by itself natural reality is an anhypostatic abstraction, unable to exist on its own and systematically at one remove from the texture of concrete reality. 39

Now Barth was quite aware that this attempt to stand our common notion of reality on its head by reconstructing it in terms of classical Christology rather than the other way round may look to some, if not to all of us, like 'a theological trick leading out of nothing into nothing'. 40 But before we turn away from him in dismay, or even disgust, we should note two things.

First, it is true that Barth does not offer any external arguments for the reality of the revelation, the resurrection or the eschatological presence of Christ. For him this is the shared faith of the Christian church which is induced not by argument or any other means accessible to us but by the free self-representation of the Spirit on the basis of the
proclamation of the Gospel; and he understands his own task as a church theologian to consist not in the external justification of this faith (which he considers to be impossible anyhow), but in the critical exposition and conceptual clarification of it in order to safeguard the content and continuity of the proclamation.

Second, however, it is this which requires the theologian to design models of thought which satisfy two criteria of adequacy. On the one hand they have to be true to the eschatological reality confessed and proclaimed by the Church. On the other hand, they have to preserve the unity of reality and the coherence of truth by enabling us to relate intelligibly the truth-claims of the Christian faith to what we know to be true by experience and reflection. This is precisely what Barth’s theology has attempted to do. Thus, if his theology is a trick, it is one which neither ignores nor violates natural reality and our experience of the world. Barth does not exclude but includes the variety and plurality of our worldly experience within the theological perspective: he does not attempt, as his critics have complained, ‘to preserve Christian theology from the indifference and hostility of a secular world’ through ‘a profound ontological exclusiveness’.41 Rather he unfolds in a painstaking and detailed way a theological perspective of universal inclusiveness which incorporates and reconstructs the shared and public reality of our world within theology; and he achieves this by interpreting it theologically within the frame of reference provided by the christological exposition of the eschatological reality described. In this respect, Barth’s theology is not only an exemplary piece of constructive dogmatics, but a sustained hermeneutical enterprise which does not deny the secularity of the world but reinterprets it theologically in the light of the presence of Christ and the world of meaning which it carries with it.42 What this amounts to I shall try to show in the second part of this chapter.
To understand the theological achievement of Barth, who has been placed in the company of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher, we have to view his theology in a historical perspective and analyse its structure relative to the theological tradition out of which it arose. And because there are many ways to construe this tradition, let me briefly indicate the criteria by which I shall proceed.

All cultural phenomena, including the Churches, their faith and their theologies, allow for two types of complementary descriptions from different points of view and within different frames of reference: the 'internal perspective of the participants' (which, for our discussion, I shall call the 'perspective of faith') and the 'external perspective of the observer' (which I shall call the 'perspective of the world'). Both perspectives and the respective descriptions can neither be reduced to each other nor replace each other or be taken absolutely by themselves without distorting a proper understanding of the Christian faith and its historical objectifications.

Now if we understand theology (as opposed to the study of religions) to be the critical and systematic exposition of the internal perspective of faith, then a theology which simply ignores the external perspective is weaker than one that does not, and a theology which unfolds the internal perspective in such a way that it reconstructs the external perspective within the perspective of faith is stronger than one that does not. This criterion allows us to describe the development of Protestant theology as a sequence of characteristically related models for the theological handling of the external perspective on faith. I can only very briefly indicate this.

The scholastic theologies of the pre-Reformation period used the model of nature and grace to relate the perspective of the world to the perspective of faith. Irrespective of the different
schools of thought they in fact operated with a philosophico-theological model. This model co-ordinated the two perspectives according to the rule that grace perfects nature and that, by analogy, we can intelligibly move from what we say in the external perspective of nature to what we want to say in the internal perspective of grace.

Reformation theology dismissed the scholastic model and replaced it by the purely theological model of Law and Gospel. The difference may be described as the transition from an additive co-ordination of the two perspectives to an internal reconstruction of the perspective of the world within the perspective of faith. What used to be an external contrast between nature and grace is now recreated as an internal differentiation of the theological perspective in terms of law and gospel. But this means that dialectics takes the place of analogy and that the perspective of faith becomes all-comprehensive: there is no external aspect which it is not in a position to reproduce internally. Thus theology unfolds a universal perspective which is not defined by its external contrasts, but by its internal distinctions and modes of operation through which it attempts to recreate the manifold plurality of our external experience of the world within theology.

The obvious danger of this sort of situation is theological totalitarianism or absolutism stemming from the uncritical use of the universal perspective of faith as an absolute frame of reference. Where this happens in the plural and where the differences are fought out not by argument but by the use of ecclesiastical and political power, we have the sort of situation which Europe went through during the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Enlightenment quite understandably reacted to these results of theological absolutism by claiming the external perspective of reason and history to be the only rationally acceptable universal perspective; and it developed it into a comprehensive model of law and order designed to cope with all reality. However, because it insisted
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on it as an absolute frame of reference, it in fact committed the same absolutist mistake against which it reacted.

The situation only changed when, towards the end of the eighteenth century, enlightened absolutism was replaced by democratic liberalism not only in the world of action but also in the world of ideas. One learned to distinguish between universal and absolute claims, and began to realise not only the possibility but the right and the fruitfulness of a plurality of universal perspectives on the same phenomenon without assigning the privileged status of an absolute perspective to any of them. Theology thus came to see the essential reciprocity of internal and external perspectives on the Christian faith; and it responded by a co-ordination of internal (theological) and external (philosophical) points of views in its handling of the external perspective. The conceptual machinery of this twofold approach in terms of the difference-in-unity of philosophical and theological perspectives on the Christian faith was provided by Schleiermacher's combination of a theory of human religiosity, a sociological theory of the genesis and structure of religious communities, and a doctrinal exposition of the Christian faith. The upshot of this was that theology conceived the Christian faith to be, at the same time, one religion amongst others and a comprehensive view of reality as a whole. External and internal perspectives were thus combined by integrating two universal (and not merely particular) perspectives in a uniform consciousness of truth which united the concern for religion and the scientific spirit of the age.

This synthesis of internal and external perspectives, of the Christian view of the world and the world's view of Christianity and everything else gave way to an antithesis when, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the eschatological nature of the original Christian faith was rediscovered. Overbeck relentlessly put his finger on the dilemma of modern theology: the eschatological nature of true Christian faith excludes any theological synthesis of faith and the world, while the modern
consciousness of truth excludes any fideist retreat to the safe shores of the internal perspective of faith alone.\(^{43}\)

Barth agreed with Overbeck's diagnosis but not with the dilemma which he derived from it.\(^{44}\) He reacted to the breakdown of the neo-Protestant synthesis by transforming Overbeck's external dilemma between 'Christianity and Culture' into an internal dilemma within theology itself by insisting that, as theologians, we have to speak of God, while as sinners we are unable to speak of him, and that it is precisely this paradoxical situation of having to do what we cannot do which theology has to face and think through.

It is the methodological aspect of this argument to which I want to draw attention: the theological interiorisation of the dilemma. This method of 'interiorisation' is characteristic of Barth's theology and provides the clue to the formal structure of his dogmatics. It does not fall back behind Overbeck to a neo-Protestant position with its mere co-ordination of the philosophical and theological perspectives. But neither does it fall back behind Schleiermacher to an old-Protestant position with its confinement to the internal perspective alone. Barth takes neither a simple theological nor a twofold theological and philosophical approach, but a twofold theological approach to the problem of the external perspective. He interiorises the whole problem and thus reproduces the discontinuity between the external and internal perspectives as a categorial distinction within the structure of the internal perspective of faith.

Precisely this is the methodological achievement of his theology both with regard to the theological tradition before him and with regard to his own eschatological realism. On the one hand, it is the exact methodological analogy to his realist view of the eschatological assumption of the world into God: as the world receives (or, in so far as it as pseudo-reality loses) its reality by becoming integrated into the concrete reality of the risen Christ, so our mundane experiences reveal their true
significance by becoming integrated into the perspective of faith.

On the other hand, it is a clearly definable step forward in
the methodology of Protestant theology which I have sketched.
Put simply, Barth repeats the same sort of theological operation
with respect to theologies in the tradition of Schleiermacher
that Luther had performed with respect to the scholastic
theologies of his time: he internalises given external contrasts
between theological and non-theological perspectives by
reconstructing them in terms of internal distinctions within
the theological perspective. But Barth performs this operation
in a significantly changed situation. Luther had first shown the
perspective of faith to be a universal perspective by recon-
structing the external co-ordination of nature and grace in
terms of the internal distinction between the Law and the
Gospel, and by using this as the basic guiding principle of
theological thought. Barth, on the other hand, was faced with
two distinct universal perspectives which he tried not only to
co-ordinate but to integrate theologically. His theology,
therefore, is not merely the unfolding of an internally differen-
tiated universal perspective of faith (as is Luther's), nor a co-
ordination of a universal theological perspective with an equal-
ly universal philosophical perspective (as is Schleiermacher's),
but the attempt to integrate this co-ordination itself once more
theologically. It is precisely this which marks his difference
both from theologies of the type of Luther and from the type
of Schleiermacher. To mention but two widely controversial
examples: he brackets Luther's (and his followers') fundamen-
tal distinction between the Law and the Gospel once more
theologically and interprets it to be an internal distinction within
the gospel or grace of God thus arriving at his much-criticised
formula of the Gospel and the Law as the guiding principle of
theological thought. And in the same way he brackets Schleier-
macher's (and his followers') view of religion and its (as he saw
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it) confusion of faith and piety once more theologically by interpreting religion and atheism to be nothing but two sides of the same sort of unbelief: our human rebellion against the grace of God.

But to stress once more the methodological aspect: the result of this interiorising or integrating procedure is a more complex theology with a more sophisticated handling of the external perspectives. For whatever falls into the external perspective of the world turns up twice within Barth’s theology. On the one hand, it is reconstructed in strictly theological terms; and, on the other hand, it is present via a theological meta-perspective on its non-theological presentation. This combination of a direct theological perspective on everything, and an indirect theological meta-perspective on non-theological perspectives on everything, results in two distinct levels of argument in Barth’s dogmatics. At a first level we find statements about theological topics such as Christ, faith, creation, or pre-history; at a second level, theological statements about non-theological topics such as man, religion, the world or history. The statements at the two levels are related by what Barth calls the ‘analogy of faith’. Contrary to the traditional analogy of being, this principle functions within the sphere of faith alone. It is not a means of relating the perspective of the world to the perspective of faith, but the interpretative principle by which we generate, within the perspective of faith, indirect theological meta-statements on the basis of direct theological statements.

Put differently, Barth’s dogmatics comprises two basic components: a constructive or dogmatic component which generates the basic theological categories, and an interpretative component which applies those categories to elucidate our experience of natural reality in the light of faith. The first component is the backbone of his dogmatics and unfolds the universal perspective of faith in terms of a complete reconstruction of reality on christological foundations. The second component reproduces the reality normally external
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to theology within theology by interpreting it in the light of
the perspective of faith. This interpretation proceeds according
to the principle of analogia fidei: it derives its interpretative
categories from the dogmatic component and applies them to
the pluriform materials of our normal perspectives on the
world. Thus external reality is not denied but included in the
perspective of faith in order to bring out its theological
significance.

The difference of these two components of Barth's dogmatics
and their respective levels of argument is significant in a
number of respects. I can only mention two.

First, statements at the first level are all singular statements.
They refer to individual topics like 'the faith', 'the person',
'the history', 'the time', 'the law', etc., which are directly
derived from a systematic exposition of the eschatological con-
cretissimum, Jesus Christ. Statements at the second level, on
the other hand, are general statements. They talk about classes
of things like religions, human beings, social and political
orders, religious communities and convictions, anthropological,
psychological and sociological facts, and theories of various
sorts, etc. Taken by themselves, these often differ quite widely
from each other – Barth's treatment of 'natural theology' is a
notorious case in point. But they are grouped together under
certain theological headings which mark the theological point
of view by which they are interpreted. Statements of this sort
do not describe reality but articulate a theological meta-
perspective on our private and intersubjective experiences
of the world. By concentrating on particular features at the
expense of others, they help to reduce their enormous variety
and plurality in such a way that they become accessible to
theological reflection and understanding in the first place.
Thus they express what has come to be called the Christian
'experience with our experience' by placing everything which
we experience in the specific interpretative frame of the Chris-
tian faith.

Second, although theology comprises these two distinct levels
of dogmatic discourse and interpretative meta-discourse, it has but one grammar; and this is Christology. It is the task of dogmatic discourse proper to work out the world of meaning that the presence of Christ carries with it; and because of the centrality of the resurrection, everything it states is to be determined christologically. This amounts to nothing less than a sustained hermeneutical process of redefining virtually every dogmatic concept in christological terms: 'God', 'power', 'freedom', 'person', 'man and woman', 'predestination', 'history', 'time', 'law', 'being', and everything else is — in sometimes quite complicated and twisted ways — derived from the central eschatological reality of the risen Christ. But Barth does not content himself with the creation of a self-sustained realm of dogmatic discourse striving towards completeness. Separatist fideism of this sort is foreign to him. Rather, he then reapplies these categories by the rule of analogy to interpret critically both traditional theological discourse, and non-theological discourse alike. For example, what 'history' really means is shown by the one history of Jesus Christ which, when interpretatively applied to our common understanding of history, shows this to be, at best, a preliminary, abstract and inauthentic understanding of history. And the same is true of all other terms and concepts: for Barth, it is the eschatological history of Jesus Christ which provides us with the prototypical understanding of the 'true God', the 'real man', the 'real reality', the 'real time', the 'true being', the 'true history', etc. To grasp this as clearly as possible by a sustained listening to the biblical testimony to the eschatological reality of the risen Christ is our first task as theologians. But then we have to go on and interpret the individual and social experience of our life and world in the light of what we have learned there: this is the second and no less important task of the theologian. Reading the Bible and reading the newspaper Barth considered to be the two pillars of theological existence. In short, Barth embarked not only on a
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cristological redefinition of the whole of dogmatics, but also on a hermeneutical reinterpretation of the language by which we describe and communicate our experience of the world. Small wonder that he died before he came to an end.

This is the structure of Barth's dogmatics and it allows for different ways of disagreeing with it: we can reject the way it develops its dogmatic component; we can disagree with the way it is used to interpret our reality of common experience generally, or in particular cases where we find the principle of analogy ill-applied. However, what we cannot do, I think, is to reject the two theological tasks with which Barth attempts to cope in the two components of his dogmatics: theology can neither dispense with a consistent doctrinal structure nor with an interpretation of reality in terms of it. Thus, even if we reject the answers Barth gives, we can hardly avoid the questions he asks.

But let me illustrate what I have described as Barth's method of interiorisation. One could choose almost any topic but I shall take one that is especially controversial: his view of religion. It is well known that Barth refused to interpret the Christian faith in terms of religion (as did neo-Protestant liberalism) or to identify Christianity with true religion (as did old-Protestant orthodoxy). For him these positions confused in their different ways the internal and the external perspectives on faith and thus failed to distinguish clearly between God's relation to man (revelation), man's relation to 'God' – or what he takes to be God – (religion) and the relation of man to God which corresponds to God's relation to man (faith). However, by stressing the fundamental theological importance of distinguishing these relations Barth did not deny that religiosity is an 'essential structure of human consciousness', that religion is a general 'phenomenon of human existence', or that Christianity can be described and analysed as a religion.45 This is not only possible but, given Christianity as it is, quite appropriate. What he denies is that external perspectives of
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this sort have any theological bearing before being internalised into, and interpreted by, the perspective of faith. He offers just this sort of interpretation with his claim that 'religion is unbelief'—which, as should be remembered, is addressed primarily to Christianity and only secondarily to other religions.

To understand this much criticised claim, one should note the level of argument at which it occurs. For Barth deals with both religion and faith in more than one way. Thus, in the internal perspective of faith, religion is understood as unbelief; in the external perspective, it is described as a general phenomenon of human existence; and in the theological meta-perspective on this external perspective, it is seen as a human mode of existence which, because of God's eschatological co-presence with us, may become a more or less adequate expression of faith. And the same multiplicity of dogmatic approaches we find with respect to faith. Internally, it is described as obedience, i.e. the human answer corresponding to God's revelation; externally, it is described as religion; and, in the theological meta-perspective on the external perspective of faith as religion, it is interpreted as human unbelief. For no religious or non-religious way of life is by itself faith or an expression of faith. It can only become so by the grace of God.

The upshot of all this is that theology can in no way be built on the fact of religion. There may be religion without corresponding faith; and there may be Christian faith without there being religion. The Christian faith is not bound to exist in the form of religion as both Barth and Bonhoeffer envisaged in their different ways. If faith is the eschatological human existence in the presence of Christ, then any mode of human existence may become or, for that matter, fail to become an expression of faith. Theology, therefore, cannot start from religious phenomena such as individual or communal beliefs, the Church, or the history of Christianity. All these phenomena are ambiguous as to their faith-manifesting
character. If there is to be an unambiguous starting-point at all, theology has to take seriously that faith is essentially faith in Christ, i.e. a direct personal relation to the present Christ. But then, logically, for faith to exist, Christ must be risen, alive and present. Accordingly the theological explication of faith is bound to become an explication of the eschatological reality of Christ: Barth’s christocentric dogmatics is a clear consequence of his starting-point. The upshot of all this is that for theology to be possible, Christ must have risen. Thus Barth quite appropriately summed up his position when he told the philosopher, Heinrich Scholz, ‘that academic theology was based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’. To remind academic theology of this is, if anything, the continuous challenge and legacy of Barth’s theology.

To sum up, I have argued in this chapter that Barth is a realist; that he holds an eschatological realism by claiming that theology essentially refers to the eschatological reality of the risen Christ; that he explicates the relationship of this eschatological reality to our mundane reality in terms of the christological model of the hypostatic union; and finally that he practises a theological method of interiorisation which not only corresponds exactly to his understanding of the eschatological assumption of our reality into the reality of the risen Christ, but also continues and consummates the methodology of Protestant theology.

Given the logic of its development, which I have tried to describe, it is hardly surprising that critics of Barth from Pannenberg to Roberts have voiced the interest of the external perspectives; and this is quite understandably so. However, the question is how to react to this theologically. Are we to wait for another Schleiermacher to co-ordinate Barth’s complexly unfolded internal perspective of faith with an equally complexly unfolded external perspective of the world? And are we then to expect another Barth who once more interiorises all this into the perspective of faith – and so on? I do not think
so. Of course, the dialectics of internal and external perspectives cannot be overcome and the formal operation of interiorisation may be continued *ad infinitum*. But, in a very important respect, theological method cannot go beyond Barth; there is no external perspective which in principle cannot be recreated and integrated internally by applying the conceptual machinery of his dogmatics. Of course, this may often lead to quite different results from the ones he himself has reached in his particular historical context. For, as I have pointed out, there are a number of ways of developing and using the two basic components of his dogmatics. But he has asked questions and worked out methods of answering them which, even if we depart from the particular answers he gives, will secure his place among the very few giants of Christian thought from whom theology will always have to take its bearings.

**NOTES**

1 Versions of this chapter have been given in lectures at the University of Cambridge, King’s College London, Durham University and the University of Leeds. I am much indebted to all those who have commented on the chapter on these and other occasions, especially to Lyle Dabney, Stephen Sykes and Christoph Schwöbel.


3 This is one of the criticisms levelled against Barth himself. See S. W. Sykes, 'The study of Barth' in S. W. Sykes [ed.], *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 1–16, esp. p. 3.

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7 Ibid., p. 150.

8 Putnam, Realism and Reason, p. 19.


11 White, 'Theological realism', p. 60.

12 The phrase is used by Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, pp. 97ff.

13 CD, 1/1, p. 268.


16 CD, 1/2, p. 752.


18 See E. Jüngel, Barth-Studien [Zurich and Cologne, 1982], p. 71.


21 D. Ford, Barth and God's Story. Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the 'Church Dogmatics' (Frankfurt and Bern, 1981), p. 84.

22 Barth, Der Römerbrief, 1st edn (1919), repr. [Zurich, 1963], pp. 97f.

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25 Barth, Der Römerbrief, 1st edn, p. 59.


27 Ibid., 72; ET, p. 52.

28 Jüngel, Barth–Studien, pp. 85ff.


30 Jüngel, Barth–Studien, p. 28.


33 Ibid., p. 145.

34 Ibid., p. 124.

35 CD, I/1, p. 389.


40 CD, II/1, pp. 69f.


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44 See Jüngel, Barth-Studien, pp. 82f.
46 CD, I/2, pp. 299f.
'He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.' So does the writer of the second Psalm depict the attitude of his God to the nations. This independence of God, the unique and untrammelled freedom of the Lord, is the theme of other Psalms, too. In face of any suggestion that God may in some way need human devotion, Psalm 50.12 reproduces the scoffing tones we have already met: 'If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine.' Not only is God free from such concerns; his is also a positive liberty: 'Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases' (Ps. 115.3). These expressions, reflecting as they do a strong strand of the biblical tradition of thought about God, sit rather uncomfortably with some of today's currents of thought, which do not like such forthright assertions of the divine supremacy. But Karl Barth knew better, as the following characteristically lyrical passage makes clear. In it, he is speaking of the divine preserving of the creature:

And so 'man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour into the evening' (Ps.104.23); to which it belongs that he can use his senses and understanding to perceive that two and two make four, and to write poetry and to think, and to make music, and to eat and drink, and to be filled with joy and often with sorrow, and to love and sometimes
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to hate, and to be young and to grow old, and all within his own experience and activity, affirming it not as half a man but as a whole man, with head uplifted and the heart free and the conscience at rest: 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works' (Ps. 104.24). It is only the heathen gods who envy man. The true God, who is unconditionally the Lord, allows him to be the thing for which He created him. He is far too highly exalted to take it amiss or to prevent it . . . [T]here can be no doubt that with an autonomous reality God does give to man and to all His creatures, the freedom of individual action'.

There are two focuses to that passage. The first is found in the contrast between the heathen gods and the unconditioned lordship of God. The second is the human autonomy it is said to guarantee. Let us look at them one at a time. Both the Psalmists and Barth assert in forthright terms what is sometimes called the transcendence of God. It is a word that should be used carefully, both because of its inherent ambiguity and because it is used as a label for Barth's theology by those who wish to understand it without the burden of thought. But it has its uses, for it denotes that in Barth in which, without prejudice to his immanence, and indeed as an implication of it, God is conceived to be other than the world, as its creator and as one who acts with sovereign freedom both within and towards it. This otherness, however, is not negative, the denial of relations. It is understood in terms of what has traditionally been called the immanent Trinity.

There can be little doubt that discussions of the immanent Trinity have, in the West since Augustine, worn an abstract air, and, despite recent attempts to defend the tradition, notably by W. J. Hill,¹ have appeared to take on a speculative life of their own, divorced from the history of salvation. Among Barth's achievements are the restoration of the link between history and the Trinity, and the insertion into the Augustinian tradition of elements from the Cappadocian Fathers. It is at this point that both the strengths and

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weaknesses of Barth’s treatment of God and human freedom are to be found. As we shall discover, there is a continuing tension in his work, and from it flow many of the difficulties of interpretation which have always been a feature of scholarly debates. For the moment, however, we shall concentrate on what he has positively to contribute to our topic.

As is well known, Barth insists that it is a mistake to conceive God, after the manner of much western theism, in negative terms. To say that his transcendence should be understood as the absence of space and time from his being would be a denial of revelation, of the capacity of God to be present in and to his world. Therefore there must be in God, despite the apparent absurdity of the claim, a kind of spatiality understood on the basis of his becoming spatial in Christ, but apophatically: ‘God possesses space, His own space, and . . . just because of this spatiality, he is able to be triune’ (CD, II/1, pp. 468f). Such a concept performs two functions. Although it (the concept) has its basis in the presence of God to space, it serves to maintain the ontological distinction between God and the world – ‘togetherness (Zusammensein) at a distance’ (ibid., p. 468). But, second, it also preserves an important feature of the inner-trinitarian being of God: ‘the togetherness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the distance posited by the distinction that exists in the one essence of God’ (ibid., p. 468). There is a distance within the inner-trinitarian relations, a kind of living space in which God is freely himself. This means that from the relations between God and the world Barth has argued to an analogous pattern of relations within the Godhead. But it is analogous. God possesses space ‘as the being who is completely present in the spatiality that belongs to Him’ (ibid., p. 470). The being of God is an ordered freedom which is the ordered freedom of God himself.

Much more has been made in the literature of the parallel treatment in Barth of the divine temporality, but it is enough for our purposes to realise that the point is similar. There is a
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kind of temporality in God, which preserves both the ontological distinction of God from the world and the real relation he has with it. God's eternity is not non-temporality, but the eternity of the triune life: 'the fact that God has and is Himself time, and the extent to which this is so, is necessarily made clear to us in His essence [Wesen – perhaps better translated as 'being'] as the triune God' (ibid., p. 615).

What is the point of this talk of divine spatiality and temporality? It is more than a matter of simply preserving ontological relatedness and distinction, more even than being true to revelation. It is a question rather of the kind and quality of the relations there are and can be. A clue to their nature is to be found in Barth's treatment of the triune eternity: 'there is order and succession' (ibid.). Why do they matter? An answer can be sought with the help of some arguments developed in connection with the Pelagian and later Arminian controversies, arguments which are in any case of direct relevance to the theme of this paper. The Pelagian conception of human freedom, said Benjamin B. Warfield, 'scarcely allows for the existence of a "man" – only a willing machine is left . . . In such a conception there was no place for character . . . here lies the essential error of their doctrine of free will: they looked upon freedom in its form only, and not in its matter'. The argument can be applied by analogy to the conception of divine freedom. God's freedom is not that of an arbitrary willing machine, but that of the triune God, and takes shape in the mysterious life of Father, Son and Spirit. Freedom, to be freedom, must have a shape, a form. If God is to be free, and free not only in his relations with the world but free to set the creature free to be itself, his freedom must be conceived to take a form appropriate to its matter. That is the function performed by Barth's conceptions of the trinitarian space and time, the life in relation of Father, Son and Spirit. Barth is sometimes accused of an arbitrary actualism in his understanding of the reality of God, but such an accusation fails to discern the
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consistent inner dynamic of the trinitarian life. There is freedom, and it is the freedom of the personal reality of God. But what does that enable Barth to say about the freedom of the creatures that are so utterly other than God and so utterly dependent upon him for their being?

HUMAN FREEDOM

We now come to the second of the focuses of the passage cited from Church Dogmatics, III/3: 'With an autonomous reality . . . the freedom of individual action.' Barth is widely thought to be weaker here, even to deny human freedom. Yet liberty was of immense importance to him, and not only in some technical theological sense. One feature of his life that will strike readers of the Busch biography is that Barth's writing and teaching life had a context of active concern for political freedoms of many kinds, including a preparedness to take a part in defending the independence of Switzerland from foreign domination. But whereas the doctrine of the freedom of God is a relatively straightforward, if utterly mysterious, matter, the pure waters of human freedom are muddied for Barth by the slavery that is the lot of those who would unaccountably (or, as he would say, 'impossibly') try to live outside the covenant. Therefore we find a conception in which freedom is given, lost and restored in Christ. The freedom is the freedom of the creature, but of the creature who is elect, reconciled and living in expectation of redemption. We begin, accordingly, with the second part of volume II.

Although Barth's treatment of the Trinity is past by the time that the doctrine of election is reached, the conception takes here new form and definition. The triune God is defined as one whose reality takes shape in election: 'In the primal and basic decision in which He wills to be and actually is God, in the mystery of what takes place from and to all eternity within Himself, within his triune being, God is none other than the
One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself, elects His people' (ibid., II/2, p. 76). In the explanation of this election, the characteristically Barthian terms of 'love' and 'freedom' have a central place: election is good news ('the sum of the gospel', ibid., p. 3), the outcome of both the love and the freedom in which God is what he is. But election, like freedom, is not shapeless and arbitrary: it is to a particular end. There is a counterpart to God's election of himself and of human beings, and it consists in the fact 'that for his part man can and actually does elect God' (ibid., p. 177). This human election which responds to the divine is described as 'autonomy': 'a simple but comprehensive autonomy of the creature which is constituted originally by the act of eternal divine election and which has in this act its ultimate reality' (ibid.). It is an autonomy, but it is a given one: shaped and – if we use the word carefully – determined by God. And there is more to be said. In the latter part of this same section of the Church Dogmatics, Barth shows that his treatment of autonomy is not confined to a teaching of the human choice of God. Election is not empty, but to something. For the Augustinian tradition it tended to be to a particular destiny in heaven or hell. The measure of Barth's originality over against his own tradition is that election has for him a much more this-worldly orientation, and is completed by a corresponding conception of ethics: 'What is the purpose of the electing God for the man whom He has elected?' (ibid., p. 510). Election is to a particular kind of life, but one that is freely chosen; it is indeed a determination, but it is not the determination of 'a mere thing, a neuter, but a person . . . As election is ultimately the determination of man, the question arises as to the human self-determination which corresponds to this determination' (ibid.). Notice again the stress on a kind of autonomy: it is a self-determination, albeit one which takes the form of 'responsibility . . . decision . . . obedience . . . action' (ibid., p. 511). Human freedom, like God's, must have a shape, and that is
why the conception of responsibility, in which Barth includes the concept of response, is central: 'Man is, and is human, as he performs this act of responsibility, offering himself as the response to the Word of God, and conducting, shaping and expressing himself as an answer to it. He is, and is man, as he does this' (ibid., III/2, p. 175).

It has been said of Barth’s concern for obedience in ethics that it is ‘Kantianising’ because, just as for Kant our sole possible freedom consists in absolute obedience to the Categorical Imperative, so for Barth our sole possible freedom is ‘the freedom of obedience’. Whether or not that be so, it is by no means Barth’s intention. We are called to obey not the impersonal dictates of reason but one who comes alongside us as one of us. There is, of course, a claim of God over us (without it, he would not be God); but it consists in ‘the granting of very definite freedom’ (ibid., II/2 p. 585). It is here that is to be found the answer to the charge of Kantianising. It is one thing to obey power exerted absolutely and impersonally, quite another to obey the kind of personal authority with which we have to do in the gospel. ‘The command of this Commander is a permission, and in this it is fundamentally and finally differentiated from all other commands’ (ibid.). Here there is a distinction in kind drawn between obedience to God and obedience to all other commands, which are ‘powers and dominions and authorities which restrict the freedom of man’ (ibid.). All other obedience is servile (ibid., pp. 595f); this command and this alone is liberating, because it is gospel: ‘Do this, because in Jesus Christ you have been born anew in the image of God’ (ibid., p. 587). ‘The basis of the “must” which corresponds to the command of God is . . . the deepest and most radical “may” of the man who sees that God is not against him, but for him’ (ibid., p. 597).

The outcome is that according to Barth one must be determined in order to be free. But unless it is God who determines us, we are under the power of a demon, not the truth. His
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determination, because it is the work of the personal God, is
a determination that liberates for true self-determination. The
slogan is often repeated that for Barth 'God is everything, man
nothing'. If, however, we examine the Christological matrix in
which the conception of freedom takes shape, we shall see that
Barth in fact asserts the opposite. Quoting that slogan, he
asserts that 'as a description of grace it is not merely a "shock-
ing simplification" but complete nonsense' (ibid., IV/1, p. 89).RATHER, 'human obedience, too, human constancy and virtue,
useful human knowledge, human faith and love and hope, all
these are only a standing and walking on the rock which bears
him up, the rock of the new being given him as his own' (ibid.,
p. 91). In volume four, to which we have now moved, the
emphasis is on the freedom deriving from reconciliation: the
freedom not only of the elect, but of those who are justified,
sanctified and called. Just as human freedom is based on elec-
tion, so its renewal is seen to derive from the movement of
God into human history in Christ.

This movement has for Barth two levels. It is at once the
self-giving of God and the elevation of Jesus as true man: almost, we might say, God becoming nothing so that we might
be everything. 'That God as God is able and willing to con-
descend, to humble Himself in this way is the mystery of the
"deity of Christ"' (ibid., p. 177). Conversely, the mystery of
the humanity of Christ is that here we have 'royal man',
slothful humanity renewed for genuine human activity. Jesus
is free 'to be in His humiliation as the Son of God the truly
exalted and royal Son of Man' (ibid., IV/2, p. 311). The link
between Christ's royal humanity and free human action is
established by Barth by means of the doctrine of the Holy
Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of Son and Father who at once
'unmasks and rejects man's lack of freedom, but it also
discloses and magnifies his freedom' (ibid., p. 374). The Spirit
grants 'a quite definite freedom', the freedom to be what we
truly are (ibid., p. 363), which is the outcome of the 'power
which does not merely hold out or describe or commend or command . . . but itself makes us free' (ibid., p. 305).

As Barth frequently remarks, human freedom is not the freedom of Hercules at the crossroads, the freedom of indifference, in which it makes no matter whether we turn to the right or the left. His is a restatement of the classical Pauline-Augustinian tradition, though his use of the term 'autonomy' betrays also an awareness of characteristically modern preoccupations. Whether it does – or would want to do – justice to all aspects of modern concepts of freedom is a question that will be at the centre of the next part of this chapter. This second part, however, will end as the first began, with a reference to the biblical tradition. For Barth's conception of human freedom is clearly not without biblical support. Paul, for example, operates with a conception of determined freedom: 'I worked harder than any . . . though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me' (1 Cor. 15.10). Similarly, his advice to the Philippians, so often quoted only in part, contains a similar conception of a direct relation between human action and divine enabling: 'work out your own salvation in fear and trembling, for God is at work in you . . .' (Phil. 2.12f).

In more negative terms, but making a similar point, Paul says that sin consists in human action that is attempted outside the relationship to God that is mediated through Christ: 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (Rom. 14.23). The fact that freedom is a divine gift is also prominent: 'the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor. 3.17). In the fourth Gospel, too, similar negative and positive points are made: first, that 'everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin'; and second that 'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8.34, 36). This is clear evidence against the idea of freedom as independent self-determination, of Hercules at the crossroads: to choose some roads, is to choose slavery. The matter was put with great clarity by Samuel Taylor Coleridge who, like Barth but in a
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different way, espoused a modified form of Calvinist theology:

Freedom expresses that highest perfection of a finite Will, which it attains by its perfect self-determined Subordination to Reason, 'whose service is perfect freedom'. . . . A will cannot be free to choose evil – for in the very act it forfeits its freedom, and so becomes a corrupt Nature, self-enslaved. It is sufficient to say, that a Will can choose evil, but in the moment of such choice ceases to be a free will.5

However, despite his strong assertions of the autonomy that flows from grace, there are few aspects of Barth's theology which have come in for greater criticism. Why are his words asserting the reality of freedom in the Spirit so widely disbelieved? Is it because they are empty rhetoric, and are overwhelmed by the logic of other things that he says? Or is it that the critics are simply operating with different preconceptions? The answer is, I think, a bit of both. We begin in the next section with a study of some of the charges.

DETERMINATION, PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL

As we have seen, the weight of Barth's conception of freedom, both human and divine, rests upon the doctrine of election, and it is here, too, that the critics have concentrated their fire. Thirty years ago, G. C. Berkouwer argued that Barth's doctrine of election entailed the eventual salvation of all, and that he was therefore inconsistent when he denied the apokatastasis.6 If all are saved, willy-nilly, by election, the fate of all would appear to depend on a premundane divine decision rather than on the actual human decisions we ourselves make. The only difference in logic from the old Calvinist double decree is that all rather than some are destined for salvation: the decretum is still absolutum. Although the form of Berkouwer's criticism has been disputed, in my view successfully, by J. D. Bettis,7 its substance continues to recur.8 A similar point is made in studies of Barth's ethics. If, as Barth appears to say, everything
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has been fixed and determined by God, has not human action been fixed 'in advance' and so deprived of genuine freedom?⁹

There can be little doubt that many of these criticisms derive from a one-sided reading of Barth, on stressing his conception of the pre-temporality of God at the expense of what he calls his supra-temporality and post-temporality (CD, II/1, p. 620). God does, of course, precede the creature as creator and reconciler. But we have only to turn to the treatment of divine providence to discover that careful attention is paid also to the concept of the divine accompanying: the presence of God to the creature in the here and now. God ‘affirms and approves and recognises the autonomous actuality and therefore the autonomous activity of the creature as such. He does not play the part of a tyrant towards it' (ibid., III/3, p. 92). As happens frequently in the Church Dogmatics, the distinctiveness of Barth's treatment of a topic is made evident in his discussion of his predecessors' approach to the subject, in this case the conceptions of concursus and primary and secondary causality in 'the older dogmatics'. As Barth realises, it is not necessarily a self-contradiction to hold God to be the cause of free human actions. The problem lies in the fact that the concept of cause has not been adequately Christianised. We do not have to do here with 'things' that interact as part of some automatic cosmic machinery, but with a gracious and personal divine accompanying of the creature. God is indeed supreme, irresistible even, but 'if the supremacy of this work is the supremacy of the Word and Spirit it does not prejudice the autonomy, the freedom, the responsibility . . . of the creature . . . but confirms and indeed establishes them. The One who rules by His Word and Spirit recognises the creature which he rules as a true other' (ibid., p. 144). It is not – and here Barth turns the criticism on those who charge him with the denial of freedom – the proponent of trinitarian lordship who takes away autonomy, but the one who, eager for an autonomy of independence, espouses some kind of synergism. But, 'The god of all synergistic
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systems is always the absolute, the general, the digit 1, the concept' (ibid., p. 139). The god who is abstractly single is the enemy of human freedom, for he is not the triune God who, because he is differentiated in himself, is the ground of true differentiation in the creature.

Barth is not, then, committed to a view that everything is decided in advance, preprogrammed from eternity. His God is in the present and future, not simply in the past. The effort that Barth put in throughout the Dogmatics to avoid static patterns of thought about the relation of God to the world should make us beware of the simpler versions of the criticism. Moreover, he makes it quite clear that he is aware that the issue at stake is not whether human action is determined, but by whom or what it is determined, and in what way. Those who reject the notion of the divine concursus, and that includes many of those who believe that Barth's theology entails the abolition of human freedom, do so because their presuppositions are deist or Pelagian. In the former case, by denying a trinitarian conception of the link between creator and creature, they are supposing an impersonal bond, or none at all. Here, as Coleridge saw so clearly, it is not a trinitarian conception of God which entails a denial of human liberty, but all conceptions, deist, unitarian and pantheist alike, which turn the universe into a network of impersonal cause and effect. In the latter case, the critics are supposing that the only autonomy worthy of the name is to be found in some kind of independent self-realisation by the creature. Such positions, however, are not so much criticisms of Barth as root and branch rejections of his view that human autonomy is given by God and remains only so long as God continues to be its support. It is simply to oppose one view of human autonomy to another; to see our autonomy, the law of our being, grounded in ourselves rather than in the grace of God. 10

That is the reason why the classical discussions of Pelagianism and Arminianism are of direct relevance to our
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theme. Pelagianism, as we have seen, depends upon a conception of the autonomous will that tears it away from its basis in formed character. It is surely significant that the burden of Iris Murdoch’s complaint against post-Enlightenment conceptions of moral action and reflection is almost identical with B. B. Warfield’s characterisation of the Pelagian view. In modern existentialism and analytic philosophy, Murdoch says: ‘Immense care is taken to picture the will as isolated. It is isolated from belief, from reason, from feeling, and yet is the essential centre of the self. ‘‘I identify myself with my will.’’ ‘‘What I am ‘‘subjectively’’ is a foot-loose, solitary, substanceless, will.’’ Here we reach the root of the problem. There is no will that is a room, swept clear and uninhabited – at least, not for long [Matt. 12.43-51]. Human character and action is the product of a process of formation; the crucial question is not whether it is formed, but how and by what influences. One thing that can be said against Barth’s analysis here is that it is philosophically unsophisticated, and therefore bears a rather abstract character. But it finds plentiful support in the tradition, nowhere more, perhaps, than in the work of another Princeton theologian, Jonathan Edwards (1708-58). In his polemics against Arminian theories of free action, Edwards attacks the supposition that there are acts which are totally free from any cause of determination. The opening sections of his treatise on the freedom of the will are a series of arguments to the absurdity of Arminian notions that freedom is the same as complete indeterminacy. To will means to choose, and to choose necessarily involves at least a measure of determination by that which we choose.

This returns us to the central point, that there is all the difference between determination by the triune God, who, because he has space in himself, can therefore give to his creatures space to live in, and by an abstract, impersonal control, whether that control be a unitary God or a mechanical universe (and, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw, they are essen-
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tially the same). According to Barth, creation is a giving of space for autonomous human reality; reconciliation the work of the omnipotence of the cross within that authentically worldly space. The creaturely person is not violated by the action of God as Son and Spirit. In reconciliation, therefore, we are determined to be children of God, but not, as Peter Brunner showed long ago in one of the first responses to Barth on this topic, compelled. The sinner can set at nought the work of the Holy Spirit. But to do that is no longer to be free, because we do something that is foreign to what we are; and that is not autonomy, but heteronomy: the heteronomy of the demonic.

TRANSCENDENCE, IMMANENCE AND FREEDOM

Hegel held that certain forms of theology led to the phenomenon of the 'unhappy consciousness' in which man is crushed to insignificance beneath the almighty power of God. In a characteristic side-swipe at Schleiermacher, Barth made it clear that he shared Hegel's view: the notion that the Christian faith is a special determination of the feeling of absolute dependence 'is an outrage to the essence of man'. We are now, of course, familiar, if not over-familiar, with the view that certain traditional ways of conceiving God are alienating. The historical root of the problem, it can be argued, is to be found in Augustine's one-sided emphasis on the unity of God, and it seems to me no accident that deism and unitarianism, as well as atheism, are more characteristic of the heirs of western than of eastern patterns of theological thought. They derive in large measure from a tendency to modalism, in which the unity of God is so stressed at the expense of his revealed threeness that the latter is reduced to epiphenomenal or secondary status. The outcome is that tendency to swallow up the reality of the creature in that of God, with ill consequences for human freedom, which is the concern of this chapter.

Barth's major achievement in this area lies in his inaugura-
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tion of a decisive shift towards a more truly relational conception of the Trinity, in which greater attention is paid to the being of God as consisting in his threeness. There is clear influence on Barth (as on Calvin before him) from the Cappadocian tradition of trinitarian theology, for example, in his adoption of the expression ‘mode of being’ from the Greek. But there the problem, also, is to be found. By using that term Barth’s stated intention was ‘to express . . . not absolutely, but relatively better and more simply and clearly the same thing as is meant by “person” ’ (CD, I/1, p. 359). But the outcome is that Augustine’s weakness in this very area is simply repeated. Instead of theologically reclaiming the concept of the person from the individualism that has impoverished it, Barth allows the weight of emphasis to remain on the unity of God. It is as one that God is personal, rather than being one only in what the three persons give to one another. As Pannenberg has written, the weakness of Barth’s theology of the Trinity is that God’s unity is seen as the ground of his threeness, rather than the result.

It may be held, then, that the form of Barth’s appropriation of the tradition prevented him from achieving as complete a recasting of the doctrine as he intended. I have suggested already that Barth’s lack of philosophical subtlety prevented him from doing adequate justice to his conception of the free human being whose freedom consists in being determined personally by the triune God. In a number of studies of Barth, it is being increasingly shown that it is more than a matter of a lack of sophistication in the handling of certain tools, but that the lack of attention which Barth gives to the details of creaturely being and freedom derives from a fundamental flaw in his doctrine of God. For example, it is not that Barth does not affirm the humanity of Christ as strongly as his divinity; it is rather that because he is weaker in handling the detail of that humanity, his theology can take a docetic air. The outcome is that when Barth comes to the subject with which we
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are concerned, the problems come fully into the open. Let us look briefly at the points made by one recent critic.

Friedrich Wilhelm Graf's paper provides an analysis of the way in which Barth conceives human freedom in terms of its correspondence to God's own self-correspondence.\(^{21}\) We have seen that for Barth the freedom of the creature to be itself is grounded in the freedom of God to be himself. Graf holds that despite Barth's own averrals, the actual logic of the theology leads to a denial of human autonomy (ibid., p. 108). He believes that one cause of this is Barth's conception of freedom as correspondence to God's 'unconditioned Lordship' (ibid., p. 88). I hope that the progress of this chapter will have shown that that is not, in itself, an adequate reason for a criticism of Barth, and it must always be asked of criticisms of this kind whether they are simply repeating Enlightenment criticisms of any theologically grounded freedom. But the detail of Graf's argument is more convincing. He holds that the christological determination of Barth's dogmatics leads to an abstractness in the concept of God, and a consequent loss of ability adequately to find room for the particular. The outcome is that all particularity is rolled up to force it into line with the abstract subjectivity of God (ibid., pp. 104f). This, as we have seen, is characteristic of modalist conceptions of God. What Graf's paper suggests is that the christological determination of Barth's theology is in some way related to its trinitarian inadequacy.

On the face of it, the suggestion that Christology is the problem is rather odd. The humanity of God, it will be argued, is one place where we can safely ground a conception of human freedom. As Jesus is the one free creature simply because of his relation to God, so it can be for us. To see where the problem lies, let us return to the theme of the first part of the chapter, that the true ground of human freedom and of the autonomy of the created order is to be found in the transcendence of God, the otherness that enables him to be free of envy of the
autonomy of the creature. The converse of such a contention would be that certain forms of divine immanence result in the denial of human freedom. To relate God too closely to the patterns of worldly causality, too nearly to identify the operations of the world with the operations of God, is to deprive the creature of its independent reality. This is a fairly straightforward matter to understand in the case of outright forms of pantheism like Spinozism; it explains also Barth's opposition to Schleiermacher's absolute dependence (and, we might add, would apply to Pannenberg's conception of God as the all-determining reality). But it could be that there are other forms of immanence which also run the risk of endangering creaturely liberty. Here we reach the question of Christology, for it is in Christ that Christian theology, Barth's especially, finds the centre of its conception of God's immanence in his world.

Before proceeding any further, however, we must pause to draw a distinction. It is often said that talk of the Holy Spirit is also a way of conceiving the immanence of God. In fact, it has been suggested that pneumatology is so attractive an alternative to Christology for this purpose, that we can dispense with traditional trinitarian ways of speaking of God, confining ourselves to *God as Spirit*. There, of course, lies the way to the lack of freedom that is the outcome of all unitarianism, and I do not think that the problem can be solved, as Philip Rosato attempts to do it, by playing Word and Spirit Christologies against or alongside one another. It is also a mistake to conceive the Spirit in terms of immanence. The essential distinction is this: in Jesus, God identifies himself with a part of his world; he becomes worldly. Traditionally, this action has been attributed to God the Son. As Spirit, however, God is present to the world as other, as transcendent. We speak of the Spirit as being present in our hearts — immanent in that sense — but not as them. The Spirit is identified with no part of the world — though he mediates to us God's immanence as Word — because he is God bringing the world to its eschatological destiny.
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The significance of this for our purposes is as follows. A conception of the relation of God to the world which ties it too closely to God's (christologically conceived) immanence is in danger of making the world too much a function of God's presence to it, too little its own autonomous reality. Where Philip Rosato is right in his critique of Barth is not in his attempt to replace a Word with a Spirit Christology, but in seeing that the work of the Spirit is not given adequate weight in Barth's Christology. Here Barth has failed to carry through his critique of the tradition, as his espousal of the *filioque* makes clear. For Orthodox theologians, the offence of that teaching lies, in part, in the fact that it prevents us from seeing that Jesus is the *gift* of the spirit as much as he is the giver. The Spirit, as a great Calvinist theologian who was deeply indebted to eastern ways of seeing the Trinity, affirmed, is the source of Jesus' authentic humanity, and so the means by which the benefits of the life are made available to us. It is this side of Christology which is underweighted in Barth, with the consequent loss to the doctrine of Christ's humanity that we have noted.

Let me attempt to bring out the point of the weakness by a comparison of the treatment of the doctrine of election in Barth with the function the same doctrine plays in Edward Irving, the Calvinist to whom I have just referred, and from whom in other ways Barth was willing to learn (see *ibid.*, I/2, p. 154). For Barth, as we have seen, the weight of election rests upon the eternal decision of God to elect Jesus Christ and with him all people into fellowship with God. As we have also seen, the impression, contrary to Barth's intention and words, is given that all has been decided from eternity, for election is universal. Irving approached the matter from a similar context to Barth's, the dispute within Calvinism about the 'double decree'. He belonged to that group, among whom was also MacLeod Campbell, who wished to deny the doctrine that Christ died only for the elect. For him, the significance of
redemption was universal, and, indeed, rooted like Barth's doctrine of election, in eternity, in the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. But whereas Barth tends to make both reconciliation and election universal for *christological* reasons, Irving, with a surer instinct, limits the universality to redemption, not because he wished to uphold the double decree but for pneumatological reasons. Election has to do, according to him, with the mysterious activity of the Spirit, communicating the benefits of redemption to particular people at particular times. The strength of Irving's pneumatological emphasis is that it enables him first to pay full and detailed attention to the humanity of Christ, and second to balance the teaching of the pre-temporal decision of God to redeem mankind with an equally emphatic concentration on the centrality of the historical and particular. The Spirit is God present to the world at particular times and places, giving to it the liberty to move into the future prepared for it. That is Barth's teaching, too. Those who deny it have missed a real part of his theology. Barth's weakness is a weakness of balance; there is insufficient weight given to the distinctions between the three divine persons and, in particular, to the reality and distinctive functions of the Spirit, with the result that too much is thrown on to Christology, too much on to the immanent and eternal; and so too little on the particularities of history. But it is a weakness of balance, or rather of the way in which weight is placed in different areas of dogmatic importance.

**CONCLUSION**

We have seen that Barth establishes human freedom in the freedom and transcendence of the triune God; that it is a real, though *given* and determined freedom; that criticisms of Barth, though mistaken if they simply repeat Enlightened and Pelagian conceptions of human freedom, do have justification in a lack of attention paid by him to the distinctness of the
triune persons and in particular to pneumatological dimensions of incarnation and salvation. We shall understand both his achievement and its limitations if we see them against the background of both ancient and more recent theological debate. The first thing to say is that Barth’s emphatic concern for the autonomy of human being and action marks him as one who takes seriously the Enlightenment charge that belief in God is alienating, the creator of the ‘unhappy consciousness’. The second is that, despite his concern for the same thing, he understands both freedom and its source very differently. The difference is in large part, as we have seen, the old difference between Pelagian and Augustinian. But it is also a difference in the way that the West has developed its inheritance from the past.

We can illustrate this by comparing the different lessons which are learned from the Reformation. Although it is wrong to see the Reformation as an assertion of the rights of the individual religious judgement against the oppression of the totalitarian ecclesiastical machine, there is no doubt that it did place liberty at the centre of its concerns. Not only Luther but Calvin too gave it a prominent place in his theology. Here again, pneumatology takes us to the heart of the matter. There are those who hold that the Reformation was in large part about the doctrine of the Spirit and its relation to the Church. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’ Western Christendom had tended to restrict the operation of the Spirit to the channel of the official ecclesiastical institution, and so had denied features of the gospel. It is not wrong to see the Spirit in close relation to the Church, but that is a different matter from limiting his operation to official functionaries or institutions. In this respect, the Reformation was an attempt to set the Spirit free to operate in less restricted ways.

The Enlightenment can in this respect be seen as a movement which attempted to liberate the divine Spirit entirely from the trammels of ecclesiastical control. The tradition
since Augustine had tended to make the Spirit immanent – within the institution. After the Enlightenment, the immanence was transferred, so to speak, to human thought and action. Spirit, no longer the transcendent and eschatological Spirit, became secularised in human culture. That is why Kierkegaard saw Hegel's near identification of the Spirit with the human mind as a return to paganism, an identification of the human and divine. In Robert Jenson's splendid dictum: 'Hegel's only real fault was that he confused himself with the last judge; but that is quite a fault.' To repeat, the biblical Spirit is the transcendent, liberating Spirit, liberating precisely because he is transcendent: 'When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (Rom 8.15f). The Enlightenment and much nineteenth century theology, with its tendency to locate God in the human Spirit, can in this light be seen as a return to a kind of pantheism, the identification of God with the world, and the route to slavery rather than liberation.

Against this background, Barth's achievement is immense. It is a corrective both to the Calvinist absolute decree and to the unhappy consciousness by a return to elements of the biblical tradition which had been lost or overlaid. But because it is only half way out of the modalism that is at the root of all the problems, there is more to be done. The theology we have been bequeathed is a great and liberating testimony to the grace and goodness of the Bible's God. As we see it against the background of Augustine and Calvin, Enlightenment and nineteenth century, we are aware that it belongs both in the western, and particularly the Calvinist, tradition, but that in its attempt to correct imbalances it has inevitably created imbalances of its own. These are real weaknesses, but they do not deserve the harshness of some of the critiques. They rather provide places where the next generation must begin if we are truly to build on the foundations others have laid. I am sure that is the way Barth himself would wish it.
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NOTES

1 W. J. Hill, The Three-Personed God. The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1982).
8 See, for example, David Ford, Barth and God's Story. Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics (Frankfurt and Bern; Peter Lang, 1981).
10 Barth's discussion of existentialist anthropologies in CD, III/2, pp. 117–32, is particularly relevant to this aspect of the discussion.
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15 *CD*, II/2, p. 553. 'It has necessarily to be repelled, for it opens the door to every kind of caprice and tyranny and therefore to the profoundest disobedience to God' (*ibid*).


17 Some of the evidence is reviewed in Colin Gunton’s lecture, ‘The One, the Three and the Many’, King’s College, London, 1985.


19 See, for example, R. J. Palma, *Karl Barth’s Theology of Culture. The Freedom of Culture for the Praise of God* (Allison Park, Pa., Pickwick Publications, 1983), p. 78, where it is suggested that Barth tends to be weak on ‘middle axioms’.


The claim to authority is the courage to dare, never forgetting the supreme power of God and therefore always mindful of the freedom of conscience, to speak to men in the name of God, with the prophetic 'Thus saith the Lord'.

If we ask ourselves why it should be that the Roman Catholic Church has been so vitally interested in the theology of an incorrigible twentieth-century Swiss Calvinist, Karl Barth, the answer is very likely to lie in the recovery which his theology made of the idea of divine authority in the Church. That he saw the implications of this recovery from a Protestant perspective is no more than one would expect. The passage which I have quoted from a lecture of 1928 is immediately followed by a reference to Luther and Calvin:

It must not be overlooked, he continues, that Luther and Calvin made the strongest possible claim upon this 'Thus saith the Lord' — not for themselves personally but for their work.

And it follows from this remark that if we ask ourselves why it has been possible in the last twenty years for the Roman Catholic Church to become so vitally interested in the theology of the two chief reformers of the sixteenth century, the answer is just as likely to lie in the impetus given by Karl Barth's theological career to recapture the sense of the divine indwelling in the Church which informs so much of their work.
S. W. Sykes

Whether the Protestant churches dare to speak the gospel in the name of God is, in Barth's lecture of 1928, the question which Roman Catholicism addresses to modern Protestantism, a 'second, new Protestantism which ... no longer knows and does not wish to know what the Church is'. So:

Catholicism testifies and affirms a sure knowledge that he who really and primarily acts in the Church is absolutely and primarily God himself in Jesus Christ. Continually through its liturgy and its dogma, Catholicism attests: God's presence makes the Church to be the Church, he preaches, he is the sacrificer and the sacrifice, he prays, he believes, he is 'the real I of the Church'.

Consequently, Barth accepts the view that where the Church is there is also the power of the Church. He recalls Max Weber's judgement that the Reformers did not intend to relinquish the rule of the Church over life, but to substitute a new rule for an old:

We cannot [continues Barth] intelligently condemn the Papacy for exercising power. If that power had remained only churchly, spiritual power, and therefore a God-serving power, and had not become instead a power which displaces and replaces God, we, like Luther, should have no objection to kissing the Pope's feet.

The theme of this chapter is the tension which is evidently set up between the confident claim that what is being spoken of is God's authority, and the exigencies of the management of a complex institution. In a wide-ranging study of the social context of the Pauline Churches, Professor Wayne Meeks of Yale University draws attention to the problem which St Paul confronts of managing churches to which has been preached the revolutionary gospel of primitive Christian apocalyptic. What care lies behind the Apostle's admonition that Christian brothers and sisters should 'aspire to live quietly, to mind their own affairs, and to work with their own hands' [1 Thess. 4, 11]? The revolutionary potential of the gospel is always in need of ecclesial management: and, conversely, one must add,
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managerial Christianity is always in need of revolutionary transformation. St Paul's problem is a perennial one for the Churches; there is no permanent solution to it. In this chapter I want to give expression to Karl Barth's attempt to give a faithful account of the significance of the indwelling divine presence in the Church, and hence of the basis of its authority.

Let us start with the well-known second edition of his commentary on Romans (1921), and in this work with his interpretation of the text: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation' (Rom. 1, 16). Barth writes that the power of God must under no circumstances be confused with any known or observable force in the world of nature or in the souls of human beings. It is utterly beyond all such limited and limiting powers, and can only be compared with them with the greatest caution. The gospel is the action whereby God, the unknowable, makes himself known. Here is Barth's vivid account of what it is to be the Church:

The activity of the community is related to the Gospel only in so far as it is no more than a crater formed by the explosion of a shell, and seeks to be no more than a void in which the Gospel reveals itself. The people of Christ, His community, know that no sacred word or work or thing exists in its own right: they know only those words and works and things which by their negation are sign-posts to the Holy One. If anything Christian (!) be unrelated to the Gospel, it is a human by-product, a dangerous religious survival, a regrettable misunderstanding. For in this case content would be substituted for a void, convex for concave, positive for negative, and the characteristic marks of Christianity would be possession and self-sufficiency rather than deprivation and hope.  

The word we should note in this passage is the word 'void', because it reoccurs in an image which Barth deploys to illustrate the essential openness of all authentic Christian living, the image of the opening in the centre of a wheel. For example, later in the commentary on Romans when asking about the human response to the gospel, Barth expresses the
conviction that the question, What then are we to do? must be continuously open:

May God never relieve us of this questioning! May he enclose us with questions on every side! May he defend us from any answer which is not itself a question! May he bar every exit and cut us off from all simplifications! May the cavity at the cartwheel's centre, which Lao-Tse perceived long ago, be delimited by a ring of questions! In that central void the answer to our questioning is hidden; but since the void is defined by questions they must never for one moment cease.7

This openness to the question, What are we to do?, cannot, of course, be taken as a substitute for action, for doing some particular thing. What it signifies in Barth is the unwillingness to simplify the task of being holy, righteous and good by identifying that quality of life with certain particular actions, the substitution of 'possession and self-sufficiency for deprivation and hope'. It is the practice in moral life of a certain ascesis, a discipline which borders, of course, upon scrupulosity without being in any obvious way merely identified with it.

This ascesis shows itself remarkably in the complexities of Barth's response to the challenges of philosophy. 'If we open our mouths [he acknowledges], we find ourselves in the province of philosophy';8 and yet he was exceedingly suspicious of the influence of philosophy upon theology, and called for the utmost vigilance. This vigilance he formulated in the necessity of questioning the extent and propriety of a philosophical influence, even while admitting the impossibility of abstracting Christian theology from all potential contamination.

At this point it is possible to add a word about the impression made upon Barth by his encounter with Erich Przywara and the still unfinished discussion of the analogia entis. In two seminars at the University of Munster, on St Anselm's Cur Deus Homo (in 1926), and St Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae, Book I (in 1928–9, attended by Przywara), Barth made strenuous efforts to grasp what he understood to be the Roman Catholic position on the relation of philosophy and
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The irony was that while there could be substantial agreement between Przywara and Barth on the major question of the authority of revelation against liberal Protestant dilution of its substance, the two protagonists had contradictory domestic agendas. Przywara and Karl Adam were seeking to counterbalance an excessive supernaturalism in their own Church, by emphasis upon the organic relationship of natural and supernatural. Barth, on the other hand, believed that these correlations were the *fons et origo* of the heresy of liberal Protestantism, precisely exemplified in the little word 'and', revelation 'and' reason, culture, human spirit or whatever. It was for this reason, among others, that both protagonists made the understandable but false deduction that the other's position was 'typical' of the errors respectively of Roman Catholicism (in Barth's persistent misrepresentation of 'the Catholic view' of *analogia entis*), and of Calvinism (in Przywara's insistence that Barth's was simply the transcendentalising of Calvinist subjectivism). But what Barth intended can be separated from his polemical dismissals.

What he intended is evident from the important essay, 'Fate and idea in theology' (1929), in which Barth attempted to locate the Christian theological enterprise in the spectrum of the great realist–idealist divide in western intellectual history. Theology, on his account, is an entirely human discipline working within the ordinary framework of thought as discussed in philosophical categories. It has no guaranteed ways of demonstrating that God is really being spoken of in human speech. So the theologian has to reckon with the ever-present temptation that he or she is overtly or covertly turning into a philosopher, instead of a person open to the gracious deed of God in Jesus Christ. In the course of the discussion it becomes apparent that Barth believes that the implications of this openness are that the theologian must be more realist than idealist. But in realism also there are temptations, particularly the temptation to bring the novelty of the gospel within the
range of possible human experience. Consequently, Barth formulates a series of questions which he desires to put to theologies in the realist tradition, including those of St Thomas Aquinas and (somewhat to our astonishment at finding him in this company) Friedrich Schleiermacher. And at the end of the questions he adds, as a kind of refrain, 'we are only asking', wir fragen nur.

The same question recurs in a piece written in 1933, largely directed against Emil Brunner, in whose receptivity to the notion of 'orders of creation' he suspected a turning towards liberal Protestantism (and Roman Catholicism!). Good intentions, Barth contends, are not enough. Every theology has the utmost difficulty in honouring the first commandment. That is why there cannot be peace in theology, but only assertion and counter-assertion. Even when, as in the case of Catholicism and still more of modern Protestantism, there is a serious fight to be fought against natural theology, our fallibility must be admitted:

We cannot see through any theology so completely that we can assert with final certainty that next to the deus ecclesiae it has 'other gods'. We can only remind ourselves mutually of the first commandment. We can only ask.11

It is, I would argue, by building into his method the necessity of relating authority to openness, that Karl Barth proposes to 'manage the innovation', to be a Church which is simultaneously a crater in which the apocalyptic shell has burst, 'a void in which the Gospel reveals itself', and yet at the same time a Church which says and does something authoritative in concrete, fallible human witness to this reality.

Certain passages in the Church Dogmatics illustrate the tensions into which this double character leads the Church. The first is the well-known section of Church Dogmatics, I/1, where Barth discusses the presence of Christ in the Word of God preached in relation to the ecclesiastical office of pastor or
priest, of bishop and of Pope. Against Harnack, who had earlier traced the movement from *Christus praesens* to *Vicarius Christi*, in what he acknowledges to be a fine essay, Barth insists that Protestants have no grounds for objecting to the development of the bishop's office, or of the mere idea of vicariate or of succession. With a pile of references from the works of both Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin he demonstrates this conclusion. Among the most striking of the quotations is that from Melanchthon's *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* where, in relation to the article 8 [on unworthy ministers], Melanchthon asserts the following:

For they [i.e. ministers] do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10.16): 'He who hears you hears me.' When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead *(Christi vice et loco).*

In the light of this and similar testimonies to the reformers' acceptance of the fact of a vicarious ministry and of succession, what is there to object to in the Roman Catholic understanding of the same?

Here Barth characteristically formulates a series of questions in full accord with the methodology we have just noted. Although there are a number of different potential objections the central issue is plainly one and the same: How far does one have here only a representation and not rather a supplanting of Christ? Barth acknowledges, of course, that Roman Catholic dogmatics strives to preserve the sovereignty of Christ over the Church. Nevertheless he insists on asking:

But where can this lordship of Christ over His Church take concrete shape in this system, where can it come into proper play, when all its power has already been fully transferred to the Church, when its power is simply present in the Church? And if it has no play of its own, is it distinguished in any way but name only from the power that is exercised in the Church by men without break, hindrance or limit?
Barth's demand that there should be some concrete way in which the sovereignty of Christ over the Church should be distinguishable from the powers exercised by human beings in the Church provokes some complex questions. There is no objection, we must remember, to the ministry exercising the vicariate. How then, in concrete, does the ministry acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ over the Church? His objection to the sort of power which acts 'without break, hindrance or limit' sounds as though it were a standard piece of antipathy to authoritarianism. But the answer cannot be, as he seems to hint, by quasi-democratic checks and balances, because for him the ministerial vicariate is the representation of the person of Christ, to which all must be submissive. The question, therefore, arises as pertinently of Barth's theology of the ministry whether it, too, concretely acknowledges the sovereignty of Christ.

Barth offers two considerations, the first of which he regards as the decisive Protestant consideration against Catholic doctrines of historic succession, indelible character and the possibility of irreformable definitions. The limitation of the power of the Church is, he asserts, contained in the fact that human authorities are not deprived of their humanity. The presence of Christ is always a personal presence, which implies the possibility of absence. There can therefore be no opus operatum in the Protestant view of ecclesiastical office. But this is much more problematic than he recognises. We must recall that for Barth there is a presence of Christ, even in unworthy ministers, by reason of the fact of their calling by the Church. By now raising the possibility of absence he undermines the very considerations which the evidence he quotes was designed to supply. And, from the Roman Catholic side, it would be most strenuously denied that the presence of Christ 'deprived' the priesthood of its humanity.

The second consideration relates to prayer. The preacher prays that God will give him a good word to speak (citing here
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Augustine’s treatise, *On Christian Doctrine*, bk. IV, 15). Barth insists that this establishes the fact that thereby the office and act of the ministry is tied to the action of Christ, ‘to the actualizing of proclamation by God’. He is once more concerned to prevent the reverse implication, the tying of Christ’s action to the office. But one must ask, again, whether the consideration meets the demand for a *concrete* limit to the power of the ministry. At the very least, one must say that Barth is on weak grounds if he believes that with these considerations he has identified the fundamental difference between Reformed and Roman Catholic dogmatics on the matters of the ministry. He is better construed as addressing questions to both traditions, both of which are incipiently in danger of acknowledging ‘other gods’, one by minimising the pervasiveness of human fallibility, the other by maximising the possibility of divine absence.

A similar set of tensions attends another group of passages in the *Church Dogmatics* in relation to the Church’s teaching office, the section on dogmatic method in I/2 (published in 1939), and the opening passages of IV/1 on the doctrine of reconciliation (published in 1953).16 In the first of these Barth is expounding his hostility to a long-standing tradition in Protestantism of organising a theology around a definition of the ‘essence of Christianity’. The objection to this tradition arises out of Barth’s formulation of the Church’s task of both hearing and teaching the Word of God. The only possible point of departure for dogmatics is that of the hearing Church. But as such it is under constant pressure to declare what it has heard; hence the indispensable connection between hearing and teaching.17 The only words it has are human words; all dogmatics can do is to serve the power of the Word of God. And this it does by setting the hearing Church a good example, by trying to show that it too is in the first place listening to the Word of God. But how, Barth asks, can dogmatics do that *concretely*? At the end of the day, nothing whatever can objectively guarantee that the dogmatic writer has been faithful and obedient to the Word:
It is the gift of grace and of the Holy Spirit which must come from God, so that man can take it into account only as a presupposition for which he must pray.\textsuperscript{18}

Of course the dogmatician must keep close to Scripture, and must avoid being controlled by alien presuppositions and assumptions. But dogmatics is not exegesis; it has to dare to comprehend and present the work and activity of God as a whole. Thus it is exposed to the same danger as that of the Church. But it must have the courage to speak and to speak with boldness and confidence. The autonomy of dogmatic thinking, including concrete decisions made about particular methods, 'applies, denotes and signifies the autonomy of the Holy Spirit'. Thus, though it is human words that are used: not even for a moment can we forget that, when and in so far as we do think and speak the truth in Church proclamation and dogmatics, it is God Himself and alone who, using man as His servant, and without incurring any obligation to him, has actually thought His thoughts and spoken His word. It is only in this modesty that we do think and speak the truth. And this modesty includes the realisation that in God's light we are shown to be darkness, in God's judgement we are exposed as liars, and that we shall think and speak the truth always against our own selves.\textsuperscript{19}

Accordingly, the human task of dogmatics must have a humanly chosen method which, \textit{per impossibile}, corresponds to the freedom of the Word of God. How can it have this? Here Barth again invokes the image of the empty centre. Dogmatics, unlike a system controlled by a fundamental principle of interpretation, must remain open: 'essentially dogmatic method consists in this openness to receive new truth.' It is continuously on guard so that its object may be allowed to speak for itself. It is confident, but also looks forward to its own purification. It does not try to prove itself prematurely, but allows itself time to be purified and refined:

In the last resort we may say that dogmatic method consists simply in this: that the work and activity of God in His Word are honoured and feared and loved (literally) above all things.\textsuperscript{20}
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The practical implications of this attitude are that there is no fundamental principle of dogmatics — indeed, according to Barth, there is a ‘fundamental lack of principle’.

Instead there is a centre, constituted by the self-positing and self-authenticating Word of God, which is like a circle from whose periphery a certain number of lines can be drawn in all directions. These lines would then constitute the separate doctrines of a given dogmatics, such as the doctrine of God, of creation, of reconciliation and so forth.

It is in this way, then, that Barth proposes to ‘manage the innovation’, the impact of the utterly free Word of God imploding upon the human situation, confronting human beings with the impossible task of faithful witness to its novel reality. We should note in particular the priority of the Church’s self-description over any imposition of normative criteria from without. The same theme had already been sounded by none other than John Henry Newman, who, as an Anglican, had already reacted to the popular attempts of a Scottish and an American Protestant theologian to define the ‘leading idea’ of Christianity. This can only result, he protested in one of the *Tracts for the Times* (1835), in the importing of rationalistic principles into religion, in neglect of the fact that the Christian revelation is a mystery lying hidden in language, and not a human intelligible system of which, in the end of the day, humanity is itself the centre.

Newman, like Barth, feared that, in the end, human beings would simply assume that they occupied a platform from which they could survey and control their material. Viewed as a system, the full intellectual significance of Christianity is simply unknown. Both Newman and Barth, though for different reasons, simply assumed a backcloth of massive human ignorance, Newman in reliance upon the philosopher, Joseph Butler, and Barth upon Calvin. The function of this backcloth is, however, identical in both theologians in that it the more brightly illuminates the spot where the light shines.

But where, we may be disposed to ask, does this argument
leave the Church's confession? It is one thing for the dogmatician to confront the impossible task of speaking of the reality of God's self-revelation; it is another matter, surely, for the Church to resolve its complex human task of testifying to the divine presence. How, in practice, can the Church leave the centre of the circle open? Barth's reply is instructive, and it is in part contained in the same section in which he rejects the tradition of defining Christianity's essence. These definitions he traces (though the derivation has with good reason been challenged) to the earlier attempt of Protestant orthodoxy to speak of the articuli fundamentales of Christian doctrine. Barth does not deny that there are, or may be, relatively more and relatively less important elements of doctrine. But he distinguishes between the dogmatic affirmation of fundamental articles and the activity of confession, which is strictly a matter for a particular place and time (one recalls here Barth's experiences at Barmen). Ecclesial confessions are necessarily selections from the wealth of biblical truth and reality. Thus 'the establishment of specific, irrevocable, fundamental articles will block the way to freedom both for itself [i.e. dogmatics] and for the Church'. By this Barth does not intend any hostility to the historic creeds. Dogmatics can and must be done in what Barth calls 'a confessional attitude', that is, with due respect to the confession of the Church. Elsewhere he notes the Reformers' reception of the classic creeds, and deplores the liberal Protestant departure from them. But the fundamentum substantiale, that is God Himself, cannot and must not be identified with any declared fundamentum dogmaticum, which is a matter for the free determination of the Word of God in ever-repeated encounter with the Church. Thus Barth declares:

Dogma is an eschatological idea, to which each particular dogmatic statement is only an approximation, which can neither anticipate it nor conceal it. This is a truth which the Church can easily forget, and if it does, the result is that in its preoccupation with mere creeds and
dogmas it loses the capacity for confession and the living relation with true dogma.\textsuperscript{25}

In due time it was on the basis of this same eschatological view of dogma that Barth was drawn in open admiration towards the innovatory project conceived by Pope John XXIII and carried out by the Second Vatican Council. Precisely \textit{because} the Lord of the Church is free to work as and where he wills, it was possible for Barth to conceive that, despite Protestantism's formal claim to be faithful to the Word of God, one day it might be the case that Rome would 'simply overtake us and place us in the shadows so far as the renewing of the Church is concerned'.\textsuperscript{26} This open expression of delight is the direct outcome of Barth's fundamentally eschatological view of the Church's relation to true dogma. His overwhelmingly positive reception of the initiatives of Vatican II is in part the fruit of a recognition of their christological content and in part an acknowledgement of their tone. An interesting example of the latter is his comment on Pope John XXIII's Easter encyclical, in comparison with the tone of documents emanating from the World Council of Churches:

Is not the reason [he asked], also the fact that in the encyclical the same things were not only talked about but \textit{proclaimed}, that Christianity and the world were not only taught but also \textit{summoned} unreservedly and bindingly with an appeal to the highest authority, that they received not only advice and admonition but also \textit{directives}.\textsuperscript{37}

Content and tone are, for Barth, the two hallmarks of an authentic authority lying not in the Church itself, but in its openness to and dependence upon Christ.

Subsequently, at the request of Father Yves Congar, Barth summed up the results of a seminar on the constitution \textit{Dei Verbum}, held in the winter of 1966–7, in a paper which compared the methods of Trent and Vatican I with those of Vatican II. Here he makes the claim that the Second Council moved beyond the footsteps of Vatican I, apart from what he terms 'an
attack of weakness in chapter II', which he dismisses as the price which has to be paid for the revolutionary 'trend to the Bible', of which the document as a whole is redolent.\textsuperscript{28}

All this is now familiar history and twenty years in the past, since when there have been many ambiguous developments. But my thesis is that the 'management of the innovations' is a process of real complexity, that the Christian faith itself promotes its own internal dialect and discord, and that the existence of an authentic teaching office is itself part of that process, and does not stand outside or above it. The challenge of Karl Barth to the contemporary ecumenical movement is to conceive of a genuine authority in the Church speaking the prophetic 'Thus saith the Lord', which is at the same time, on its own admission, a human voice, open to question and to the future.

It has to be said that this is a difficult thought. It is easier to imagine either a sacralised ecclesiastical authority, girding itself with legitimations in classic style, manipulating when it can no longer repress; or alternatively of a secularised assembly of quasi-democratic style, responsive to the passions and fashions of popular culture, alternately apologising and blustering, constantly demonstrating its deep inner anxiety. Are there not, we want to know, sociological laws governing the behaviour of large organisations like world-wide Churches which simply prevent them from exemplifying the kind of confidence, yet modesty, for which Barth calls? Are human beings capable of both supreme confidence in God and human modesty? Are not the parallel languages of theology and of human psychology and sociology inevitably and dangerously mixed? Do we not need to know in sociological detail how an organization, which a Church undoubtedly is, may be protected from self-deception and delusion whilst making the most startling claims for its divine indwelling?\textsuperscript{29}

These are questions which, in my opinion, lie at the heart of the contemporary ecumenical situation. The processes of
convergence, which so far have applied themselves with exemplary intensity to precise formulations of dogmatic fundamentals (including, as we know, precisely formulated ambiguities), need to ask two basic questions with which Barth's work confronts us. The first is primarily a matter of ecumenical spirituality. Is there in all our preoccupation with the small print of creeds and dogmas nonetheless a deeply laid, living relationship with true dogma? Or to put the same question another way: does the ascesis of deprivation and hope predominate over possession and self-sufficiency? It is perhaps a strange thought that we might, in the long run, be able to treat this formidable Calvinist dogmatician as a spiritual writer. What is at least certain is that the ecumenical movement requires a common spirituality to undergird it, and that Barth's profound reflection upon the eschatological *novum* in human life has the strongest of biblical precedents, the writings of St Paul.

The second question likewise arises from Barth's concern with St Paul, but takes with greater seriousness than did Barth or other Protestant exegetes of his day St Paul's own managerial initiatives. The question is, how is the innovatory Word of God to be 'managed' in everyday, sociological reality? How is this treasure to be contained in earthen vessels, without being imprisoned in them? Barth believed that the unification of Christianity would come about, not by the co-operative activity of the different insitutions but by their common participation in the dynamics of the Word and of the Spirit. Without loss of this perspective, there is surely much to be learnt from understanding, as well as may be understood, the sociological dynamics of large bureaucracies, which is what modern Christian denominations are, just as much has been clarified of St Paul's relations with his congregations by seeing them, sociologically, as millennarian movements. The unification of Christianity, as it comes about, will have its sociological correlates. It will fall to Christian leaders, as it fell
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to St Paul, to 'manage the innovations'. We shall need, as Barth indicated, institutions with openings at their centre.

NOTES

1 'Roman Catholicism: a question to the Protestant Church' in K. Barth, Theology and Church, ET, L. P. Smith (London, SCM Press, 1962), p. 320.

2 A shorter version of this chapter was read at a symposium organised by the Theological Faculty of the Pontifical Gregorian University to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Karl Barth, and was published as 'Karl Barth on the heart of the matter' in Gregorianum 74, 4 (1986), 679–91.

3 Barth, Theology and Church, p. 313; p. 314, referring to Karl Adam's The Spirit of Catholicism, ET, J. McCann (London, Sheed and Ward, 1934), p. 16.

4 Barth, Theology and Church, p. 321, referring to Luther's commentary on Gal. 2.6, and to Melanchthon's individual attestation on signing the Schmalcald Articles in 1537.


7 Ibid., p. 254. The editor of the English translation helpfully cites from a translation of Tao-Teh-King, ch. 11: 'The thirty spokes of a chariot wheel and the nave to which they are attached would be useless, but for the hollow space in which the axle turns.'


9 I owe this point to the thesis of J. Macken SJ, The Autonomy Theme in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics (Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät der Universität Tübingen, 1984), pp. 288–9.

10 Delivered as lectures in Dortmund and first published in Zwischen den Zeiten, they were subsequently printed in Theologische Fragen und Antworten, Gesammelte Vorträge (Zurich, 1957) vol. III, pp. 54–92; ET, H. M. Rumscheidt [ed.],
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11 K. Barth, 'The first commandment as an axiom of theology', ET, Rumscheidt, The Way of Theology, p. 78.


13 CD, 1/1, pp. 95-9.


15 CD, 1/1, pp. 97f.

16 I have already examined these passages in some detail in 'Barth on the centre of theology', S. W. Sykes (ed.), Karl Barth, Studies of his Theological Method (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 17, 54; and again in The Identity of Christianity (London, SPCK, 1984), ch. 8, 'Barth and the power of the word'.

17 CD, 1/2, p. 854.

18 Ibid., p. 859.

19 Ibid., p. 884. Dr Philip Rosato SJ, in his examination of Barth's pneumatology, speaks perceptively of the way in which Barth 'continually comes upon pneumatology as the corrective to natural theology', The Spirit as Lord (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1981), p. 43.

20 CD, 1/2, p. 867.

21 Ibid., p. 869.

22 See Sykes, The Identity of Christianity, ch. 5, 'Newman on the idea of Christianity'.

23 CD, 1/2, pp. 863ff.

24 Ibid., p. 864.

25 Ibid., p. 865.

26 Karl Barth, Ad Limina Apostolorum, An Appraisal of Vatican II, ET, K. Crim (St Andrews Press, Edinburgh, 1969), p. 75. It is also true that he was capable of expressing himself with considerable vulgarity on the subject of the 'game' played in Rome of ignoring or marginalising inconvenient texts from past Councils. See the letter to his Lutheran friend of long standing, Professor Edmund Schlink, in Karl Barth, Letters 1961–68, ET, G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1981), pp. 225f. I draw attention to this because the ecclesiological basis of Barth's positive response remains his own, and because at this stage one must avoid the
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temptation to gloss or ignore his open and frequent attacks on aspects of Roman Catholicism.

27 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 76.

29 There is a brief discussion of the way in which Barth has handled the question of power in the closing part of ch. 8 of Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, see n. 16, above.
Ad Limina Apostolorum in retrospect:
the reaction of Karl Barth to Vatican II

PHILIP J. ROSATO SJ

The centenary of the birth of Karl Barth has coincided with the twentieth anniversary of his ecumenically significant visit to Rome in September 1966; already an ailing octogenarian, Barth wistfully caricatured his trip as a peregrinatio ad limina apostolorum, as an official call on Pope Paul VI undertaken by a separated brother and elder. Equipped with one general set of questions and nine double sets – questions for clarification and critical questions – derived from nine of the sixteen Latin documents of Vatican II (1962-5), Barth arrived post festum at the centre of Roman Catholicism, so as 'to become acquainted with its theology where it had long been operating, and from where, with conflicting and interrelated tendencies, it had now adopted for itself new standards and directions'. In the subsequently published booklet, with the same playfully earnest title as the visit itself, Barth provided no more than a brief description of the felicitous happenings in Rome, and an unedited facsimile of the theological questions he openly discussed there with leading representatives of Catholicism. In explaining the reason for his brevity, Barth parenthetically mentioned that some of his queries were left unanswered: 'Because from the beginning I assured the Secretariat for Unity of my strict discretion, the reader will find here nothing of the answers (sometimes, lack of answers) which my questions received in Rome.' Yet, despite the silence Barth maintained,
and the less than total satisfaction he hinted at, he voiced two reactions to his historic 'working pilgrimage' which indicated its generally successful outcome in his eyes. The first expressed frank admiration of the achievement of Vatican II, and suggested that Protestantism was in need of a similar impulse:

As a result of the trip I gained a close acquaintance with a church and a theology which have begun a movement, the results of which are incalculable and slow but clearly genuine and irreversible. In looking at it we can only wish that we had something comparable, if it could avoid a repetition of at least the worst mistakes we have made since the sixteenth century.³

The second reaction, following an allusion to his grave reservations about a treatise on mariology sent to him by a German theologian, permitted Barth both to assuage and to unsettle his fellow Protestants: 'Anxious souls on our side may here at last see that I returned from Rome just as stubbornly evangelical – I would really rather say, evangelical–catholic – as before.'⁴

What could Barth have observed and heard in Rome between 22–9 September 1966 which more profoundly convinced him that a sincere spiritual renewal of Catholicism had been inaugurated by Vatican II?

This essay attempts to reconstruct an hypothetical account of what transpired there in the theological conversations about which Barth and his Catholic counterparts have remained silent. If such an account is to be more accurate than speculative, it should rest not only on a careful study of the questions formulated by Barth and published in Ad Limina Apostolorum, but also on a prudent selection of some major themes which are recurrent in them, and which also correspond to those problematic elements he had consistently found present in Catholic theology prior to the Council. Thus, rather than treat specific topics which might have been discussed in Rome, such as the role ascribed by Vatican II to the continuing election of Israel, to the primacy of the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian faith and sanctification, and to the...
eschatological dimension of Christian ethics, this essay will concentrate on themes which underlie these important issues.\(^5\) Barth was indeed dissatisfied with particular Conciliar decisions, like that of including Israel among the non-Christian religions, and that of basing its appeal to governments for religious freedom on solely philosophical and pragmatic arguments; yet these objections were rooted in his suspicion that Catholicism is uncertain about whether the primary purpose of Christian theology is to resist cultural pressures by transmitting biblical revelation in its entirety, or to dialogue in each culture with those possessing non-biblical conceptions of God. Therefore, it will be maintained that the position of Vatican II towards previous Catholic understandings of the relationship between fundamental and biblical theology was most probably an issue lengthily debated in Rome. Similarly, Barth was frustrated with the Catholic penchant not only to attribute to the eucharistic celebration, and to the ordained who preside at it, the privileged function of mediating salvific grace to the world, but also to create a dichotomy between the special sacramental apostolate of the clergy and the subordinate duty of the laity to testify publicly to the Gospel; at the base of these difficulties, however, was his conjecture that Catholicism neglected the challenging kerygmatic and diaconal dimensions of Christian life for the sake of safeguarding its controllable sacramental and hierarchically organised forms of manifesting Christ to the world. As a result, it is feasible to claim that the stance of Vatican II on traditional Catholic explanations of the connection between sacramental and pastoral theology was an item on the agenda in Rome. By first demonstrating that many of the critical questions posed by Barth in *Ad Limina Apostolorum* concerned the relationship of either fundamental to biblical or sacramental to pastoral theology, and by then surmising how his Catholic counterparts, relying on the documents of Vatican II, may have responded to his objections, this chapter intends to comprehend why the conversations in Rome would have rein-
forced Barth's already positive disposition to the reform movement in Catholicism. For the answers which he received were sufficiently cogent to render him more confident in considering himself 'evangelical-catholic' and to challenge his fellow Protestants to renew themselves and 'with calm, brotherly hope' to strive for unity with a self-renewing Catholicism.

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A repeated reading of the series of critical questions which Barth put to the representatives of Catholicism in Rome reveals that many of them pivoted on the precise nature of Christian theology. His greatest difficulty with the Council itself, and with its various decrees, arose from deep-seated uncertainty as to whether the 'new' Roman Catholicism was preoccupied with its own identity or with its public acceptability. Was faithful transmission of divine self-revelation *intra muros et extra*, or relevant dialogue with modernity, the scope of the Council? Barth articulated this query in the introductory questions which served as a prelude to the specific ones to follow: 'Was the main concern a renewal of the Church's theoretical and practical understanding of itself in the light of the revelation on which it is founded, or a renewal of her thinking, speaking, and acting today in the light of the modern world? If both, in the interests of the pastoral task, which was it primarily?' It was not the case either that Barth had no preference with regard to the more satisfactory answer, or that he had not already responded to his own question three years earlier in 'Thoughts on the Second Vatican Council' (see n. 1, p. 110). There Barth made it clear that, before Catholicism could readjust its relationships to others, both its theoretical and practical self-understanding needed renewal and that this enterprise should be marked by a thoroughly spiritual character. Why then did Barth pose such a basic
question to his Roman interlocutors during the 1966 visit? The last of the general questions provides the key to the answer: 'Are the adherents of the 'progressive' majority of the Council who opt for the latter (world-oriented renewal), aware of the danger that this might result in an undesired repetition of the errors committed in modern Protestantism?' In effect, just as Barth had called his fellow Protestants to renewal by righting the worst mistakes made since the Reformation, he was fearful that 'the renewal of the Catholic Church in the sense of conversion to Jesus Christ is not necessarily identical with the concern of the 'progressive' wing of the Catholic camp where some are becoming all too Protestant.' In short, it was not the much-desired rejuvenation of Catholic dogmatic and pastoral theology which Barth greeted with caution, but the much-feared revival of its so-called anthropological presuppositions of accepting the truths of the Bible and the creed, the same apologetically intended presuppositions, whether termed 'fundamental' or 'philosophical' theology, which underlie the secular exaggerations of liberal Protestantism.

That this interpretation of Barth's concern about the very nature of the renewal movement of Vatican II is justified, even though in Ad Limina Apostolorum he did not employ the phrases 'anthropological presuppositions', 'fundamental or philosophical theology' or 'liberal Protestantism', is confirmed by a critical question resulting from his study of Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Barth succinctly asked: 'Is it so certain that dialogue with the world is to be placed ahead of proclamation to the world?' Since Barth's hermeneutics of the Old and New Testaments rested on their kerygmatic rather than apologetical function, this question challenged what he deemed Catholic naïve optimism with regard to the validity of secular conceptions of human beings, their knowledge, their morality, and their destiny. Rather than claim to appreciate humanity's wisdom and projects by adopting its philosophical categories,
supposedly so as to present biblical revelation as parallel to and compatible with them, the Church must counter secular terminology by announcing the Word of God with its full eschatological force. Barth thus doubted the consistent commitment to biblical theology in the documents of Vatican II which at points seemed to set the Scriptures aside for the sake of addressing non-believers in thought patterns familiar to them. The same fear that the force of the Scriptures was compromised by the Council was reiterated by Barth as he reflected critically on Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: 'Why is tradition given precedence over Scripture [7, 2; 9; 10, 1; 10, 3]? How did we get the triad of tradition, Scripture, and teaching office, and their interdependence [10, 3]? How did the "pari pietatis affectu" ("with the same sense of devotion") of Trent come to be included here? The three subdivisions of this single question can be traced to Barth's lifelong difficulty in grasping what Catholicism holds to be the content of its proclamation to the world; is it the Scripture itself, its past (transitio) or its present interpretation (magisterium)? If this matter could not be clarified, Barth could not be sure whether the deeper conviction of Catholics about the primacy of the Bible and the intensified transmission of its unadulterated contents to humanity were indeed the two foci of the renewal begun by Vatican II. Thus, in 1966, Barth interrogated his Roman dialogue partners about the most essential of all theological topics: their adherence to Scripture and witness to it as the indisputably prior theoretical and practical tasks of the Church. Although Barth was certainly satisfied that Dei Verbum of Vatican II had greatly surpassed the affirmations of Trent and Vatican I, he felt constrained once again to plumb the depths of this apparent progress, and to be assured in Rome that Scripture was not being presented as the norm of any other theological font, when in fact tradition and teaching office – both purported to be under its sovereignty – were the truly operative tools of Catholic theology.

If Barth suspected that in two of its formal constitutions
Vatican II subordinated the Word of God either to anthropological considerations or to tradition and teaching office, he found his opinion corroborated in *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. In two of the critical questions he formulated concerning it, Barth noted the blatant lack of a theology of the cross in the very document in which Vatican II delineated its rapport with 'Jews and Greeks', and thus in which he would have expected to perceive unambiguous reverberations of the Pauline teaching on the folly and weakness of God as manifested in the crucified Jesus. Hence, in the first of these questions Barth indicated his displeasure with Catholicism's neglect of the biblical message for the sake of humanistic or apologetical considerations: 'Would not the justifiable human concern of the Declaration have been expressed better by adhering to the proven methods of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, in which he proclaimed nothing to Jews or Greeks but the One who had been crucified for them - a stumbling block to the first and folly to others - in order to address them as men from that point, and to call them to a realisation of their common humanity?' 16 In the second of his questions Barth observed that another Catholic interest, the findings of the modern science of comparative religion, appeared to impede the preaching of the cross by generating a preference for the 'higher religions' whose purer concept of God was judged reason enough to esteem rather than challenge them. Barth disagreed not only with this conclusion, but also with the degree of scientific expertise on which it rested: 'On what grounds does the Declaration [2ff.] continue the distinction, long since outgrown in the study of comparative religion, between the so-called 'higher religions' and the primitive religions, when the opposition of the former to the message of the cross is much more obvious and dangerous?' 17 Barth expressed similar reservations about the primacy of revelation in Catholic thinking, when he commented critically on
Dignitatis Humanae, the Declaration on Religious Freedom: 'When or where did the witnesses in the Old and New Testament defend their freedom to act by reference to the natural dignity of the human person? When or where did they react to the threats of oppression which the ruling powers raised against freedom in any other manner than by resisting and suffering?' Once again Barth distrusted the renewal undertaken by Vatican II whenever its openness to philosophical, religious and scientific trends extrinsic to Christianity obfuscated its clear transmission of the data of Scripture. Furthermore, Barth surmised that, by linking the Word to tradition and teaching office, Catholicism assured that fundamental rather than biblical theology guided its course. For the continual efforts of the Catholic Church to adjust itself to varying intellectual currents could be rationalised on the ground that they were shielded by a long tradition and approved by a legitimate authority, both of which ecclesial mechanisms could supposedly interpret Scripture properly. Barth's own questions reveal that he went to Rome to ascertain the extent to which his suspicion concerning the subordinate place of Scripture in the documents of Vatican II was justified.

How did Curia officials and theology professors in Rome assuage Barth's uneasiness regarding this matter? It would seem that they had to attain two related goals: the first a respectful rebuttal of Barth's objections as inaccurate in the light of Catholicism's self-understanding; the second an earnest attempt to expound this self-understanding so that Barth would be able to judge it substantially amenable if not entirely valid. Thus, it had to be shown that his difficulty with the apparent inability of Vatican II to opt for either dialogue with non-Christians or transmission of revelation to them was based on an inadequate comprehension of the Catholic position on the origin and nature of the New Testament writings. Before these were composed and selected as fitting articulations of Christian faith and experience, they existed as oral traditions consisting to a great extent of the early endeavours
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of Christians to account for their belief and life-style before incredulous representatives of both Judaism and Hellenism. Thus, the Word of God in its literary form emerged from a living tradition fundamentally determined by the previous efforts of Christians in various environments to announce the Christ-event so that precisely its novelty might become partially intelligible as a gratuitous divine gift to their hearers. Rather than being diametrically opposed, therefore, dialogue with those who did not know and accept Christ and transmission of his truth and grace to them comprised a ‘single complex reality’.\(^\text{20}\)

It is unwarranted to place a wedge between the dual elements of this one reality by, for example, consistently appealing to biblical images depicting the Christian community as extrinsically related to the transcendent Word while methodically excluding other images which stress the intrinsic relationship between the self-communicating divine Word and its appointed human messengers. Thus, while not denying that the Pauline portrayal of the Word of God as a heavenly treasure contained in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4.7) represents the ‘non-identity’ pole of the theological spectrum and affirms Christ’s supremacy over his Church, Catholics would prefer to emphasise its ‘interpenetration’ pole which is represented by Paul’s organic image of Christ inhabiting Christians through his Spirit (Gal. 2.20; 4.6). Taken together, these images illuminate ecclesial existence and testimony both as absolutely dependent on the prior and unique assumption of human nature by the Word, and as appropriately analogous to the same mystery in which the self-communication of the Word took place in and through his human reason and affection. Once the unmerited identity of the Church as sacramental herald of the incarnate, crucified and glorified Christ is accepted, it follows that developing an ever more adequate philosophical mode of discoursing with non-believers about Christ is an inner moment of the Church’s evangelical task, that guaranteeing the vitality of the original oral and subsequent written tradition through authoritative
witness to it belongs to its mandate to preach Jesus Christ authentically, and that conversing continually with non-
Christians, who are searching for the full truth about God and the world, expresses its inherent ability to act as effective sign 
of Christ to all people of good will.21

Having offered such a correction of Barth's reaction to the seemingly unresolved tension in Vatican II between dialogue and transmission, his interlocutors would then have encouraged him to understand *in optimum partem* their integration of these elements. They could readily embark on this effort by relying on two of the favourable 'questions for clarification' which Barth posed concerning *Dei Verbum*: 'Why is chapter I of this Constitution opened and dominated by statements that are christological and soteriological in nature? Why does the Constitution lack all the apologetical material of chapters II–IV from Vatican I ["On Faith and Reason . . ."]? This happened in spite of the "pastoral" intention of Vatican II!'22 The spokesmen in Rome could maintain that the Catholic Church has no intention of allowing the human person or the ecclesial community to take the place of Christ the Saviour; its only aim is to communicate his truth and grace to others through the extension of all the gifts which the Church receives from his Spirit. No doubt, a Conciliar text which was highlighted for Barth in Rome was a section of *Dei Verbum*, 8: 'Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase of faith of the People of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is and that she believes.'23 Although this passage is admittedly not very precise (Barth would have been sympathetic, since he recognised Vatican II as chiefly a pastoral council), it would have provided the representatives of Catholicism an opportunity to describe the deposit of faith not as a treasure of truths to be appreciated in time, but as a living body of liturgical, catechetical and spiritual reflections and
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meditations meant to convey that the christological and soteriological message of the Scriptures is a pneumatic event rather than a static teaching. This fundamental stance could then be further delineated in terms of the specific matters which Barth found disturbing. An aspect of the vitality of tradition is that it does not need to fear the loss of its authenticity (or its becoming liberal Protestant!) when it engages non-believers, with the aid of philosophical categories which they comprehend, in discussion about the incomprehensible God; the Church trusts that its graced possession and declaration of divine truth will prove credible to others moved by the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the magisterium is not a regulating screen or a foreign light which either shades or outshines the saving flame of Christ, but a community of subservient yet vigilant discerners who safeguard the Scripture from human glosses made upon it by believers as diverse as John Calvin and Thomas More, Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.24 Finally, in affirming that there are seeds of the Word and the Spirit in other religions, the Catholic Church has never thereby mitigated its missionary thrust but, as Barth himself openly confessed, has gone out on mission even in the darkest periods of its history.25 In reply, Barth would surely have conceded that, in titling his major work Church Dogmatics, he intended to present the Word of God as a transcendent reality to be understood, either in its historical, written or preached form, only by an ecclesial community. However, he would most likely have been unconvinced of the intermingling of divine and human initiatives in his interlocutors’ exposition of the mode by which the Catholic Church interprets and transmits the Scripture.

MEDIATION OR TESTIMONY? QUESTIONS TO THE SACRAMENTAL AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

Another leitmotif in the critical questions raised by Barth in
Rome was the apparently disordered relationship to be found in Vatican II among three elements which he would have ranked as follows: Scripture, Church and sacraments. Barth located the root of this problematic in the quite understandable Catholic tendency to continue its counter-Reformational attitude by subsuming the ecclesially interpreted Scriptures within the ecclesially regulated liturgy, in order to withstand the Protestant bent in the opposite direction. Yet, when evaluating Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Barth voiced a further preoccupation, namely, that in Catholicism ritual still seems to supplant not only the Scriptures but also the role of faith and testimony as the primary responses of Christians to the biblical account of their objective redemption in Christ: 'What does it mean to say that through the liturgy "the work of our redemption is exercised" (2; 6, etc.)? Would it not be more appropriate to speak of a central answer of God's people, or of the testimony they are to bear?' 26 This question implied that for Barth the only evangelical 'exercise of redemption' is interior and public acknowledgement of the antecedent and permanent efficaciousness of Jesus Christ the Redeemer as it is attested in the Scriptures; Catholic emphasis on the need to partake in a redemptive rite could effectively distract believers from the clarity of the New Testament concerning the definitiveness of the Christ-event. Barth found this issue to be at stake in Dei Verbum as well: 'If what is said of Scripture in 21 is valid, in what respect is participation in the Eucharist the growth (incrementum) of the spiritual life of the Church, while the veneration of the Word of God is only the stimulus (impulsus) to this life?' 27 Whenever Barth sought the ultimate cause of such preferential option for the spiritual richness of ritual over that of Scripture, he concluded that, as is the case with its approach to fundamental and biblical theology, the Catholic Church takes on itself the office of mediator, so that every act of hearing the Word and giving public testimony to it at the
sacraments is an event over which the institutional Church rather than its Lord has control. Barth explicated this opinion in a seemingly innocent yet quite blunt question concerning *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: ‘Does the Church “beget” the faithful [28, 64]? Does it do this through baptism?’ The same theme recurs in the almost impatient question put by Barth to *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church: ‘Again and again, is it the Church which saves and renews the world [1, 2]? Is not her task of testifying to Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel between his first and his second coming, great and magnificent enough?’ If, as was shown in the previous part of this chapter, Barth’s critique of Vatican II regarding the theological issue, dialogue versus transmission, was intense because concentrated, here it can be said that his objections to the parallel issue, mediation versus testimony, are even more intense because directed at various aspects of Catholic sacramental life.

The teaching of Vatican II on the Eucharist was already alluded to above in a quotation in which Barth distanced himself from the disproportionate importance for spiritual growth attributed to this rite in contrast to hearing and acting upon the Word. Barth turned his attention to the Eucharist in two other pointed questions, both of which lay open aspects of his displeasure with Catholicism’s seemingly myopic concentration on this sacrament. The first of these, an exegetical question, appears in Barth’s reaction to *Lumen Gentium*: ‘Why is it that among the four marks of the Church in Acts 2:42 (devotion to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers) it is the third [Eucharist] that is designated as constitutive for the life of the Church?’ Barth was patently dissatisfied with Catholicism’s neglect of major biblical themes concerning Christian orthopraxy for the sake of underlining the Eucharist at all costs, and thus perpetuating its own claim to greater orthodoxy than that of Protestantism.
The second question which Barth raised in Rome on this matter was of an historical nature; it occurs in his critical reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium: 'Had the Eucharistic celebration already taken on in the New Testament church the primary significance ascribed to it here and in the other documents of Vatican II?'

In this question, Barth indicated his uneasiness not only with the objective ground of Catholicism's claim concerning the primacy of the Eucharist over other dimensions of Christian life, but also with the practical fact that this conviction is repeated in almost all the decrees of the Council. Barth surely had in mind such prominent Conciliar statements as: 'From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a fountain, grace is channelled into us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God to which all activities of the Church are directed as towards their goal, are most powerfully achieved'; and 'Hence the Eucharist shows itself to be the source and apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.'

That Barth would have preferred the accentuation here to be reversed became even more evident when he inquired whether Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, could not have served as a model for all the other documents: 'Is not the concept of testimony, which is used in this decree (11, 2; 11, 5; 13, 1; etc.) to designate the task of the laity, a suitable designation of the task of the whole Church in her relation to the World (Acts 1. 8; 2. 32, etc.)? In 27, 1 it is stated explicitly as "the common duty of Christian witness".'

Whether Barth reflected on what Vatican II regarded as the right order between Scripture and sacrament, or between Christian life as an entirety and Eucharist, he invariably arrived at the same quandary: has the inexhaustible task of proclaiming the Gospel been overshadowed in Catholicism by the controllable task of celebrating the Lord's Supper and the other sacraments?

A further dimension of Barth's difficulty with the preference
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of Vatican II for the concept of sacramental mediation of Christ rather than evangelical testimony to him came to the fore in connection with what he deemed the inequality between the ordained priests and the lay apostles. Thus, in his critical remarks on Sacrosanctum Concilium, Barth may have been only somewhat conciliatory in suggesting that the Catholic understanding of the modes of Christ's presence at the Eucharist be extended so as to include his presence in the laity: ‘Is Christ present in the Mass only “in the person of his minister” and in the two elements of the Eucharist (7, 1) when it is stated in 48 that the faithful, together with the priest, offer the “immaculate victim”’ (“not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him”)?

Although Barth thoroughly disagreed with the excessive emphasis on mediation in the sacramental and pastoral theology of Vatican II, he analysed the arguments put forth in its favour in order to show that their inherent inconsistencies comprised a major ecumenical problem. Thus, in a deceivingly innocent question for clarification concerning Lumen Gentium, Barth assailed the fundamental distinction made in Catholicism between the laity and the clergy: ‘Are only the pope, bishops, priests, anddeacons “partakers of the function of Christ” (28)? If so, then the laity (30–42) are not a part of the hierarchy, are they? But why not, since they share in all the three offices of Christ, and in the apostolate of the Church?’

Further on, in a critical question on the same Constitution, Barth forcefully stated the christological basis of his problem with the Catholic notion of ‘hierarchical communion’; it seemed to substitute the hierarchy for Christ and thereby reduce the laity to the status of ‘mere’ witnesses to him: ‘Wherein lies the difference between Christ as Lord, King and Judge and his Church? Are only the laity his witnesses in the world? Are the hierarchy more than that? Is not the whole Church a witnessing people?’ Since the ‘more’ of the hierarchy was for Barth a particularly incomprehensible teaching, he reiterated his objections a number of
times in critical observations on *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: ‘What is the basic, essential difference between the apostolate of the laity and that of the whole Church? Is not the apostolate of the laity the genuine form of the apostolate of the Church as such, within which there are also various functions? In what way can there be alongside the apostolate of the laity a special apostolate of the hierarchy?’

The insistence with which Barth raised this issue was alleviated only by the somewhat jocose but by no means flippant, inclusion of a mariological argument into another critical question on the same decree: ‘If Mary (4, 9) is the "perfect example" of the apostolate of the laity, and as such "Queen of Apostles" (and therefore of Peter and his colleagues and successors), is it not then necessary to speak of the superiority of the apostolate of the laity to all other forms of the apostolate of the Church?’

In the end, Barth had an irenic aim in mind as he armed himself with these playfully polemical questions to the sacramental themes in the ecclesiology and practical theology of Vatican II. If Rome had found the separated brethren deficient in the expression of their faith, Barth was ready to retort that he discovered a similar lack in the faith statements of Catholic brothers. A critical question based on *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism, embodied Barth’s reason for proposing all his objections, that is, the hope that Catholicism would deepen its own recognition of deficiency: ‘What is the significance for the definition “separated brethren” (lack of “fullness”) of the statement (4, 10) that it is difficult for the Catholic Church herself "to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects"?’

Confronted with these many difficulties of Barth regarding mediation versus testimony, his dialogue partners in Rome would again have had recourse to a method of responding which combined frank refutation with painstaking clarification. First of all, they would have pointed out that it is a misreading of the Council not to perceive that it had in fact
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adopted the sequence, Scripture, Church, sacraments, and in this way corrected any impression that the liturgy could be efficacious apart from the historical, written and preached forms by which the Word of God is manifest in the world. As evidence for this affirmation, they could have cited a passage from Presbyterorum Ordinis, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, in which the teaching of the Council of Trent on the primacy of the sacrificial function of the ordained was properly modified so as to necessitate viewing such cultic activity as an intensified form of gospel proclamation: 'The People of God finds its unity first of all through the Word of the living God, which is quite properly sought from the lips of priests. Since no one can be saved who has not first believed, priests, as co-workers with the bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel to all.' Once the indispensable need to hear, respond and testify to the Scriptures had been established, however, the bishops at Vatican II could not and did not reduce Christian life to the task of proclamation, and this for a number of reasons which are indicated in the passage just cited: the Word of God fulfils a unitive function in the ecclesial body of Christ; this unity is symbolised and effected as often as the New People of God assembles at the Lord's Supper; this gathering itself is structured, such that through the presence of the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons on the one hand, and all the faithful on the other, a living sacrament of Christ as both transcendent head of his ecclesial body, and immanent participant in it, is presented to the world; it is as the diversely ordered yet essentially interrelated sign of the divine and human natures of Christ that the ordained and the baptised witness to him until he comes again; such corporate witness, therefore, has doxological and eschatological dimensions, since it is oriented to gathering all creation together in unified praise of God as it journeys towards the heavenly kingdom. All these statements are summarised in a text of Lumen Gentium which is inspired both by
biblical and sacramental theology: 'Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ the Shepherd and Head, pastors gather together God’s family as a brotherhood all of one mind, and lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, to God the Father.' Yet the bishops at Vatican II were not content simply to speak about the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, as sacred realities which unify the Christian community and render it an eschatological sign of Christ to the world. Their unity and sign-function have to be made concrete through acts testifying to others the self-giving of Jesus Christ which the Eucharist contains and communicates: 'If the Eucharistic celebration is to be sincere and thorough, it must lead to various works of charity and mutual help, as well as to missionary activity and of different forms of Christian witness.' In short, his Roman interlocutors would have had to tell Barth that the dichotomy he discovered between mediation and testimony in the documents of Vatican II represented a one-sided interpretation of their contents, since celebrating the sacraments is an intense way of hearing and reactualising the definitiveness of the kenotic Word, and living according to the moral values symbolised and experienced at the sacraments is a form of testifying to the power of the glorified Word.

By unfolding various aspects of the Conciliar definition of the Church as sign of intimate union with the triune God and of unity with all humanity, those in conversation with Barth could have addressed his specific difficulties in a cohesive manner. As a sacrament, or a visible and effective sign of a transcendent reality, the Church cannot appropriate to itself the acts of justification and sanctification which are proper to the Son and the Spirit. Thus, if in Vatican II the Church is said to beget, save and renew the world, this was intended to mean only that, as an instrument of Christ’s eschatologically victorious grace, the Spirit-filled ecclesia witnesses to him by participating in and extending, but by no means replacing or
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overshadowing, his unique efficacy. To Barth's retort that witnessing is great and magnificent enough, it could have been said that witnessing is not an abstract concept but an enfleshed reality of ecclesial life, since witnesses are human persons who in the power of the Holy Spirit do serve as opaque windows onto the person, message and victory of Jesus Christ. Hence this service of being a witness is always a grace and never a presumption. Moreover, the community of witnesses is designated to its vocation at baptism and nourished in it at the Eucharist, both biblically grounded rites which are constitutive of the Church precisely because Scripture confirms them as such. Certainly the earliest Christians experienced and espoused a primarily kerygmatic rather than eucharistic ecclesiology, but as theological reflection on the mystery of Christ advanced and as the community expanded, the dominical gathering centring on the Gospel and the Eucharist was an ecclesial event at which dispersed Christians could continually rediscover their kerygmatic mission and the strength to practice it. Hence a eucharistic ecclesiology, in which the unity-in-diversity between the baptised and the ordained is made visible in the Church and in the world, does not contradict but reinforces a kerygmatic ecclesiology. If, like the nucleus of a cell, the hierarchy is ontically different from the laity who form its indispensable body, this difference exists only to foster the internal unity, social mission and eschatological thrust of the ecclesial community. All the members of this cell, therefore, have the same apostolate and goal, which is witness to Christ who was, is and will be, although they accomplish these tasks in various ways so as to be a living image to others of Christ transcendent head and immanent member of his Church. With such arguments based on the structured character of the Church as sacrament, Barth's Roman interlocutors could defend the objective holiness of the ordained as a guarantee that the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 4.14)
which they receive is not a personal privilege but a corporate gift of the Church; this gift exists so that all the faithful can be confident about their call to holiness, despite their own weakness and that of their ministers, and thus witness to and channel Christ’s saving grace to the world. Barth, who had hoped that the renewal of all the Christian Churches would result in ‘conversion to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’, may have publicly expressed admiration of these christological and pneumatological responses he heard in Rome as indicative of a revived Christian orthodoxy there, but may not have been innerly persuaded that Catholicism had credibly translated them into Christian orthopraxy, that is, into consistent practice of internal equality and missionary zeal.

OUTCOME OF THE CONVERSATIONS IN ROME?
A MUTUALLY AND FRATERNALLY VOICED
PLACET JUXTA MODUM

Regarding both the topics of debate, postulated here as the most likely ones to have occupied Barth and his hosts in Rome, quite different approaches were surely suggested so as to resolve the theological tension which was manifest in their very formulation. As the one responsible for posing the questions, Barth would obviously have wanted his conversation partners to make the sharpest possible demarcation between what he considered the antithetical terms ‘dialogue and transmission’, ‘mediation and testimony’; yet he could hardly have expected that his Catholic partners would eliminate the first element in each case by assuming it, as he would, into the second. Likewise, the Catholic spokesmen would have preferred that Barth admit that the tension in the pairs of terms was unavoidable, because biblically grounded, and that a synthetic resolution had to be sought after in which both the first and the second elements in each pair were conjoined but not confused;
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however, they were not so idealistic as to suppose that Barth
could accept their conclusion that multi-faceted dialogue was
an internal factor of biblical transmission, and sacramental
mediation a permanent guarantee of evangelical testimony.
For these reasons, just as he had done with regard to the degree
of progress made by Vatican II over Trent and Vatican I concern-
ing the nature of revelation, Barth would most probably have
consented to the arguments offered by his counterparts in
Rome only by voting placet juxta modum.⁴⁹ The same reac-
tion would have been voiced by the Catholics who dialogued
with him there. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to con-
clude that the discussion between them simply provided
another instance in the annals of the Protestant 'either – or'
opposed to the Catholic 'both – and', and vice versa. Why was
this so? The first reason is that the conversations were mutually
desired, a factor which should not be taken lightly twenty
years after the aggiornamento undertaken by the Council and
the start of serious discussions between previously hostile
brother Christians. The Protestant and the Catholics who freely
encountered each other at that time in Rome still offer all
Christian theologians, perhaps tired of debating and discouraged
by the slow progress towards unity, an edifying example of
mutual openness and hopefulness. In 1963, Cardinal Bea had
kindly but unsuccessfully invited Barth, already committed to
other obligations, to act as an official observer at the final
sessions of the Council, and Barth in turn had politely and
successfully answered another request that he come to Rome
once he was able and well enough to do so.⁵⁰ Besides open-
ness, hope marked the prayers of both parties that ecumenical
progress be firmly based on theological and spiritual renewal of
their own communities; Barth expressed this hope quite
emphatically:

What humiliation could befall us in such conversations with
Catholics if it should prove to be the case that the participants on the
other side were more seriously engaged in the issue of Christian
unity, that the cry *Veni creator Spiritus* was raised by them with more concrete single-heartedness, and that they were praying not in view of our own misery but with their gaze on their own Roman Church problems? From the one standpoint as from the other, the way to unity of the Church can only be the way of her renewal. But renewal means repentance. And repentance means turning about; not the turning of those others, but one’s own turning.\(^{51}\)

Mutual openness is not often considered an outstanding Christian virtue, let alone a form of evangelical repentance, but as Barth and his Catholic conversation partners earnestly lived it, it embodied the cardinal virtues which render Christian love prudent, temperate, just and courageous.

The connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy was always an important theological issue for Barth, and he dared in Rome to ask his interlocutors why the suggestions of the Council had been more general than practical with regard to Christian social action: 'Why does the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World set forth so few concrete positions? Where is the prophetic function of the Council in the face of the real problems of the middle of our century?'\(^ {52}\)

Thus, in stating that the Roman meeting of 22–9 September 1966 was fraternal as well as mutual, more should be meant than that each side acted with deep respect for the other. The very fact that Barth, already quite weak and accompanied by his personal physician, wanted to embrace Pope Paul VI, was moved by receiving from him a facsimile edition of the text of the Gospels of the *Codex Vaticanus*, and could consider this encounter the high point of his days in Rome, comprised an example of Christian orthopraxy in the form of ground-breaking gestures made at considerable cost to its own independence and pride.\(^ {53}\) Paul VI similarly desired to symbolise the prophetic function of the Council for the world; twelve years after he met Karl Barth in Rome, the Pope was called to eternal life with him, and even in death provided a gratuitous sign of fraternity with all people which Barth would have greatly
appreciated: 'Paul, who had such a wonderful sense of the meaningful gesture, planned his funeral with an eye to making it sum up his life. His coffin was on ground level. It was surmounted not by the tiara that he had given away (and that no future pope would use), not even by a mitre or a stole, but by the open book of the Gospels, its pages riffled by the light breeze.'

In the light of these sincere acts of humility and brotherhood, the reaction of Barth to Vatican II, like that of Paul VI, was not primarily a matter of words but of actions directed both within and beyond their unfortunately divided communities. Barth performed these actions with his inimitable jovial yet pungent style, as some of his questions to the Council documents attested. Although the prophetic actions of Paul VI were more sombre than light-hearted, they were equally forceful, as Barth himself commented: 'He impressed me as an intelligent and, in his own way, a definitely humble, pious person. During that hour, there was no moment when I was forced to think of the title he bears of Pontifex Maximus. On our side it should be clearly noted that he did not call himself "Vicar of Christ" in any of the documents of the Council but simply, "Bishop, servant of the servants of God".'

Viewed in retrospect, Barth’s peregrinatio ad limina apostolorum resulted in a publication whose intellectual content is still vibrant when read with the current theological and ecumenical situation in mind. But more challenging are both the cheerful openness with which Barth and his Roman confrères pronounced their reciprocal placet juxta modum, and the readiness for prophetic action which Barth and Montini, having held the Gospel book together, displayed in their self-humiliating practice of Christian unity.
NOTES

1 Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum: an appraisal of Vatican II* (Richmond, 1968), p. 10. Besides a brief account of the trip to Rome (pp. 8-18), and a list of the questions Barth posed there (pp. 19-40), this work includes articles entitled 'Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I Inhaerens Vestigiis?', pp. 43-55; 'A letter about mariology' pp. 59-62, and 'Thoughts on the Second Vatican Council', pp. 65-79.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 18. Although Barth remained publicly discreet, he did express in personal correspondence some disappointing occurrences. For example, he observed in a letter of 3 October 1966 to E. Wolf that he 'only came up against somewhat grim faces with Ottaviani and Parente (in the Holy Office!)', and stated in a letter of 11 October 1966 to J. G. M. Willebrands: 'I must also be somewhat critical in recalling my evening conversation with Cardinal Bea. I was in fact surprised that I did not hear his good case supported by even better theology and therefore, as my companion said to me afterwards, reacted with somewhat nervous gestures.' These passages, from letters in the Barth Archives in Basel, are reported by E. Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1976), p. 483.

3 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 17.


5 These three topics are discussed at some length by P. J. Rosato SJ, 'The influence of Karl Barth on Catholic theology', *Gregorianum* 67, 4 (1986), 659-78.

6 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 17.


10 Busch, *Karl Barth*, pp. 481-2. Here a phrase is also cited from Barth's circular letter of 1968, in which he comments on the confused state of the post-Conciliar Church: 'I can see all too clearly into the misery that prevails even there.'

11 Barth attempted especially in his pneumatology to dialogue with liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, for he was convinced that the emphasis on a vague anthropology and mysticism in these theological systems was a misguided search for a doctrine
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of the Holy Spirit; a valid pneumatology, however, must be as historically grounded as a valid Christology; see *CD*, IV/1, pp. 337–8.

12 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 27.
13 *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 27; Barth also attributed this lack of prophetic force to the fact that Roman Catholicism and Neo-Protestantism confused justification through Jesus Christ with Christian sanctification, that is, an exaggerated esteem of holy human experiences which overshadowed clear confession of the priority of Jesus Christ and unambiguous reference to the transcendent activity of the Holy Spirit; see *CD*, IV/2, pp. 504–5.

14 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 26; Barth is referring in the last part of this question to *Dei Verbum*, 9, which cites the decree of Trent on Scripture and tradition; see H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer (eds.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg, 1963), p. 364, par. 1501.

15 Barth was critical of the relativising of Holy Scripture both by Roman Catholicism and Neo-Protestantism; yet he differentiated between these two forms of confusing the reality of the Church with revelation: 'The distinction between the two consists in the fact that the reality of the Church equated with revelation has in Catholicism, in the form of the Roman hierarchy, a theoretical and practical definiteness and mobility which the Neo-Protestant "history" of Christianity, lacking any visible form, can never have'; see *CD*, I/2, p. 546.

16 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 36.
19 A comparison of Barth's sharp critique of the teaching of Trent on Scripture and tradition, and of Vatican I on revelation (see *CD*, I/2, pp. 447–72) and his 'ironically critical' observations on *Dei Verbum* written after the Roman trip (see *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, pp. 43–55), reveals that the entire experience there, and especially the encounter with Y. Congar, had disposed him to admit that: 'The trend of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* was in the direction of a doctrine which carefully (more carefully than we do) considers and includes the genuine problems of "tradition" and the "teaching office", a doctrine not of the sole authority but of supreme authority of Holy Scripture for the Church and for theology'; see *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 54.
This phrase, *una realitas complexa*, taken from *Lumen Gentium*, 8, where an analogy is affirmed between the divine and the human natures of Christ and the invisible and visible aspects of the Church, can equally be applied to the various seemingly contradictory dimensions of ecclesial life; in this case, to the necessity of proclaiming the divine Word in and through human dialogue with others.

For a presentation of the human spirit’s transcendental horizon as the ‘inner motive’ of a theology based on revelation, and of philosophical theology as an ‘internal factor’ of the same, see K. Rahner, ‘Theology and anthropology’, *Theological Investigations*, 7 (1967), 34.

Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 25.

This and other quotations from Vatican II are taken from W. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966). It should be noted that the cited passage is found in chapter 2 of *Dei Verbum*, which Barth regarded as ‘the great fit of weakness which befell the Council in the editing of our text’; see *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 48.

This train of thought is indebted to a comment made by H. de Lubac in *La Révélation divine* (Paris, 1983), p. 182.

See *CD*, III/4, p. 602, where Barth attributes the missionary thrust of Catholicism to a lively sense of *klesis* or personal calling as a presupposition of all Christian existence and as an experience of the Holy Spirit.


Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 32.


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33 Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 1: ‘By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humanity’; see *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 15.
35 If Protestantism calls Catholicism towards a kerygmatic ecclesiology, Orthodoxy challenges it to strengthen its eucharistic self-understanding; a synthesis of the two approaches is proposed by J. D. Zizioulas, ‘Ordination – a sacrament? An orthodox reply’, *Concilium* 4 (1972), 33.
36 Vatican II, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 5: ‘Therefore, while it indeed presupposes the sacraments of Christian initiation, the sacerdotal office of priests is conferred by that special sacrament through which priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are marked with a special character and are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the head’; see Abbott, *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 535.
38 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 18.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 16; Busch, *Karl Barth*, p. 484, relates that Barth presented the Pope copies of some of his works, in one of which he penned the following words: ‘In common service of the one Lord, this book is dedicated to Bishop Paul VI, the humblest servant of God, by his separated brother Karl Barth.’
Philip J. Rosato SJ


55 Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, p. 16.
The reception of the theology of Karl Barth in the Anglo-Saxon world: history, typology and prospect

RICHARD H. ROBERTS

INTRODUCTION

There is a real sense in which an investigation of the 'reception' of the theology of Karl Barth would demand an examination of virtually the whole of the Christian (certainly the Protestant) theology of the twentieth century, besides mastery of the very considerable body of material written by Barth and published both during his lifetime and in the posthumous Nachlass. Our limiting strategy in the face of this complex and extensive requirement will be as follows: first, we shall articulate what can be understood as the 'problem' of the reception of the theology of Karl Barth; second, in elucidation of the origins of that reception, we shall examine its history in Britain and North America, using as a primary but not exclusive focus of attention the immediate interface of traditions to be found in the contemporary journals; third, on this historical basis we shall examine the theological assimilation of Barth in the period after the Second World War, using a 'typology' to represent the range and diversity of the manifestation of Barth’s influence; fourth, in conclusion, we will find ourselves in a position to venture both the hypothesis that there has not in fact been a consistent, comprehensive reception of Barth’s work which goes 'through', rather than 'around' it, and, beyond this, some suggestions as to what
might be the necessary conditions for an adequate reception of Barth's work.

The historical situation with which we are concerned, that is the basic interaction and interpenetration of different cultural traditions, was early expressed by Barth's great English advocate Sir Edwyn Hoskyns in 1936, and his words written to Barth himself crystallise both something of the challenge and the inspiration of the following inquiry:

We are separated by the very real barrier of a different language, a different political tradition, a different quality of piety and impiety, a different structure even of theological and untheological heritage. And you well know that there are still wider divergences lying behind all these things . . . And yet, however different the background and texture of human thought and behaviour may be, the problem of faith is the same problem, the problems of theology are the same problems – and the answer is the same answer. To have recognised this is to have apprehended the situation in which theologians stand together and side by side.4

Ultimately, then, the following essay is directed towards a reconception, drawing upon the deepest impulses of Barth's inheritance, of the pursuit of theology as ministerium verbi divini. This, as Barth himself recognised in his preface to the Hoskyns' translation of the Römerbrief (Epistle to the Romans), is a summons to conflict; such was and is the price of the apprehension of truth.5

THE PROBLEM OF BARTH'S RECEPTION IN THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD

In his survey of the study of Barth by the English reader in 1979, Professor S. W. Sykes drew eclectically upon British and American material, noting the preference for the more accessible Emil Brunner and the tendency of the English to fumble their way towards Barth through the medium of popular and semi-popular works. It was not difficult, as Sykes showed, to
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find indications of the ignorance, exasperation and perplexity that characterised the attitude towards Barth on the part of leading English theologians such as J. K. Mozley, Charles Gore, W. R. Matthews, William Temple and lesser figures. By contrast in Scotland, Sykes noted the warmer (yet not uncritical) reception of Barth on the part of H. R. Mackintosh, and the brothers John and Donald Baillie, which was followed by the monumental labours of T. F. Torrance, whose commitment to Barth was massive and consistent. In addition, Sykes referred to the growth of ‘biblical theology’ in Britain and North America and to the ambivalent effects of a close acquaintance with Barth; his conclusion that the English reader’s approach to Barth was in danger of predetermination by powerful, contextually related factors still stands as a general historical observation. The Sykes’ symposium of 1979 was directed towards the comparative analysis of Barth’s theological methods so as to provide modes of access to a huge and intimidating œuvre. These earlier conclusions deserve repetition because they summarise factors behind and beyond which it is our intention to penetrate. Sykes maintained these factors included:

- a tradition of amateurish comment on Barth, based largely on the negative impact made by some of his early works;
- a willingness to use the term ‘Barthian’ or ‘Barthianism’ to characterise certain presuppositions which are supposed to run counter to a long tradition of Anglo-Saxon theology;
- a powerful counter-movement of approval of Barth, which sees him as standing in the select company of the unquestionable geniuses of the history of Christian theology, and a legacy of disillusionment among those who once would have counted themselves as disciples of Barth. At the very least the study of Barth poses some considerable puzzles.6

Our concern is not to demonstrate the inadequacies of these responses by opening up direct comparisons with the German and mainland European reception of Barth, but to concentrate upon the patterns of reception in particular English-language contexts, which, by their distinct differences, may provide a
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way of penetrating into the processes whereby any system of theological ideas can be socially and culturally translated. From such a closer knowledge and understanding of the 'puzzles' attending the 'study of Barth', it may then in turn be possible to generate ideas capable of wider constructive use and application.

**THE RECEPTION OF THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD: AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE**

**Britain**

The reception of the theology of Karl Barth in Britain may be divided into three main phases, which, although they overlap to some degree, are relatable to the publication of major works in translation and to changes in the wider perception of Barth as a theologian that are detectable in the literature. The first phase extends from the earliest references in the immediate post-First World War period up until the publication of E. C. Hoskyns’ translation of the second *Römerbrief* in 1933; the second consists in the reception of the latter, probably the single most important theological act of cultural translation in the first half of the twentieth century as regards British theology; third, finally, there is the post-war period from 1946. This latter is a rather more arbitrary dating relating to the end of the Second World War and to the general realisation that a new era was about to begin, in which, so far as theology was concerned, Barth's mature work would henceforth appear in a sustained flow largely under Scottish inspiration and direction. In 1947, Barth became, as it were, an 'ordinary theologian' and associated with him a considerable secondary literature then arose commenting in detail upon many aspects of his work. Whether, however, the former or the latter stages constitute an adequate reception is, as Professor Sykes suggested in his 1979 introduction, open to question.

The emergence of Karl Barth from the obscurity of his Safenwil
pastorate into a central position in German theological life is intimately associated with his reflection upon and theological response to the First World War. The precise character and the interpretation of Barth's response to this and to other political events throughout his life as a practising theologian is a matter of some dispute that awaits the (eventual) publication in full of the early writings in the Nachlass. Correspondingly, the First World War also had a marked influence upon the reception of Barth's theology in both Britain and North America and the latter was itself determined by the different characteristics of these contexts. As T. A. Langford has argued in his study of English theology in the immediate pre-war period, the war accelerated social and cultural changes which were already at work. The effects upon organised religion were catastrophic: in particular, residual belief in Providence and trust in authority were dramatically weakened. Theological reflection upon the experience of war, with its degree of random suffering and mechanised slaughter, new to the generation that entered the ranks in 1914, was relatively rare; such figures as G. A. Studdert-Kennedy and P. T. Forsyth were exceptional inasmuch as they confronted the implications of the destruction of the remnants of traditional theodicy in the popular mind. The 'war-theology' of the Established Church, notoriously expressed in the Bishop of London, A. F. Winnington-Ingram's declaration that 'this is a straight fight between the mailed fist and the nailed hand' further compromised a religion already deeply divided in terms of class structure. More significantly, from the standpoint of the reception of Barth was the aftermath of the war; it was only an exceptional figure like Hensley Henson who could remark: 'After the war men must face again the old questions which perplexed them before, but which the strain of the crisis drove from mind . . . The traditional theology will be again seen to be plainly inadequate to express the truth of religion as they must needs perceive it.' Otherwise, it is a sense of an ecclesiastical and theological as-you-
were, a return not only to pre-war questions, but also their old answers, as though nothing had happened, which pervaded the theological discussions of the ensuing decade. In this, the 'roaring twenties' and the era of Weimar culture in Germany, there took place a decisive (even if only semi-conscious) step on the part of theologians away from the wider social consensus. A class isolation, the pursuit of theology and Church leadership as an elite activity, had previously existed; but this was exacerbated by an awareness of the historic discontinuity of the war, which Barth (admittedly as a Swiss-German non-combatant) recognised theologically, but which was, if we are to believe the textual evidence, largely suppressed and circumvented in Britain. Thus the long-standing and difficult relationship between German and British theology stemming, so far as England was concerned from the early nineteenth century, was characterised by even greater alienation as the shock of conflict turned infrequent interlocutors into enemies. Not only this, but the very experience of the war itself, the source of a profound psychic wound, was afterwards repressed. This repression was not confined to theologians and Churchmen, but was characteristic of a decimated generation whose experience only surfaced in literary terms after the lapse of a decade in, for example, the autobiographies of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon. The ritual sublimation of grief did provide a context for the formal enactment of established religion, as Owen Chadwick has shown in his account of the origins of the Armistice Day and the erection of the Cenotaph. All in all, the First World War must be accounted as a decisive event in the gradual marginalisation of religious belief in English society. As David Cannadine has argued:

At a more general level, the established Church, concerned like all Christianity, with explaining the significance of death in this world and life in the next – seemed unable to cope when confronted with so much mortality and grief . . . But to neither the soldier at the front
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nor to the bereaved at home, baffled and numbed by the cataclysmic
events in which they were caught up, could the Church offer plausible
explanation or abiding comfort.¹⁵

The relation of German theology to the First World War is
reported in Karl Hammer’s study¹⁶ of German ‘war-theology’
and this provides obvious parallels with British patriotic
exploitation and distortion of religious belief.¹⁷ The conse-
quences of defeat for German society and the Churches, both
Protestant and Roman Catholic, were dramatic, as Scholder
has shown;¹⁸ not so much because of a failure of theodicy in
the face of hideous suffering, but as a result of the unashamed
commitment of both groupings to the cause of German
political and cultural imperialism. Barth’s place in the univer-
sal social, cultural and religious regrouping that took place in
the context of the Weimar Republic following the revolution
of 1919 is unique. He cannot be identified with any of the
established parties within the German Churches, but his
activities both as regards the Wirkungsgeschichte of the
Römerbriefe and in the circle associated with the journal,
Zwischen den Zeiten [1923–33], have to be understood against
this background.

British attitudes towards Germany in the immediate post-
war and inter-war period can be traced through the occasional
reports and comments upon the German situation and upon
the relationship between the British theology that appeared on
an irregular basis.¹⁹ The only concerted effort at actual con-
tact and organised rapprochement in the first decade after the
war was through three theological conferences held at Canter-
bury in 1927 and the Wartburg in 1928 and at Chichester in
1931, the proceedings of which²⁰ reflect explicitly neither the
experience of the First World War nor the influence of Karl
Barth, whose name is conspicuously absent. From the
evidence of attitudes during the period we select as represen-
tative the remarks of one well-informed and influential figure,
later Editorial Secretary of the SPCK, W. K. Lowther Clarke,
who was one of the minority of contributors to British
theological journals with first-hand knowledge of German
theological publications. That such an important Anglican educationalist could write in the following terms about Germans and Germany, besides England, at the end of the decade after the First World War is itself a comment not only upon the ancestral resistance to things German traceable at least to the time of Coleridge, but also upon the isolated standpoint of the writer in the context of English social structure. Thus in 1928, shortly after the General Strike of 1926, Lowther Clarke could assert that:

The German is an individualist. His conception of religion is withdrawal into himself. His loyalties are to his party or school. The Englishman, on the contrary, is imbued with the team spirit... Cooperation is the keynote of modern England. The fraternal relations of the religious bodies are remarkable. So is the general loyalty to the Government, the ethical strain which leads an Englishman constantly 'to do [something for someone]', the mutual confidence which inspires social relations, and the absence of friction in political and business life.

On the basis of this somewhat one-sided and complacent vision of English society, Lowther Clarke then proceeded to characterise the contrasting mind-sets of the two nations through an informal venture into the sphere of socio-linguistics:

The difference between the two nations is shown best in the use of common words. The Englishman goes 'to see' his friend, the German 'to speak' to him, 'to hear' him. 'Seeing' is the dominant category with the English. Picture papers, for example, are far more developed than in Germany. The Anglican Church exemplifies the national characteristic in its emphasising of the Incarnation. 'Whereas I was blind, now I see' is a favourite text in England, hardly noticed in Germany.

Lowther Clarke then concluded his peroration on national characteristics with the remark that:

Finally, and this is most striking, the Englishman remembers. He dates everything as pre-war, war, and post-war. The German has
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almost forgotten the war. Probably for this very reason, that he can forget, he is the better philosopher and psychologist, and the better understands the universal values of history.22

It is not our purpose to comment definitively upon the broader adequacy of these observations. The last comment does suggest, however, a smouldering inner awareness, represented above all, in both public and private, by the word 'remembrance' and its cognates. The reports surveyed suggest that there was a basic but limited understanding of the German situation available to an informed British theological readership.23

The high points of the early reception of Barth's theology were marked by the translation of Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie by Douglas Horton published in 192824 and the translation by E. C. Hoskyns of the second Römerbrief published in 1933.25 Earlier, however, Adolf Keller had pioneered the presentation of Barth's theology, seeing it as the expression of dialectical method standing beyond the dogmatic and critical alternatives, presenting the cross as 'the last obscurity in which human history ends' and, paradoxically, 'the new Life which can be faced only though Death' in a revival of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. The nascent dialectical theology movement, perceived as a 'small but extremely aggressive group of younger theologians' was presented by Keller as tripartite: Barth the exegete; Gogarten the philosopher; and Brunner the systematician. The 'theology of crisis' defied objective appraisal, for it rightly discriminated between the 'aims of the transcendent God' and the 'elements of a worldly culture'; whereas, however, Keller perceptively remarked upon the questionable character of the dialectic as a foundation for future theological construction, he did not see it destined to 'take the place of any other theology'.26 John McConnachie, a faithful populariser of Barth's work,27 understood something of the distinctive importance of the commentary on Romans as 'an erratic block among commen-
tories' and he would appear to be the first to have pointed to
the affinity between Barth and P. T. Forsyth. Barth's concep-
tions of transcendence, his focus upon the Word of God and the
'radical and cosmological dualism which rules his whole
system' are recorded but, clearly following Keller's lead,
McConnachie perceived some drawbacks: a religious and
ethical pessimism; an absence of all verification in experience;
an inadequate place given over to Christian nurture and educa-
tion; and an unresolved understanding of the relation between
the historical Jesus and the risen Christ. It was a theology that
'attracts and repels us; it attracts by its lofty daring, and
spirituality, it repels by a certain want of heart'.

Here we see developing these tendencies within the jour-
nals, which, broadly speaking, corresponded with the reac-
tions recoverable from the theological works of the time, but
it is clear from an early stage that enthusiasm for Barth's
work [as opposed to mere curiosity] was primarily a Scottish
attribute. J. H. Morrison, N. Porteus, H. R. Mackintosh, J.
McConnachie and (presumably) A. J. MacDonald were all
Scots, and it would seem apparent that Barth's revivification
of the reality of the Word of God as the existential core of the
human encounter with the divine corresponded with their
expectations. Thus Morrison asserted that 'The Barthian
message . . . is a tremendous onslaught on the modern world-
spirit by men whose whole souls are captivated by the word of
God', and that 'One explanation alone is adequate – God is
speaking to these men; the Eternal has broken in upon them'.
The 'autopistic' Word encountered in crisis, reversion to
Reformation insights, the new trembling before the Word of
God all fitted the 'Barthian school to act as a wholesome tonic
to our Age'; it could even 'help bring back authority to the
preacher's message and a revival of evangelical religion'. Also
pertinent is N. Porteus' early observation of that consistent
tendency to adapt Barth to a context of faded, yet revitalisable
tradition. Thus Porteus, a distinguished Old Testament

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scholar, saw the younger Barth’s extreme view of sin as a symptom of an ‘early confused stage in his thinking’ and thus lends his weight to a tendency amongst those (a minority) sympathetic towards Barth to ‘normalise’ his teaching. This process of normalisation became the easier as the distance in Barth’s own work from the early dialectical extremity seemed to grow greater in both time and actual content. H. R. Mackintosh, however, resisted this tendency either to drain away or to apologise for the extremity perceived in Barth’s teaching. With characteristically judicious learning and caution, he situated it in a wider context, putting a different interpretation upon Barth’s most famous book, The Epistle to the Romans: ‘It exhibits not a trace of purely historical interest or philological precision; it seeks only to pierce the historical transparency and reach what is spiritual, super-historical, transcendent, to make everything present and urgent, to hear what God is saying to men today out of the Epistle.’ Thus Mackintosh was able to circumvent questions as to the validity of Barth’s views in relation to the norms of tradition and formulate an agnostic and provisional judgement: ‘Barth is important and memorable, if not for his solutions, at least for the cardinal questions he compels us to encounter’.

Barth underwent in general terms a forceful normalisation in the interests of contingent local needs, in particular the residual incarnationalism within English Anglicanism. Writing in a perceptive but wholly noncommittal manner, the exceptional M. Chaning-Pearce (from Ripon Hall, Oxford) succeeded in putting a really fundamental question to the theology of crisis, which, I believe, is still important: was it ‘one among the many despairing reactions and atavisms of which our modernity has of late been so prodigal . . . or is this a reaffirmation of a reality, a real Christianity, to which we have grown blind?29 This writer was one of the few from within the theological teaching body as a whole to grasp something of the wider importance of Barth’s work and of the
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growing peculiarity of theological statements in the contemporary cultural Sitz im Leben. Chaning-Pearce drew out an important link between the theology of crisis and the dominant literary figure of T. S. Eliot:

Thus theology offers to our crisis only the 'Word of God', not the word of the Bible, but in Mr T. S. Eliot's phrase, 'the Word without a word', the absolute word of God veiled in the relative word of man. It is an audacious thought, this of a 'Word of God' unguaranteed by any human authority, of church or book or man, guaranteed only by a God Who is hidden from men's eyes, comprehensible only by His Spirit dwelling with the soul, by faith alone – sola fide. Faith in church or book or man is a little thing beside this all-surrendering, all-risking faith, this veritable 'leap into the dark'.

This is one of the more astute comments to emerge within a theological tradition apparently lacking the desire or the capacity to confront a complex religious and social reality. Thus the general reactions to Barth of repudiation and disdain, or of a normalisation through assimilation either into the norms of tradition or back to the original foreign context, was here momentarily confronted by an altogether more sophisticated articulation of the central dilemmas of Barth's thought as it informed the dialectical theology of crisis. This was a fitting, even if isolated, introduction to the second phase of the British reception associated with the translation of the Römerbrief which, after the delay of a decade, put a crucial work into the hands of the English-reading theological public. It was, however, more typical of the era that R. W. Stewart, directly following Chaning-Pearce, could voice the following sentiments:

Barth's commentary on Romans is one of the longest books in existence, and almost impossibly difficult in style, and it was hardly printed off before it was all rewritten. May we not smile at the length and turgidity of a book that deals particularly with religion as revelation? May we not be amused at the incessant italics and jingling repetitions of catchwords that Barthians confuse with penetrating thought and arresting statement?
Here, indeed, is a stygian lack of comprehension: Hoskyns' light could not have striven to penetrate a deeper darkness.

Until the publication of the translation of the second *Römerbrief* by Edwyn Clement Hoskyns (1884–1937) in 1933, the British response to Barth was largely occasional and indirect; even the appearance of *The Word of God and the Word of Man* in 1928 was relatively insignificant in comparison. E. C. Hoskyns inaugurated the second, more direct, phase in the mediation of Barth. Hoskyns (and his associate Francis Noel Davey) were central figures in Cambridge theology early in the inter-war period. Facing considerable opposition from other faculty members in Cambridge, Hoskyns' name became inescapably linked with that of Barth, although as one contemporary commentator was to claim, he 'was never a Barthian'.

Hoskyns' first published references to Barth appeared in a 1928 review of the German translation of Th. L. Haitjema's *Karl Barths 'Kritische Theologie'* in which he recognised a 'new method of approach, a new point of view, in thinking about God, Christ, men, faith and grace' as distinct from scholasticism, intellectualism or mysticism. There was, so Hoskyns argued, 'no Barthian theology, no Barthian psychological experience'. Hoskyns, as an Anglo-Catholic resistant to the excesses of his co-religionists, saw Barth and Maritain as 'moving along the same lines', yet whilst the latter might understand the former, 'Barth has as yet shewn no glimmering of a perception of the significance by which men like Maritain are moved and redeemed'.

Hoskyns' translation of the second *Römerbrief* was received in some quarters with acclamation, and had a profound influence, epitomised by the distinguished New Testament theologian, C. K. Barrett, who later wrote: 'Barth's commentary ... I read as an undergraduate. If in those days, and since, I remained, and have continued to be a Christian, I owe the fact in large measure to that book, and to those in Cambridge who introduced it to me.' Above all, for Hoskyns, 'Barth's claim
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to be heard rests, and rests only, upon a decision as to whether what Barth finds in the Scripture is really there or not'. That, and his championing of Barth's text, 'the product of a severe wrestling with the Scriptures', have to be understood within the framework of a specific strategy within English theology that led to the creation of a powerful but relatively short-lived 'biblical theology' which must be understood as the most distinctive, even if indirect, fruit of the English response to Barth. Here, indeed, is a parting of the ways between the distinctive English and Scottish appropriations of Barth. Through Hoskyns and his collaborators and pupils, most notably in Cambridge, there emerged the biblical theology 'movement' (or rather a tendency with diverse strands) in which many leading theological thinkers participated.

Associated with the development of the 'biblical theology' was the Scots, but English-educated philosopher-theologian, D. M. MacKinnon who, again writing under the influence of Hoskyns, attempted to recast Barth's early dialectic in two short, extremely interesting, but neglected and problematic works, written in the early stages of the Second World War. MacKinnon's daring but abortive expedition into Barth's dialectical rhetoric would seem to be a near exception in a context generally speaking inimical to such a mode of thought. The general tendencies exhibited in the material available from the period could thus be encapsulated in the slogan: 'from dialectic to normality', reflecting the changing perception of Barth's theology from the publication of Hoskyns' The Epistle to the Romans through to the growing realisation that Barth himself had altered his outlook very considerably. Thus whilst Hoskyns' translation acquainted readers with the key work in Barth's early development, its appropriation was attended with a simultaneous dismissal of its continuing relevance. So, in an important review, Sidney Cave could quietly blunt the edge of the Römerbrief by reduction to its original context and
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the application of the normalisation hypothesis. Thus, 'it would be futile to judge of this book as if it were a conventional "scholarly" commentary on St Paul' for the book was 'significant, not as a contribution to the study of St Paul, but as the fountainhead of that Barthian movement which, whether it attract or repel, had become of decisive importance in Continental Protestant Christianity'. Aware of Barth's work up to and including volume one of the Church Dogmatics, Cave could then go further and assert that Barth had admitted that 'faith is experience and an act of recognition. This takes the sting out of what seemed to some of us the gravest error of Barth's earlier theology', thus (and this is a key phrase) 'Barth's theology is to-day less distinctive because more true'. Whilst Barth's 'shrill and passionate' stridency 'saved many German Christians from complete despair . . . most of us', Cave concluded, 'prefer to hear a quieter voice, but in spite of its violence, and indeed, perverseness this is a book to read and study'. Safely distanced, Barth's work had become an interesting temporary aberration of youth, the prelude to a return to traditional norms.

As early as 1934, H. C. Rouse had asserted that the 'Barthian movement in England is a spent force' with its place in the popular mind supplanted by the Oxford Group Movement. Rouse recorded the view of Raven that 'Barthianism' was a 'noble but demonstrably one-sided and therefore sub-Christian theology', and O. C. Quick's unanswered question: 'And yet how far is it true that the theology of crisis is but a gesture of intellectual impatience after all?' As a Baptist free from the securities of establishment, Rouse looked in vain for a full critical evaluation of Barth. M. Chaning-Pearce wrote once more upon Barth in 1936 and could report that the 'first fury is now spent' as regards the 'thunders of Barthian theology' which had not succeeded in troubling the 'placid provincialism of English theological thought'. Barth's transcendentalism was not, he concluded, a 'theology which

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can minister to the mind and conscience of the twentieth century' despite its timeliness in the context of modernism. In 1939 Daniel Jenkins could comment with exasperation that 'the small group of faithful followers of Karl Barth in this country have begun almost to despair of his ever being understood by the mass of English theological writers'. By any standards the reception of Barth in Britain, and in particular England, could not be regarded as a success. It was, as we have seen, partial, fragmented, delayed, and in the final analysis effectively redeemed only by the pioneering and substantial work of E. C. Hoskyns and the growth of the biblical theology movement, and then later by T. F. Torrance's monumental labours.

We conclude our brief survey by referring to a remarkable article written by R. Cant in 1946 in which the watershed between the period of reception of Hoskyns' translation of the Römerbrief and the third modern period of Barth's reception as a 'normal theologian' is represented with admirable clarity. Assisting, as he saw it, at the death-bed of liberalism, Cant regarded the legacy of Barth as ambiguous: 'beneath all the things which repel and exasperate us he is saying something to me of quite ultimate importance'. The Church of England then stood between Neo-Calvinist Barthianism and Neo-Thomist Scholasticism. Between these contrasting (yet formally similar) movements, biblical theology, inseparably linked with Hoskyns, might, he thought, form the basis of a via media. Described by some as a 'kind of theological Fascism' and by others as the 'flight from reason', the biblical theology movement, the distinctive culmination of the initial reception of Barth in Britain, awaited reintegration into the world of modern philosophy and science; and, for the latter, Cant turned in expectation to F. L. Cross, A. M. Farrer and Donald MacKinnon. Whether in fact the post-war and more recent history of English theology constitutes such a progression is open to doubt: despite heroic and isolated exceptions (Donald MacKinnon springs to mind) an eclectic pluralism has diluted the
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effective pursuit of any well-structured *via media*. In Scotland, T. F. Torrance and his collaborators worked with energy and zeal rendering Barth’s *magnum opus* into English. Later, to aid this act of translation, Torrance produced a notable introduction which both set Barth’s *œuvre* in context and expanded its wider theological significance. The character of the English reception was summed up by F. W. Camfield in 1947 when he presented Barth as an ‘ordinary theologian’. As an early (but prematurely deceased) co-worker with Torrance, Camfield showed how, despite the relative indifference within English university theology, Barth’s work at least appealed to some parish clergy.

The post-war theological situation in England has been characterised by a fissiparous breakdown of the strands of tradition into episodic developments underlaid by a prolonged crisis of ‘authority’. The variegations that have emerged both in Britain and North America draw, on occasion, upon Barth, and these we outline in our ‘typology’ below. In overall terms, the English tendency to respond in a belated way to winds of doctrine blowing both from the continent and then, increasingly in recent years, from across the Atlantic, impedes any straightforward narrative description of the reception of Barth’s work. The story, such as it is, is one of episodes, temporary fixities in a constantly altering picture lacking truly paradigmatic, constructive thinking; above all, it is characterised by tentative and exploratory ventures, quintessentially represented by the ‘radical theology’ and the eventual emergence of the individual, publicity-conscious theologian enjoying the transient universality of self-projection in a media-culture. In other words, in Britain, theology entered a period of decline marked by pluralism, internal fragmentation and progressive loss of nerve in the face of secularisation.
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United States

The religious history of North America is long and complex, involving the transposed developments of many European traditions: Puritan, Anglican, Presbyterian, Revivalist, Catholic, Jewish, Evangelical, besides the indigenous phenomena of the Black Churches and the growth of Liberal theology within the last two decades. For the purposes of comparison, we focus our attention on the American experience of the First World War and its effects upon the perception of Germany and its theology within which context the reception of the theology of Barth has to be understood.

If Germany's social and cultural crisis took place in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and Britain's reaction was one of repressed trauma, then, as the distinguished historian S. E. Ahlstrom has remarked:

For Americans World War I was 'over there' – a long, long way from Times Square. On the home front only a very few seemed to comprehend the tragic dimensions of the holocaust. During the twenties their numbers increased as participants and observers began to expose the reality and its aftermath. But only with the coming of the Great Depression did a fairly wide range of thinkers begin to see that bourgeois civilization was deep in crisis. And not until a quarter century after that did the idea of a 'post-Christian' world begin to dawn on the popular consciousness.48

With the signing of the Armistice the way lay open, so President Wilson believed, for America to bring civilised values back to a self-mutilated and war-torn Europe (and, indeed, to the world). It is in this context that the interface between European and American theology must be understood; this was a setting fraught, above all, with acute ethnic problems of national identity and racked by internal denominational dissension, besides theological disagreements between Fundamentalists, Liberals and the proponents of the Social Gospel. In none of this, however, could it easily be said that an awareness of a profound crisis existed of the kind that had
allowed the theology of crisis to take root and flourish in post-First World War Germany.49

The American perception of Germany as reflected in the theological journals was exceptionally well served by two articles by Richard Lempp published in 191050 and 192151 in the Harvard Theological Review. Richard Lempp studied at the Harvard Divinity School in 1908–9 and then returned to the Stift in Tubingen before a pastorate and afterwards service as a war chaplain. His first article conveys a vivid, first-hand impression of German Church life prior to the First World War, and his account is remarkable for its sensitivity to political, cultural and sociological aspects of a complex situation. It is clear that in Germany a developing crisis in religion, particularly in relation to the industrial working class was well in evidence prior to the First World War. In particular, class differentiation was acute: 'The differences of class and education are so great in Germany that the classes scarcely understand one another. They speak different languages.'52 This antagonism had somehow to be overcome and, in a way very different from that of Britain or the United States, the answer lay with the state upon which the Church rightly (in his view) depended:

The old liberal conception of the state as merely the protector of law and order, and of the free development of the individual, is completely gone in Germany; the German states, by their traditions and historical development, have taken into their hands all the tasks of culture, provision for education, health, science, art, industry, agriculture, the care of the sick, the poor, and the old, schools, post offices, railroads, banks. But if the government so promotes all culture, shall it leave the most important part of it, religion, to individuals?53

Despite the pervasive influence of Strauss' Life of Jesus and Ernst Haeckel's fervid materialist evolutionism in The Riddle of the Universe, Lempp believed that ancestral tendencies would win through: 'The German working man is much more
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of a philosopher and a politician, and in the end he will have to recognise the shallowness of materialism.' In the face of the cultural flux and pluralism informed by increasing secularity, a 'neo-romanticism, or mysticism, or symbolism', a 'striving we may fairly call religious', made itself apparent. The supreme ruler of this new cultural era, Nietzsche, was still, despite the immense literature about him, the 'unsolved riddle of Germany'. As the new Messiah, attributing decadence to the lies of Christian religion and morality, preaching that 'God is dead, sin never existed, truth we do not want, the will of the few to be mighty is alone God and truth and righteousness', Nietzsche had been taken up by those who 'preached brutal immorality with provoking frankness'. Lempp thought that there was possibly a more positive interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas: 'He saw that there is only one problem of life, the problem of the soul; and his whole life was one great longing after true idealism in contrast to realism and naturalism, his whole thinking was a seeking after god, after holiness, after eternal life'. Such was the strain in the relationship between culture and the Church that only 'a new conception of transcendence of God, of salvation, can settle it'. There was, more ominously, an unsatisfied demand for a 'final solution of the antagonism between religion and culture'. All the latent tensions in this situation were explosively released in the aftermath of the First World War; Lempp, writing in 1921 under protest and as only a favour to his friends, was frank:

Americans can have little idea of the terrible sufferings of my country, or the hopelessness of the future which the peace of Versailles has set before us; nor can they easily imagine the mood of the nation which, after gigantic achievements and the most heroic endurance, has at last been broken in body and spirit by the force of hunger that its enemies saw fit to employ as an instrument of war. If, after the slaughter of the innocents, the representatives of Herod had inquired of the good people of Bethlehem concerning the outlook for religion in the period of reconstruction then beginning, they would hardly have elicited a dispassionate reply.
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Confronted with revolution, financial crisis and the threat of Bolshevism, religion in its traditional form was unlikely to meet the need of the hour but:

Rather we may hope that in the distress which all of us, and not least our workingmen, are now facing, a prophet may rise from the working class itself, to preach the Gospel of Christ in a new tongue and devise new forms of fellowship for a re-awakened Christian faith.60

Seen with hindsight this passage is fraught with ambiguities and unconscious ironies; from the standpoint of an inquiry into the reception of Barth's thought, the desire noted in 1910 was now given more urgent social embodiment:

The idea that only a new spirit of devotion, sacrifice and sincerity can save us from the Russian chaos, that our external culture must give way to a new inwardness, is widely prevalent among educated men and women.61

In the cultural vacuum of the period into which philosophical and religious duties were being tossed from all sides of the social and political spectrum, there still remained the possibility of a recall to religion:

On the other hand, not a few people of education eagerly await the rise of some new prophet, some creative genius, who, amid the present confusion of thought and the crumbling of foundation, shall point a new way and proclaim the old gospel in new language. May the bitter and fearful period which by the will of God we face, and which threatens to surpass in incalculable misery all that has been experienced in the past, raise up for us such a man! Assuredly he would prove a blessing, not only in Germany, but likewise to other nations, which are beset with the same confusion and cherish the same longing for new ideas and a new spiritual leader.62

Whether or not we are to regard the appearance of Karl Barth and the flowering of the 'theology of crisis' as the Messianic answer to this call for a 'new prophet' is a matter open to further discussion. What is indisputable is that the ground for such an intervention could not have been better prepared: Karl Barth was, in the fullest Nietzschian sense, zeitgemäss, that
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is, 'timely'. It is apparent that the American theological audience were better served as regards their access to the German scene than their British counterparts in a flow of articles which, after 1930, increasingly record the influence of Barth. The immediate 'untimeliness' of Barth's thought in the North American context is also, however, evident. Thus, G. Krüger writing on the theology of crisis in 1929 was aware of the contextual difference. Krüger had witnessed Friedrich Gogarten's intervention at the Wartburg conference of 1920 which, so he had claimed, owed its stimulus to Barth's 'great book on Paul's Epistle to the Romans' upon which in turn the influence of Kierkegaard and Tertullian was apparent. Both Gogarten and Barth thus saw that 'Religion is not the soul of culture; it is the crisis, that is, the doom, of culture'. In such a situation, judgement is as it were being passed every moment. Barth's dialecticism, the interpretation of affirmation and negation in a method which though 'lucid', 'animated' and 'fascinating' tended to defeat the critic: 'Dialectics are very difficult to deal with.' Granted this difficulty, Krüger recognised a fundamental problem: what was to become of a theology as a university science when it regarded religion itself as the 'crisis of culture'? How, in more general terms, we might ask could a theology of crisis take root in a culture that did not as in North America (unlike Germany) see itself as in a state of crisis?

Krüger's response to these difficulties in 1929 was to recommend the translation of Barth's lecture of 1922, 'The Word of God and theology', which duly appeared in Horton's translation of the collection, The Word of God and the Word of Man, in 1928. This was a milestone in the American reception of Barth's thought which then, in consequence, thoroughly absorbed the triad of the 'dogmatic', the 'critical', and the 'dialectical' paths towards understanding divine immanence in the 'Word of God'. This pattern reappears frequently in the American literature as it provided a convenient programmatic
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representation of Barth's strategy that could fit into the orthodox-liberal divide. As in Britain, the dialectical path nevertheless presented difficulties for America. The paradox of the 'Word of God' as at once 'the necessary and the impossible task of theology' could not remain a stark methodological proposal within the given structures and context of assimilation. It is precisely at this point that Brunner's own 'normalisation' of the dialectical method proved the more easily assimilable approach. Krüger saw the theology of crisis, when interpreted in a more extensive historical setting than the aftermath of the war, as the replacement of the 'idealistic conception of interpretation of the Bible' with that of the Reformers. With pre-science, Krüger detected in dialectical theology 'the best weapon for putting to flight "historicism" and replacing its relativity with a new absolutism', an absolutism of the Word which could itself result in a pessimistic, triumphant rhetoric and an excessive narrowing of vision.

The tradition of publishing first-hand accounts of developments in German theology continued throughout the 1920s with articles by E. Krebs (1927-8), G. G. Kullmann (1927-8), and H. Offermann (1929), who, whilst often repetitive, do nonetheless display an awareness of the gradual transformation of Barth's outlook. In the American literature, the observation of the apparent, gradual estrangement of Barth himself from his dialectical phase and the emergence of the strongly systematic thrust of the Christliche Dogmatik in 1927 and then the Kirchliche Dogmatik proper from 1932 onwards, provided the opportunity for commentators to relate Barth's later work to their own presuppositions without excessive compromise. Barth was thus assimilable into given critical expectations once the dialectical origin had been distanced. As in Britain so in North America a process of normalisation took place which did not necessarily lead to an uncritical response to Barth, but one which was conducted primarily in terms of national structures and theological
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norms. Thus, in 1929, Offermann could regard the 'dialectical method' as the greatest obstacle in the way of understanding Barth's theology, fraught as such method was with contradictions, paradoxes and antitheses. Yet the diversity of the second stage of reception, seen as the products of the initial assimilation, display a range of divergence which cannot be accounted for as the product of the extraordinary comprehensiveness of Barth's theology as tied to the emergence of volumes of the Church Dogmatics in translation. We suggest that the diversity of responses both in Britain and North America was also influenced by the more interesting and indeed profound problem as to the nature of the relation of Barth's theology as a whole to modernity. Was, and indeed in what sense is, Barth's theology in any sense 'contemporary' [in the German sense of zeitgemäs]? In 1929 Offermann's comment that: 'Barth himself is a modern theologian, and in many respects he is ultra-modern'\textsuperscript{65} poses a problem of continuing, even revived importance, in the present context of 'post-modernity'.

It is clear that the initial North American reception of the theology of Karl Barth was better informed and more fully reported than in Britain. For different reasons the initial impact of dialectical theology was delayed: in Britain the experience of the First World War reinforced an already existing tendency to repel and repress things German (that is outside definite Germanophile circles); whereas by contrast, in the United States, although the higher education system and North American culture owed much to Germany, the absence of real 'crisis' until the economic collapse of 1929 insulated all but a coterie of intellectuals from the sensibility that could absorb dialectical theology as something more than a function of a distant and alien context.

In general terms, in the 1930s Barth was assimilated into the role of 'prophet' and the more accessible Brunner into that of the 'Melanchthonian interpreter of Barth'.\textsuperscript{66} There was in effect a hiatus; Barth's early dialectical work did not take
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immediate root as it was not socially translatable into either the British or North American contexts until such time as Barth himself had seemingly passed beyond the dialectic into systematic work. Alternatively, the transposition might take place given a socio-cultural crisis analogous to the 'crisis' in dialectical theology. It was meanwhile Brunner, whose dogmatic work had been written in the twenties and rapidly translated,\(^{67}\) who became the effective representative, if not the acknowledged leader, of the dialectical movement. Barth as a 'corrective' was acceptable in 1932 to W. L. Wood inasmuch as he brought a 'hopeful expectancy' in the 'twilight of a civilization'.\(^{68}\) In the same year, however, the Lutheran L. H. Awes regarded the Barthians as 'hopeless pessimists' unable to grapple with the real achievement underlying the ideal of 'progress'. Here we find one of the first expressions in the journal literature of the indigenous transformation of the abstract theology of *crisis* (as opposed to 'dialectic') into 'realism'. Apocalyptic promise was insufficient and:

Instead of a metaphysical relation in God and forgiveness in the abstract, the problem appears rather than the achievement of an uncompromising realism in dealing with the facts of life and a readiness to compromise with those laws of life which express the way of God and which, as experience teaches us, make for more harmonious and meaningful human living.\(^{69}\)

This is, in effect, an early affirmation of the Niebuhrian approach which tamed the excesses of dialectical theology (admitted under the term of 'crisis'), whilst retaining some of its critical content. Opinions varied as to the ultimate success of the translation of 'Barthianism' into American religious thought. Adolf Keller, in a translation of his major work on Barth published in 1933, could write: 'Barthianism is threatened with the peril of being translated too well into American life and thought . . . Only through rationalising, through intellectual simplification and adaptation, does the marked abstraction of Barthian thought become comprehensible to the empirical,
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more naive American thinking.\textsuperscript{70} John McConnachie put it even more bluntly in the same year: 'In America the theology of the Word . . . can hardly be said to have reached the stage of understanding criticism.'\textsuperscript{71} From this time onwards, until the later assimilation of the \textit{Church Dogmatics} proper, it is not possible to detect a consistent or highly developed direct response to Barth in the North American literature. Nevertheless, Norman Pittenger could record in 1939 that in conjunction with social circumstances:

It is no exaggeration to say that within the last decade (or perhaps even less) the entire spirit of American theology has changed. In a sense this fact is a reflection of a profound change which has come over the mentality of the American people as they have faced an economic and social situation almost unparalleled in their history.\textsuperscript{72}

The denominations, other than the Episcopalians, had swung from an 'ultra-liberalism' through to an 'ultra-conservatism of a neo-Barthian type'. The American equivalent of \textit{via media} consisted in a realistic theology with its re-emphasis upon radical doctrines of human nature, the incarnation and the atonement. This loosely allied movement led by Reinhold Niebuhr, H. P. van Dusen, W. M. Horton and Paul Tillich was influenced by Brunner, Heim, and the translations of Kierkegaard, besides Barth. The extremities of liberalism, orthodoxy and the new realistic theology all subsisted, however, in an increasingly pluralistic context as other continental (and even English) influences were drawn in. The specific influence of Barth, related in the post-war era to the emergence of the \textit{Church Dogmatics} and attendant theological controversies spilling over from Europe, cannot be readily integrated into the relatively narrow conception of initial 'reception' employed in this chapter. Barth’s voice was loud but one amongst many.

Neo-Orthodoxy, a dominant force in North America from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, owed much, but certainly not all, to Karl Barth. As a movement affirming the unity and
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authority of the Bible, the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, the deity of Christ, the sinfulness of humanity and the strength and transcendence of God's power, Neo-Orthodoxy may be considered the most impressive indigenous assimilation of the theology of crisis. Its exegetical correlate, biblical theology, was present in both Britain and North America and grew in forms related to the respective contexts. Henceforward, Barth's influence was disseminated but integral to the succeeding stages of development in post-war American theology.

As a means of reflecting the scale and complexity of the emergent situation, we turn at this point from an outline of the history of the immediate reception to a typology of responses which indicates the extraordinary variety of phenomena attributable in different ways to Barth as aspects of the complex matrix of post-Second World War Anglo-Saxon theology. As a postlude to our appreciation of the initial reception of Barth's thought and in particular its initial impact in North America, it is worth noticing the observations of two historians of the era. First, S. E. Ahlstrom remarks that:

All considered, there are many reasons for regarding Neo-Orthodoxy as an ambiguous prelude to the theological radicalism of the 1960s. Yet the interest in traditional doctrine which the movement stimulated – especially when Karl Barth was being heeded – did undeniably lead to a revival of supernaturalistic ways of thinking. And because they ignored many intellectual difficulties, Neo-Orthodox theologians have been justifiably accused of putting down only a very thin sheet of dogmatic asphalt over the problems created by modern critical thought.

Writing a decade later, D. W. Ferm sharpens this perspective, arguing that after an intellectual hegemony of three decades within Protestant theology, Neo-Orthodoxy collapsed, mainly because it maintained a 'leap of faith' into a 'supernatural order which forever remained beyond the reach of human initiative'. This option was rejected by the modern believer
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as inconsistent with the modern world view. Moreover, Ferm argues, the problem of evil takes on a form insuperable in terms of repristinated orthodoxy:

The suggested answer to this problem, which led in part to the birth of neo-orthodoxy, was precisely the opposite from the solution which provoked its death. The origins of a neo-orthodoxy lay in part in liberalism's neglect of the evil dimension of human nature. Human beings had to be saved from their worst selves. Since they appeared unable to save themselves, they turned to a transcendent God for salvation. Now, however, neo-orthodoxy died in part because this same evil dimension made it impossible for human beings to believe in a loving, parental God who would permit such evil as the Holocaust and Hiroshima to happen. Human beings now sought salvation within themselves.77

On the basis of our argument thus far, we have observed processes of theological normalisation taking place, in which a relatively alien dialectical pattern of theological thought only became assimilable as either its extreme characteristics corresponded with analogous forms of social and cultural disruption as 'crisis' or, alternatively, the dialecticism itself actually waned in intensity and itself changed. In reality, both processes took place in the settings we have described. For a variety of reasons the historical, cultural and social circumstances of each context helped dictate the pattern of reception and normalisation. Theological and non-theological evaluations of this reception might well differ and such distinctions call into question fundamental issues about the role and status of theology in contemporary culture it is not possible to explore at length here.

A TYPOLOGY OF ANGLO-SAXON RESPONSES TO BARTH

It has been our purpose to indicate how the initial reception of the theology of Karl Barth in the Anglo-Saxon world was related both to the internal self-perceptions, and as it were to the external relations of the social and cultural milieux into
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which the distinctive ideas of dialectical and crisis theology were introduced. Although the comprehensive history of what then followed in both the British and North American settings has yet to be written, our initial survey is directed at depiction of the means by which an alien mode of thought was, by processes both on Barth's part and as a result of influences in the social context, brought to the point of 'normality' and ready assimilation. This latter stage, which was reached just after the Second World War in Britain and just before in North America, is relatively easy to relate in historical terms. It was accompanied by the discussion of the issues raised by Bultmann's demand for a demythologisation of the gospel and, from that point on, the residual stability of the Neo-Orthodox position with all its variants was in principle endangered and then suffered in the sudden and drastic aggiorniomento of Protestantism itself in the 1960s. Once Barth had become an 'ordinary theologian', the reception of his work becomes a process broadly relatable to the translation of the succeeding volumes of the Church Dogmatics, which continues into recent and continuing discussion. The typology of responses now proposed is linked in broad chronological terms to the assimilation of the Church Dogmatics, and represents stages, each of which tends to develop into a partial and semi-autonomous development, that does not in itself represent an interpretation of the whole of Barth's work, nor necessarily a consistently developed aspect of it. They are, in effect, growths within Anglo-Saxon theology stimulated by the intervention of Barth's theology. In this the Anglo-Saxon reception differs in major respects from that in the German and mainland European contexts. In comprehensive terms we may isolate the following types of response, which do not exhaust the modes of influence of Barth's theology, but at least indicate its range and potency, albeit often indirect.
The foregoing historical survey indicated that the dialectical dimension of the theology of crisis was for Anglo-Saxon observers problematic to the point of being effectively unassimilable. It would nevertheless be possible to see some of the early work of D. M. MacKinnon, and to a lesser extent that of A. Vidler and Daniel Jenkins, as the partial exceptions proving this rule. In general, however, the dialectical mode of thought would seem alien to the English theological mind. In post-war terms, the American R. W. Jenson’s provocative book, *God after God*, is a systematic reworking of major theses of Barth’s mature theology on the basis of the ‘rediscovery’ of the early dialectical Barth of the *Römerbrief*. Despite these exceptions, it is plausible to argue that the effective reception of Barth’s theology in Anglo-Saxony has depended in the first instance upon the elimination of the nihilistic, Germanic stranger and his replacement with the recognisable and respectable ‘ordinary’ dogmatician of the last thirty years of Barth’s life.

*Barth and the critique of religion*

From early on, the critique of religion embodied in Barth’s contribution to the theology of crisis was recognised, and later formalised, as regards world religions, by the Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer, whose books, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, and *Religion and the Christian Faith*, had a powerful influence upon attitudes in the English-speaking world until their transformation in the last twenty years. On a more local level the Barthian separation of ‘religion’ and the ‘Christian faith’ has helped widen, with mutually disastrous consequences, the gulf in the tertiary sector between ‘religious studies’ and ‘theology’. Recent theological polarisation in the United States reflects this
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continuing disjuncture as it is embodied in the Hartford (1975) and Boston (1976) Declaration.\textsuperscript{85}

Individual inspirational assimilation

Whilst many distinguished figures within the biblical theology and Neo-Orthodox traditions owe much to Barth in a variety of ways, there are a number of independent minds who have consistently drawn on and commented upon Barth. In Britain the first most obvious example is D. M. MacKinnon, who after his dialectical phase under Hoskyns' influence, has continued to defend the ontological uniqueness of the incarnation and the \textit{Novum} of revelation and sought to combat the intellectual downgrading of Christology in English theology.\textsuperscript{86} Another very different example is W. A. Whitehouse, whose acute comments\textsuperscript{87} upon the whole series of Barth's texts appearing in the post-war period are of a consistently high quality. The only major Barthian systematic theology to emerge in Britain is that of T. F. Torrance, but this is so distinctive as to merit separate treatment as an orthodox Barthianism. In North America, Paul Lehmann stands out as a parallel figure, an individual powerfully influenced by Barth whose fidelity remains steadfast despite the changes and pluralistic diversity of his environment.\textsuperscript{88} For these individuals Barth's thought would appear, in different ways, to have helped sustain commitment to the strangeness and distinctiveness of Christianity. None, apart from Torrance, produced a fully developed position, and all have pursued the path of critical self-distancing from the majority views of their time.

Biblical theology

Without doubt the theology of crisis with its emphasis upon the central, biblically witnessed events of revelation inspired and lent impetus to the renewed study and interpretation of
the Bible. The actual work evident within the amorphous biblical theology movement is diverse, produced by such British figures as Hoskyns and Davy, besides A. M. Ramsey and A. M. Farrer, through to the Americans, Brevard Childs and G. E. Wright. The different strategies implicit in the claims to biblical authority in this movement and beyond were reviewed by D. M. Kelsey in 1975. The methods of exegesis employed in such monuments to this biblical re-engagement as the Kittel *Wörterbuch*, besides individual works, were subjected to annihilative attack by the Old Testament scholar James Barr. This was not so much a *direct* assault upon Barth (although this happened *en passant*) as the expression of one aspect of a renewal of critical methods over against the systematising tendencies of the biblical theology movement, which, through the insights of redaction criticism and a sharpened sense of historical discontinuity made textually problematic the assertion of inner conceptual unity. The exegetical crisis should not, of course, be divorced from wider, contextual factors which were predisposed towards the denigration of all residual authority, biblical or otherwise. In Britain, perhaps the most durable reflection of Barth's influence upon biblical theology is in his inspirational role, as we saw earlier, in the lives of biblical scholars, such as C. K. Barrett, who recount a specific debt. Interestingly, his long-standing Durham colleague, C. E. B. Cranfield, also acknowledged his indebtedness to the later, not the dialectical, Barth.

*Neo-Orthodoxy and orthodox Barthianism*

The influence of dialectical and crisis theology, and then the later more systematic theology of Barth upon Neo-Orthodoxy is complex and many-sided, although it contains distinct, isolable features. Such is the importance of Neo-Orthodoxy that it can be seen as a dominant force in the context which
eventually broke down in the 1960s with the advent of radical secular theology and the 'death of God' school. Within Neo-Orthodoxy, there have been theologians who can in more specific terms be regarded as orthodox Barthians; they have found in Barth a satisfactory and indeed normative interpretation and restatement of tradition in the broadest sense. Amongst these must certainly count F. W. Camfield, T. H. L. Parker, H. Hartwell, G. W. Bromiley and, above all, Thomas Forsyth Torrance. Thus within the ambit of Barthianism, the less than flattering epithet used to denote theologians and others influenced by both Barth and Brunner, Torrance and his associates have been consistent in their support of Barth. The mediation of Barth's theology in the English-speaking world owes much to both Bromiley and Torrance, editors of the translation of the *Church Dogmatics*. T. F. Torrance has produced a comprehensive interpretation of Barth's work which emerges from his account of the early work, and from the forceful and energetic presentation of a developed epistemology couched in terms of scientific analogies and relying in many respects upon the *Church Dogmatics*. Thus Torrance's conception of revelation is advanced in a way that leaves the reader in no doubt as to the significance of Barth:

Barth found his theology thrust back more and more upon its proper subject, and so he set himself to think through the whole of theological knowledge in such a way that it might be consistently faithful to the concrete act of God in Jesus Christ from which it actually takes its rise in the Church, and, further, in the course of that inquiry to ask about the presuppositions and conditions on the basis of which it comes about that God is known, in order to develop from within the actual content of theology its own interior logic and its own inner criticism which will help to set theology free from every form of ideological corruption.

Torrance's consistent and uncompromising representation of Barth's thought as a concretisation of the inner logic of revela-
tion itself realised through a conception of absolute, self-positing truth is an intellectual strategy fraught with considerable dangers. It appears to offer to the putative believer a form of theological rearmament with absolutist overtones, all too reminiscent of other twentieth-century descendants of German idealism and its transformations. Torrance’s mode of Barthian epistemological positivism would seem largely alien to the Anglo-Saxon mind. The reality of God, so conceived, puts the intellectual proclaimer of the Word in a dangerously ambiguous and less than wholly relativised position with regard to the Subject about which he speaks. Torrance has, nevertheless, been responsible for the dominant interpretation of the mature work of Barth in Britain.98

**Barth and the ‘death of God’: secularising assimilation**

Some indication of the stunning diversity within the reception of Barth in the post-war, post-dialectical ‘ordinary’ period of his work is apparent when we appreciate the contrast between T. F. Torrance’s hyperbolic assessment of Barth, as compared with the attribution to Barth of the radical ‘death of God’ movement in the 1960s, a development associated with the collapse of Neo-Orthodoxy itself.99 Some indication of the incipient tensions that underlaid the fairly sudden transition from revelational ‘positivism’ and biblical ‘realism’ into ‘secular theology’ is given by the Scottish theologian Ronald Gregor Smith, who, as a seminal thinker in the tradition of Bonhoeffer, put Barth in context:

In Barth we have the last, and possibly the greatest, certainly an awe-inspiring, effort on the part of traditional metaphysical theology to overcome the difficulty of relating ‘God in his being for himself’ with ‘God for the World in Christ’. But if you begin with ‘being’, is there any way to the world of time and movement, the historical world where Faith takes its rise?100

The simultaneous heightening of the profile of quasi-
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metaphysical transcendence (formalised as we saw by Torrance in epistemological terms) took place in a socio-cultural historical context marked by an unprecedented turn towards individualism and consumer materialism, combined with a concern, above all, for 'human potential' during the relative optimism of the decade 1955-65. This led at the very least to a scarcely sustainable tension between the nature and content of the theological assertions and the context of their social realisation. A post-war phrase coined by Daniel Bell, 'the end of ideology', was symptomatic, the comprehensive systems of thought imposed in the inter-war totalitarianisms of Hitler and Stalin had lost their lustre and attraction. Likewise social moves towards individual self-realisation, demands for effective praxis and the emergence of the theological equivalent of 'pressure-group' politics had their effect. The troika of Barth, Bultmann and Tillich were to be among the last great monolithic ideological exports; an era of theological pluralism had truly begun. The orthodox Barthian 'either/or': either enter into the 'safe stronghold of transcendence' (to use Ernst Bloch's resonant phrase: 'ein feste Burg der Transzendenz'), or depart into the chaotic realm of 'unhinged thought' (reflecting T. F. Torrance's equally potent imagery) was a dilemma increasingly questionable in a new pluralistic era.

Barth and the sociology of religion

The massive post-war expansion of higher education in both Britain and North America was attended by a corresponding increase in the teaching of sociology and of the sociology of religion. The latter provided (especially when presented within the ambit of 'religious studies') an acceptable way of introducing the study of religion into undergraduate teaching without the apparent stigma of dogmatic or denominational prejudice. In this post-war context, the sharp distinction in the Barthian position between 'faith' and 'religion' allowed for the intellec-
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tual strategy, exploited by Peter Berger, of participating in and promoting the strictly objective discussion of the latter, whilst simultaneously by sleight of hand retaining a sharply differentiated implicit commitment to the former. The retention of a faith commitment as a means of escaping thoroughgoing sociological reduction was a tactical ploy from which Berger later distanced himself.\textsuperscript{101} The dominance of the positivist revelational image of Barth embodied in Neo-Orthodoxy, encouraged through the formulation of analogies between Christian dogmatics and ideas drawn from pure science as in Torrance’s work, has been pursued at the expense of adequate understanding of the constitutive role of sociological factors in the evolution of religious, theological and, indeed, all intellectual constructs. Needless to say, the sociology of theology (including that of Barth) now opens up areas of great interest and importance.\textsuperscript{102}

Barth and the philosophy of religion

Again seen in the context of the post-war expansion of the liberal arts and social science in higher education, the apparent ‘fideism’ within Neo-Orthodoxy became the stock-in-trade object of philosophical critique. R. W. Hepburn in Britain\textsuperscript{103} and W. W. Bartley III\textsuperscript{104} in the United States, amongst others, attacked the status of a belief-system which had apparently lost effective touch with other spheres of discourse. The Neo-Wittgensteinian riposte, the assertion of the autonomy of spheres of discourse using the images of the ‘language game’ and ‘form of life’, and the formalisation of this ‘conceptual relativism’ in such popular works as Peter Winch’s \textit{The Idea of a Social Science},\textsuperscript{105} provided part of the epistemological and structural support for the type of response identified below with ‘narrative theology’ and, for the contemporary theological academicism referred to below.
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Barth and politics

Examination of contemporary journals reveals regular if not extensive pre-war accounts of Barth's political interventions at Barmen, on the occasion of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and, most notably, in his exchanges with Reinhold Niebuhr at the Amsterdam meeting of the World Council of Churches in 1947. Whilst, for the most part, Barth's political intervention from his Safenwil period onwards have been the object of keen discussion in West Germany, and despite G. Hunsinger's efforts at mediation of the highly contentious Marquardt thesis concerning the political character of Barth's theology, the Anglo-Saxon evaluation of the significance of this element has been generally sceptical. The political events upon which Barth commented and in terms of which his theology might be understood are vital to contemporary German identity in a way not shared, for better or worse, by Britons and North Americans. Most significant here is the Anglo-Saxon theologian's relative ignorance of, and ideological exclusion from, the issues raised by Marxism during the period in question. In this context Charles West's unsurpassed study was the notable exception. Recent interest in the reappearance of Marxist ideas in liberation theology coincides, broadly speaking, with a decline in commitment to the theological 'grand theory' approach characteristic of Barth, despite his own and his followers' disclaimers.

Narrative theology

The decline of Neo-Orthodoxy and the secular theology of the sixties and its attendant social phenomena have, in recent years, been succeeded by a reassertion of interpretation of the biblical texts on a literary, rather than a historical-critical basis. Central to this has been the exploitation of 'story' and 'narrative' as the starting-point for theological use of biblical
texts. It would appear that the close contiguity of the growth of narrative theology with the assimilation of the later volumes of the Church Dogmatics, notably volume IV, was not merely coincidental; indeed G. W. Stroup's programmatic The Promise of Narrative Theology can be understood as an extended commentary upon theological possibilities inherited from Barth and first opened up by Hans W. Frei in two linked but dissimilar works. The location by Frei of the focal point of theological reflection in 'history-like', 'realistic' narratives on the basis of a methodological appropriation of elements drawn from Eric Auerbach's Mimesis would appear to free the theologian from the restrictions of historicism. Whether in fact Barth's theology would legitimate this strategy of evading historical-critical reductionism through exploitation of the literary mode of novel-like realistic narrative is open to question. Moreover, the use made of Auerbach's contrast between the intense known particularity of the ultimately closed Homeric narrative, and the witnessing transparency of the Old Testament narrative, is also questionable as regards any Barthian justification. It is only by prising apart the early and later volumes of the Church Dogmatics that ontological claims and narrative meaning can be divorced in order to exploit the latter.

Mythopoesis and post-modernism

The sanction given to the unfettered employment of the theological imagination apparently afforded by the later volumes of the Church Dogmatics was noted by the American feminist theologian, R. R. Ruether, in a perceptive but neglected article published in 1968. Looking for the freedom to reform tradition herself, Ruether openly proceeded along the lines hinted at above, taking volume IV of the Church Dogmatics as a starting point for a presentation of Barth as a theologian of the imagination caught up in sublime mythopoesis, having
The reception of the theology of Karl Barth effectively abandoned questions of historical or philosophical truth and indeed narrative criteria other than the creative and aesthetic. Whilst such a loosening of restraints might be justified in the context of an attack upon Barth's patriarchal theology, it opened up a possibility within Anglo-Saxon theology not hitherto regarded as legitimate within the main lines of the tradition. The theologian could, following Ruether, act with a sovereign freedom not merely to restate, but also to recreate a tradition using its narrative sources as a mineable seam containing images and motifs exploitable within belief-systems, suited to the ideological needs of theological pressure groups within a pluralistic corpus Christianum.

A perhaps less irresponsible approach to the new imaginative possibilities detected in Barth's late work can be found within the post-liberal or post-modern movement in which the demands of both context and tradition are, so its proponents argue, contained. G. A. Lindbeck in his seminal work The Nature of Doctrine asserts that: 'Karl Barth's exegetical emphasis on narrative has been at second hand a chief source of my notion of intratextuality as an appropriate way of doing theology in a fashion consistent with a cultural-linguistic understanding of religion and a regulative view of doctrine.'

Thus the more positive aspects of the fideist interpretation of Barth are re-earthed in the context of the religious life of a tradition and its socio-cultural matrix. Even here the failure satisfactorily to distinguish and to relate questions of truth and the exploration of meaning is not without its problematic aspects.

Literary assimilation: 'fallen' Barthians

There is undoubtedly a sense in which Barth's theology has served as a transitional intoxication in the lives of some distinguished twentieth-century intellectuals who have passed
through a Barthian adolescence as a prelude to the adoption of other positions. The transition from faith to scepticism may be sudden and complete. Such 'fallen' theologians sometimes retain a persistent Barthian core, almost as it were a gnostic 'spark', overlaid with consistent practical atheism: these have now through the good offices of the distinguished Episcopalian novelist John Updike, a dauntless explorer of the Alpha and Omega of sexuality, entered the pantheon of literary types. The central character of Updike's recent Roger's Version, Professor Roger Lambert, exemplifies this, and his exploits belong entirely to the pre-Aids era of the pursuit of unrestrained sexual fulfilment. This is, to use MacKinnon's phrase, another 'dark theme' in the history of twentieth-century Christian theology.

New fundamentalism and academicism

There is evidence, finally, of increased interest in Barth on the part of main-line Evangelical theological thought as it struggles between the resurgent and uncompromising demands of modernity over against Fundamentalism and the moral majority. Whether such belated attempts to retain contact with modernity in the face of the ultra-conservative threat are more than the misemployment of Barth's thought as an ideological bastion remains to be seen. Over against the struggles within conservative Protestantism, North American university theology has moved decisively in the direction of a academicist liberalism exemplified in the widely used textbook, Christian Theology, edited by P. C. Hodgson and R. H. King. This work in its original form, without the later addition of S. W. Sykes' paper on 'Church, Ministry and Sacraments', is a classic example of the virtual elimination of any vestige of Barth's healthy insistence upon the Church and witness-related character of Christian theology. The consequences of this distancing of the pursuit of theology as a liberal arts discipline from a responsible relationship with tradition and
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equally from the active life of the Church may well be considerable.

PROSPECT: THE PAST AND THE FUTURE
OF THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

Without doubt, it may be said that the thought of Karl Barth has had a constructive influence upon the development of German Protestant theology in the twentieth century. It is also evident that Barth has earned a unique place in modern German Church history. As regards the Anglo-Saxon world, he has made a major but less decisive contribution: the evidence would indicate that Barth was seen as one in a series of major continental thinkers along with Bultmann, Tillich, Berdyaev, and so on, who have influenced English-speaking theology and religious thought in the mid-twentieth century, and his status in this process of intellectual transmission is a contested question. It is a relatively select minority who have, like Torrance, accorded Barth the status of master theologian and drawn prescriptive recommendations therefrom. As we have shown above, the reception and influence of the theology of Karl Barth has not been uniform but diversified in accordance with the time and the mode of its cultural insertion. Barth’s most fruitful and indefatigable champion in the Anglo-Saxon world, T. F. Torrance, saw in his work a radical clarification of the ground and grammar of theology, a gift to the Church that could only be ignored at the risk of grave loss. Such claims are difficult to assess but the extraordinary range and quality of the secondary literature does bear witness to the rich, ripe depths of Barth’s achievement. Contrary to Torrance’s hopes, something other than the exploration of the inner logic of revelation has emerged, and this is a function not merely of the structure of an extensive organised body of thought but also of obscurely felt and imperfectly understood social forces which put in radical question the total status of such a complex system. What we find when we confront and penetrate the
epistemological and ontological 'either/or' implicit in Barth is a series of profound questions, which although applicable to the whole conspectus of the theological task, take on in this connection a coherent, distinctive and pressing particularity. Karl Barth was a very great theologian: great in terms of a highly original recapitulation of the tradition, which is, at the same time, a masterful representation of the total difficulties of that tradition in the face of a hostile modernity.

Barth's work, bears the marks of something all too close to the claim of an absolute authority manifesting itself in a disembodied image; that is, as a 'strange new world', that first appears as a Kierkegaardian 'moment' and is then extended in the linearity of the temporal order.117 Barth's theology progressed from dialectic and paradox to the sublime majesty and ontological solidity of a regular dogmatics; but it has been repeatedly perceived merely as a reinstated 'ordinary' theology. The larger issues are exposed if we emphasise further the affinity between Barth's progress and that of other earlier major Germanophone thinkers, of whom Hegel and Marx are the obvious examples. Each moves from early, essentially dialectical insecurity, towards regenerated ontological certainty: thus Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind precedes the Logic and then moves to narrative application in the massive series of historically based lectures including the posthumous Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Marx's Paris Manuscripts are followed by the Grundrisse, volume I of the Capital, and then the historical justifications of the later volumes of Capital and the Theories of Surplus Values. So Barth effectively begins with the dialectical Römerbrief, crystallises an ontology in the Prolegomena to the Church Dogmatics, and then progresses into the 'history-like' narrative textuality of the later volumes. These analogies suggest that the imposition of an interpretation of Barth's theology in terms of the disembodied image, the stasis and immobilism of a strange new world, is far too simplistic a response to what is not merely in its internal
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relations a complex phenomenon (as a synthetic reinterpretation of the tradition), but also as regards its external relations equally difficult to comprehend and represent. We are repeatedly confronted in the evidence educed alone with a false and misleading dilemma, 'either/or': either enter the world of alienated majesty or depart into secular aridity. This is the choice, a parting of the ways, imposed by the consistent, orthodox Barthian; but does it represent the true nature of the situation? Far from being confronted with a simple choice between ideologies or with a disjunction between fantasy and reality, we ought here to articulate what it would mean to go through rather than merely around Barth in a passage not as yet accomplished in the fullest sense by Anglo-Saxon theology.

In this chapter, it has been our purpose to indicate through comparative historical surveys how the initial stages of the reception of the theology of Karl Barth were delayed and distorted by contextual factors both social and cultural. Once Barth's thought, albeit imperfectly and incompletely mediated, had taken root in the consciousness of the English-speaking theological world, then its secondary assimilation was to give rise to the series of responses which we have presented in terms of a typology. The alternative to such categorisation would have to be a complete history of the theology of the mid- and later twentieth century. Our typology indicates how the modes of response related to the often delayed transmission of vital elements in Barth's œuvre. Serious efforts at the re-presentation tended to fall victim either to the kind of superficiality that stems from dogmatic and partisan overcommitment, or to an equally misleading instrumental use of Barth to justify individual intellectual strategies. There has been no definitive Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the theology of Karl Barth which respects its context, content and consequences. An adequate passage through this body of thought and its total Sitz im Leben would present considerable, some might think insuperable difficulties. At the
very least such an Anglo-Saxon reception ought to bring to bear virtues of restraint, analytical skill and clarity; but beyond this it would demand the full deployment of intellectual insights: historical, philosophical, sociological, linguistic and theological, besides those of literary theory, in what would amount to a 'genealogy' of Barth's thought conceived in the field of force of its historical emergence. In this way, it might prove possible to displace the dominant Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the theology of Karl Barth with its apparent totalitarian demands. Such a displacement would, however, merely be a corrective act secured at the cost of immense and scarcely worthwhile labour. A repetition of Barth's recapitulation of the tradition would demand a more pressing justification.

Barth's theology is, in T. W. Adorno's phrase, an 'alienated masterpiece'\textsuperscript{118} that represents to us in an extremely powerful way simultaneously both the recreation and the distance of tradition from modernity; in grappling with this dilemma we engage with something affecting the torn soul of European culture. To dare to venture a healing here would be to probe a universal wound. The prospect of such a recovery would be no mere dismantling or salvage of the stricken hulk of the great dreadnought of Barth's life-work, but perhaps a means to the recovery of a theologia viatorum, reintegrated with unforeseeable consequences into the fabric of human commonality. It is the task and purpose of the Church to incarnate the 'impossible possibility' of the active Word; part of this task implies a comprehensive Anglo-Saxon mediation, as opposed to a merely passive reception of the theology of Karl Barth.\textsuperscript{119} This in its turn would require the unsparing Einsatz of intellectual energy and dynamic intellectual praxis on the part of a theological tradition which in England is starved of resources and not noted for such ambition. Nevertheless, as Hegel has taught the world, the unreflective consciousness of dominance awaits the challenge of the oppressed, the bondsmen, those who through confrontation with fear
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experience that inferiority (likened to the state of thinghood) out of which they may possibly emerge through struggle and labour into the dynamism of fully reflective self-consciousness. Such is the burden and the possibility incumbent upon the Anglo-Saxon tradition in confrontation with Karl Barth, the Goliath of twentieth-century German-speaking theology. Indeed, as regards England, theology must learn anew to live dialectically (and thus dangerously) or it will slowly die, suffocated in the cocoon of its own myopic misapprehensions; this is a process all too apparent in its reception of the theology of Karl Barth, and a function of its as yet 'unconquered past'.

NOTES

1 This chapter is a revised version of a paper entitled 'Die Aufnahme der Theologie Karl Barths im angelsächsischen Bereich: Geschichte Typologie – Ausblick', delivered on 16 April 1986 at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, West Germany, in the context of Theologie zwischen den Zeiten Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag von Karl Barth, and published in Evangelische Theologie, 46 (1986), 369–93. My friend and colleague Dr Ann Loades read and commented freely on both drafts – I am deeply grateful.

2 The present contribution is in effect a specific sequel to S. W. Sykes 'The study of Barth', and my own 'Karl Barth’s doctrine of time: its nature and implications' in S. W. Sykes (ed.), Karl Barth. Studies of His Theological Method (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 1–16, 88–146. Attention is here focused upon the Protestant reception of Barth; the Roman Catholic reception in the Anglo-Saxon world has in effect taken place after the Second World War and lies outside the major thrust of the argument in this chapter. See E. Lamirande, 'The impact of Karl Barth on the Catholic Church in the last half century' in H. M. Rumscheidt (ed.), Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972 (Waterloo, 1974), pp. 112–41.

3 The word 'typology' is used here in order to avoid the imagery of 'left' and 'right', the theological application of which was justly criticised by the American theologian Claude Welch in 'On theological typology', Theology Today, 22 (1965–6), 176–89.
Methodologically I draw upon insights afforded by the Durham sociologist Dr J. W. Beckford's recent book, *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements* (London, 1985), in which he examines comparatively the modes of interaction between religious groups and the distinctive societal contexts to which they address themselves.


5 Cited *ibid.*, p. 525.


14 The displacement of religious concerns as the correlate of secularisation is documented by, for example, Terry Eagleton in 'The rise of English' in *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 17-53.


17 There would however appear to be, so far as regards the aesthetic assimilation of the experience of the First World War, no allied equivalent to the extraordinary 'war-mysticism' classically expressed by Ernst Jünger in his books, *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), and *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922).
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18 Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* (Munich, 1977), vol. I, ch. 1, provides a fascinating account of this ecclesiastical disarray which was the religious correlate of the social disorder and the threat of cultural nihilism that followed in the aftermath of Germany's defeat.


20 For a detailed contemporary account see *Theology*, 14 (1927), 247–95; 17 (1928), 182–260; and 22 (1931), 301–46. The collective volume *Mysterium Christi: Christological Studies by British and German Theologians* (London, 1931), edited by A. Deissmann and G. K. A. Bell, embodied the full fruits of these theological encounters. N. P. Williams, in reviewing this volume
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in *Theology*, 22 (1931), 45–8, could remark that the 'religion and theological situation in post-war Germany is still somewhat of a mystery' even to those with pre-war acquaintance with that country.


27 John McConnachie was author of *The Significance of Karl Barth* (London, 1931), a study similar in tone to R. Birch Hoyle's *The Teaching of Karl Barth: An Exposition* (London, 1930).

28 McConnachie, 'The teaching of Karl Barth', pp. 388, 392, 400.


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33 J. O. Cobham, cited in the editorial, Theology, 37 (July, 1938), 1, maintained after Hoskyns' death that:

Hoskyns was never a Barthian. That I am sure, wants saying. But at a time when his own work on the New Testament was forcing him away from Catholic Modernism he discovered Barth as someone who supplied him with a language through which to express what he himself was discovering from the New Testament. And the Barth he appreciated was the Barth of the Römerbrief, not the Barth of the Dogmatik.

34 E. C. Hoskyns' review of Th. L. Haitjema's Karl Barth's 'Kritische Theologie' in Journal of Theological Studies, 29 (1928), 201-4, 201, 202, 204.


36 Review of Birch Hoyle, The Teaching of Karl Barth in Journal of Theological Studies, 33 (1932), 205. Hoskyns' claim on behalf of The Epistle to the Romans contrasts strongly with the contemporary consensus that it was not, in any straightforward sense, a commentary illuminating the text of Romans.

37 Numbers 1 and 7 in the Signposts series: D. M. MacKinnon, God the living and the true (London, 1940), and The Church of God (London, 1940). It is interesting to note G. S. Wakefield's remarks on the political background of this series, Crucifixion-Resurrection, p. 62, in the light of MacKinnon's commentary. On the texts, see R. H. Roberts, 'Theological rhetoric and moral Passion in the light of MacKinnon's "Barth" ' in K. Surin [ed.], Christ, Faith and Ethics, Pursuing the Thought of Donald MacKinnon (Cambridge, 1989). The position we take up with regard to both Barth and MacKinnon is an implicit rejection of A. McGrath's assertions that 'dialectical theology is an aspect of the history of Christian thought, rather than a contemporary theological force', and that it is 'difficult for the modern scholar to appreciate the full force of this violent
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work when it broke upon an unprepared theological world', The Making of Modern German Christology (Oxford, 1986), p. 95. McGrath continues a time-honoured, but misleading, English tradition when he refers to the Römerbrief as 'a work of prophecy rather than theology', ibid.


42 O. C. Quick honestly admitted his inability to read Barth in the original and his dependence upon the translation of The Word of God and the Word of Man (1928), and the introductions to Barthianism by Birch Hoyle and Brunner. His comments in The God of Faith and the Chaos of Thought (London, 1931), pp. 96ff, and The Gospel of Divine Action (London, 1933), pp. 104ff, nevertheless cast interesting light upon the sharp conflict over Barth between Hoskyns and Streeter, likewise in the Cambridge faculty.

43 Channing-Pearce, 'Karl Barth as a post-war prophet', p. 365. As in his earlier article, Channing-Pearce again illuminated the affinity between Barth and T. S. Eliot: 'Mr Eliot's St Thomas seems to incarnate the Barthian "word" in modern drama', ibid., pp. 370-1.
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44 Jenkins, 'Mr Demant and Karl Barth', p. 412.
45 R. Cant, 'Recent tendencies in theological writing', *Church Quarterly Review*, 142 (1946), 149–75, 152.
47 F. W. Camfield's characterisation of Barth as 'ordinary theologian' (as opposed to a disregardable 'prophet') comes at the end of chapter I of *Reformation Old and New: A Tribute to Karl Barth* (London, 1947), p. 29.
49 As Ahlstrom puts it: 'To most Americans of the 1920s, the notion of "crisis" and "despair" could arise only in the frightened and diseased minds of those who stalked the remote European ruins, the world of yesterday – or in the minds of expatriate intellectuals who preferred the ruins to the world of Cal Coolidge', *A Religious History*, p. 937.
50 R. Lempp, 'Present religious conditions in Germany', *Harvard Theological Review*, 3 (1910), 85–124.
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52 Lempp, 'Present religious conditions in Germany', pp. 92-3.
54 Ibid., pp. 113, 118.
56 Lempp, 'Present religious conditions in Germany', pp. 118-19.
57 Ibid. We do not here question the adequacy of this interpretation of Nietzsche, but merely reiterate it.
58 Ibid., pp. 122, 124.
59 Lempp, 'Church and religion in Germany', pp. 30-1.
60 Ibid., p. 50.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 52.
66 Ibid.
67 Thus, for example, Brunner’s direct experience of the United
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68 Wood, 'Karl Barth, prophet and theologian', pp. 31–2.
69 Awes, 'The theology of crisis', p. 34.
75 Ahlstrom, A Religious History, p. 947.
76 Ferm, Contemporary American Theologies, p. 19.
77 Ibid., p. 20.
81 See, for example, W. Pauck 'Barth's religious criticism of religion', Journal of Religion, 8 (1928), 453–74, a well-informed account.
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84 The continued development and modification of this line of argument can be seen in Bishop Leslie Newbigin's *The Open Secret* (London, 1979), and his autobiography *Unfinished Agenda* (London, 1985).

85 Texts published in *Theology Today*, 31 (1975), 94-7, and 32 (1976), 101-4, respectively.


87 See A. L. Loades (ed.), *The Authority of Grace — Essays in Response to Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, 1981), in which these contributions are conveniently assembled.

88 See, for example, P. Lehmann in 'Karl Barth and the future of theology', *Religious Studies*, 6 (1970), 105-20, where he provides a valuable contextualisation of Barth's work in the post-war context and its varied contributions to the types of its assimilation.

89 A. M. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936), is an early example of the English biblical theology genre, but no direct attribution to the influence of Barth is here in question [verbal communication with the author]; Ramsey does, however, imply the influence of F. N. Davey and A. M. Farrer in the preface, p. viii.

90 D. M. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London, 1975), in which extensive reference is made to Barth's impression upon the proponents of biblical theology.


92 Cranfield comments upon the influence of the *Römerbrief* in the introduction to his monumental study, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, 1975): 'to take it for one's main aid in studying the epistle would be to demonstrate one's failure to learn from Barth's maturer thinking and one's lack of an essen-
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tial element in theological seriousness, a sense of humour', pp. 41-2.


94 Hartwell's basic textbook, The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction (London, 1969), remained for many years the only comprehensive English presentation of the Church Dogmatics. It is essentially a skilled paraphrase of the 'ordinary' Barth.

95 T. F. Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology 1910–1931 (London, 1962), is as yet unsuperseded in English.

96 A forerunner of Torrance's approach may be detected in G. Howe, 'Parallelen zwischen der Theologie Karl Barths und der heutigen Physik' in Antwort, Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (Zurich, 1956), pp. 409-22.


van Buren’s personal history (as one of Barth’s doctoral students) and his role in the ‘death of God’ theology represent par excellence this problematic dimension of Barth’s reception.


108 One hostile example will suffice: W. R. Ward, the Durham modern Church historian, has likewise attacked the integrity of the ‘cult-figure’ of the ‘unpolitical Barth’ prior to 1935 in ‘The socialist commitment in Karl Barth’, Studies in Church History, 17 (1978), 254–65. There is prolific further biography.

109 C. West, Communism and the Theologians (London, 1938).

110 G. W. Stroup, The Promise of Narrative Theology (London, 1984), see pp. 139ff, where Frei’s dependence upon Barth is made clear.


112 E. Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton, 1953), esp. ch. 1.
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117 I have outlined the temporal structures informing this danger in my contribution, 'Karl Barth's doctrine of time', to Sykes, *Karl Barth*.