

# ORTHODOX AND MODERN

*Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*

Bruce L. McCormack

  
**BakerAcademic**  
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[www.BakerAcademic.com](http://www.BakerAcademic.com)

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Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McCormack, Bruce L.

Orthodox and modern : studies in the theology of Karl Barth / Bruce L. McCormack.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8010-3582-1 (pbk.)

1. Barth, Karl, 1886–1968. I. Title.

BX4827.B3M38 2008

230'.044'092—dc22

2008019879

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## Abbreviations

- CD* Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by G. T. Thomson. 5 vols. in 14 parts. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1977
- KD* Karl Barth. *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*. 5 vols. in 14 parts. Zollikon, Switz.: Verlag der Evangelischen Buchhandlung, 1932–1970



## Introduction

“Modern . . . *and yet orthodox*”: for many, such a description will seem to be a contradiction in terms. An explanation why this is not so will require close attention to each term. Perhaps the best place to begin is with a bit of personal biography—which will also shed considerable light on the motives which led to the writing of the essays contained in this volume.

The interpretive traditions in which I find myself most at home as a Barth researcher are European rather than American. This needs to be stated at the outset if the essays in this volume are to be understood well—which is to say, understood contextually and in terms of their basic intentions. In part, this is due to the fact that I first gained entrée to Barth’s theology through Eberhard Jüngel’s *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, which I read in preparation for my doctoral qualifying exams in 1982. For the first time, the whole of Barth’s theology was opened up to me in a way that made sense of the details. To that book I owe my most basic commitments as a Barth researcher. This already marks an important difference from those who began their study of Barth under the guidance of Hans Frei, for example—and helps to explain my deviations from the “neo-orthodox” reading, which has shown an impressive ability to reinvent itself in recent years. My starting-point in Jüngel’s writings was then further enriched by a Fulbright year at the University of Basel in 1984–1985.

A highlight of that memorable year in Basel was my participation in a German-language *Arbeitsgruppe*—a small circle of friends, led by Niklaus Peter (then a doctoral student at the University of Basel, later managing director of Theologischer Verlag Zürich, and today pastor of the Fraumünster in Zürich). During the winter semester, the object of our study was Barth’s book on Anselm, *Fides quaerens intellectum*. The questions which dominated our discussions were finally two: First, is Karl Barth’s theology to be regarded as recognizably *modern* in its basic commitments, or is it more rightly understood in terms of a *neoorthodox* repristination of older trains of thought no longer considered viable by the vast majority of European theologians? And second,

if Karl Barth's theology, too, is demonstrably modern in character, then what is the meaning of "modernity" in the realm of Christian theology? What is it that makes *any* theology modern rather than ancient?

Where the first of these questions was concerned, leading Barth scholars in Germany at that time were united in the conviction that while Barth's theology might have been many things, "neo-orthodox" was not one of them. Whether the focus of their research was political or more straightforwardly dogmatic, virtually all agreed that Barth's theology constituted a variant within modern theology—Barth's own sharp criticisms of certain tendencies in modern theology notwithstanding.<sup>1</sup> Critics of this central claim were not to be found among adherents but only among those who rejected Barth's theology. And so we wrestled with our questions throughout that semester and on through the remainder of the year.

But obviously, the answer one gives to the first question depends largely upon the answer given to the second. At that time, we looked for answers to the question of what it means to be "modern" in the realm of theology by reading the results of historical research into the intellectual roots of the rise of historical-critical investigation of the Bible. In conjunction with a seminar taught by Uwe Gerber in the university and the discussions spawned by it, I read works by Troeltsch, Ebeling, Scholder, Reventlow, and Hasler, among others.<sup>2</sup> The conviction I came to at that time is one I still hold today: that it was the rise of "historical consciousness"—by which I mean the awareness that all human thinking is conditioned by historical (and cultural) location—that

1. Appreciation of characteristically modern elements in Barth's theology began in earnest in 1972–1973 with the publication of the following: Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Subjektivität Gottes und die Trinitätslehre: Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels," in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 96–111; Trutz Rendtorff, "Radikale Autonomie Gottes: Zum Verständnis der Theologie Karl Barths und ihrer Folgen," in *Theorie des Christentums* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972), 161–81; Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths* (Munich: Kaiser, 1972); and Karl Gerhard Steck and Dieter Schellong, *Karl Barth und die Neuzeit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1973). By the time I was studying in Basel, these works had spawned a number of others. See Peter Eicher, *Bürgerliche Religion: Eine theologische Kritik* (Munich: Kösel, 1983); Christoph Gestrinch, *Neuzeitliches Denken und die Spaltung der dialektischen Theologie: Zur Frage der natürlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977); Wilfried Groll, *Ernst Troeltsch und Karl Barth—Kontinuität im Widerspruch* (Munich: Kaiser, 1976).

2. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melancthon: Untersuchung zur Geschichte der altprotestantischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1891); idem, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1913), 2:729–53; Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism," in *Word and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 17–61; Klaus Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der historisch-kritischen Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1966); Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1984); Ueli Hasler, *Beherrschte Natur: Die Anpassung der Theologie an die bürgerliche Naturfassung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrmann) (Bern: Peter Lang, 1982).

was most basic to the emergence of what we tend to think of as “modern” theology today. The most significant preconditions necessary for the emergence of historical consciousness as a culturewide phenomenon in Germany were twofold: first, Kant’s limitation of what may be known by the theoretical reason in phenomenal reality and, second, the emergence of early romanticism in Herder and Hamann.<sup>3</sup> It was the confluence of these two developments especially which brought an end to Enlightenment rationalism and made possible the first truly modern theologies. Schleiermacher’s relationship to romanticism in his early period is well known. But even Hegel’s theology—intended as a reaction to romanticism—embraced its historicizing tendencies to the extent that his “grand meta-narrative” (to borrow the language of the postmodernists) consisted in an understanding of the unfolding of Absolute Spirit which was identified with the history of the world.

Beyond the historicizing tendencies unleashed by the rise of historical consciousness, any truly “modern” theology will also include the following: an acceptance, in principle at the very least, of critical methods for studying the Bible; a recognition of the loss of respect among philosophers for classical metaphysics in all of their (Greek) forms; the recognition of the breakdown of the old Aristotelian-biblical cosmology in the course of the seventeenth century; and acceptance of the necessity of constructing doctrines of creation and providence which find their ground in more modern theological and/or philosophical resources.<sup>4</sup> Negotiable elements (i.e., those found in some “modern” theologians but certainly not in all) include the following: a relatively positive stance towards evolutionary science (the fact that evolutionary theory came into existence only *after* the rise of “modern” theology ought to be sufficient to demonstrate that complete acceptance is not a necessary feature of all modern theologies); and nonfoundationalism and opposition to natural theology. Though many recent postmodern accounts of the “modern” would like to make foundationalism the hallmark of all “modern” theologies and therefore essential to the definition, it is hardly the case that all “modern” theologians were foundationalists. Some among the Hegelians might be argued to be (Ernst Troeltsch comes immediately to mind), but Schleiermacher certainly was not. Nor were the “outsiders” who owed so much to him (e.g., Søren Kierkegaard and J. T. Beck).

Where, then, does Barth stand when measured by the foregoing criteria? The most conspicuous feature of the earliest form of Barth’s dialectical theology was its antimetaphysical stance in the matter of theological epistemology. The Barth of the second *Romans* commentary especially was concerned to

3. On the importance of Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder for the emergence of romanticism, see Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

4. On the breakdown of the Aristotelian-biblical synthesis in matters of cosmology, see John Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science: An Historical Interpretation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1977).

overcome what he saw as the domestication of God by “neo-Protestant” or “liberal” theology in the nineteenth century. This concern manifested itself in an attempt to speak of God on the grounds of God’s Self-revelation alone rather than on the basis of either classical metaphysics or modern personalist philosophies. The fact that Barth devoted so many pages of his writings in this phase to criticizing neo-Protestant theology tended to conceal the extent to which his antimetaphysical stance was itself a distinctively modern option in theology.

My own contribution to the European discussion of Barth’s relation to modernity was to demonstrate the extent to which Kant and the later Marburg neo-Kantianism influenced not only his earliest “liberal” theology (prior to 1915) but also decisively stamped his dialectical theology.<sup>5</sup> From Kant, Barth took the view that human knowing is the consequence of the synthesizing activities of the mind (the combination of intuited sense data with the categories of the understanding). Barth would never see any serious reason to question this basic epistemological commitment later—though his attachment to it was always relative, never absolute. The result was a concept of revelation which laid great emphasis upon the dialectic of divine unveiling in and through the veil of a Self-chosen creaturely medium. Revelation is therefore understood by Barth as an *act* of Self-mediation in the execution of which God remains ontologically other than the chosen medium—and therefore hidden in it. What Barth took from Marburg neo-Kantianism, on the other hand, was his understanding of actualism as having not only an epistemological but an ontological significance. For Hermann Cohen, the founder of Marburg neo-Kantianism, the human simply *is* the sum total of his or her lifetime of knowing activities. Expressed more expansively: the human is what he or she does. It was but a short step from here to reflection upon the divine nature as actualistic—a point which Barth would begin to ground christologically just two and a half years after publishing his second *Romans*.<sup>6</sup>

5. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 43–49, 129–30, 207–9, 218–26, 235–40, 245–66, 464–67; idem, “Die theologieggeschichtliche Ort Karl Barths,” in *Karl Barth in Deutschland (1921–1935): Aufbruch–Klärung–Widerstand*, ed. Michael Beintker, Christian Link, and Michael Trowitzsch (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 15–40. In the same year in which my book appeared, the question of the influence of neo-Kantianism in particular was addressed more fully in Johann Friedrich Lohmann, *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im “Römerbrief” und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995). Subsequent contributions to this area of investigation include D. Paul LaMontagne, “Barth and Rationality: Critical Realism in Theology” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001); Clifford Blake Anderson, “The Crisis of Theological Science: A Contextual Study of the Development of Karl Barth’s Concept of Science from 1901–1923” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005).

6. See Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:131–67.

Where the other dimensions of the foregoing definition of “modern” theology are concerned, Barth embraced the critical study of the Bible in principle from the very beginning (though he made himself free to be critical of the critics, too!). And he took for granted the breakdown of the older Protestant synthesis of Aristotle and the Bible in his thinking about creation and providence. Beyond these points, where the negotiable items of belief among “modern” theologians were concerned, Barth showed himself to be a member in good standing of the Schleiermacherian tradition in his opposition to natural theology as well as in his “nonfoundationalism.” And he saw no merit in seeking to oppose evolution but contented himself with the understanding that this theory belongs to natural science and is not therefore something which a Christian understanding of creation ought either to support or contend against.

The only remaining element in my earlier attempt to establish the meaning of “modernity” in the realm of theology has to do with the tendency to historicize. This element comes more strongly to the fore in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*—after Barth’s revision of the doctrine of election in CD II/2. The central idea here is that God’s eternal election of himself to be God “for us” in Jesus Christ is an act in which God constitutes his being as a being for historical existence (i.e., the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth). In CD IV especially, his thinking about Christology began to draw nearer to Hegel. Barth thereby established both the relative validity and the proper limits of the historicizing tendencies of the previous century and a half. The relative validity lay in God’s determination that God’s being should be a being in the becoming that is the history of Jesus. The limit—and this is significant—lay in the fact that this act of Self-determination was a *free* act on the part of God, not a necessary one.

The result of this move was that the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* are far more explicitly “modern” in their commitments than were the earlier volumes. Still, all of this was but a consistent application of Barth’s earlier actualism.



Returning to my personal narrative for just a moment: I came home from Basel in September 1985 to a different theological situation from the one I had left. Almost overnight, American theologians seemed to have decided that “modernity” was over, that we were now in a “postmodern” moment. While my European colleagues and I had been trying to understand the meaning of “modernity,” a fair number of Americans had declared “modernity” over and done with! The first indication that this new situation might have an impact on Barth studies had, in fact, appeared before my departure in the form of a dissertation by Steven G. Smith, published in

1983.<sup>7</sup> But the greatest impact of so-called postmodernity on Barth studies lay in the future. Books by Walter Lowe, Graham Ward, and William Stacy Johnson appeared around the same time as my own.<sup>8</sup> In my view, the most significant defect in postmodern readings of Barth—aside from the tendency of its creators to make of “alterity” a principle which is then read into Barth—is the lack of historical awareness which comes to expression in them. I regard what is called the “postmodern” in theology to be a variant of romanticism. But precisely as such, it is not something that comes *after* modern theology (as its name implies) but something which belongs to one of the two principal trends of thought which created modern theology in the first place. It is an inclination towards the fragmentary, the provisional, the open-ended, the eclectic. This is its link to the romanticism of a Friedrich Schlegel, for example.<sup>9</sup> The difference is that romanticism in its originating form was characterized by a turn *to* history whereas postmodernism (in its Anglo-American theological representatives) is engaged in a flight *from* history.<sup>10</sup>

7. Steven G. Smith, *The Argument to the Other: Reason beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

8. Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

9. Jack Forstman has suggested that Friedrich Schlegel’s romanticism was born out of a rejection of the harmonies, the sameness, the confident system-building of the Enlightenment. Schlegel understood human thought to oscillate constantly between two poles: infinite unity on the one side and infinite chaos on the other. Neither the unity which would be provided by an Absolute ground nor the pure chaos of a completely disordered mass of particulars is accessible to thought; rather, they constitute the limits within which thought does its work. That the particulars are thought at all means that they are thought in combination with other particulars, that coherences between them are observed and established. But this process can never lead to an absolute ground. “The consciousness of this as the human condition is the occasion of irony”—the realization that no matter how far understanding reaches, it will never comprehend reality in any total sense. “The impulse to understand is inevitable; the impossibility of complete understanding is insuperable. One must be serious about one’s understanding; one can only smile at its feebleness with reference to the infinity of the task. This combination of earnestness and jest, of seriousness and playfulness is the essence of irony in Schlegel’s thought” (Jack Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 8, 3).

10. The flight from history is rather easily explained where American theologians are concerned. Having spent part of his career in Germany and part in America, Paul Tillich was in a unique position to explain the major difference between the way theology is done in Europe and the way it is done here: “If you should come from Europe to America as I did thirty years ago, you would be astonished at how much more Americans are dependent on the eighteenth century than Europeans. The reason is very simple. America experienced very little of the romanticist reaction against the eighteenth century” (*A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967–1968], 299). America was born in the Enlightenment, and although it had its romantics, romanticism never impacted its culture in the way it did Europe’s. And in any case, we had no past to which to return. We

In response to this newer movement, my own work (after the appearance of my book) became much more historical and concerned itself with uncovering antecedents of Barth's theology in the nineteenth century (above all, in Schleiermacher).<sup>11</sup> It also concerned itself with issues surrounding Barth's theological ontology, in the conviction that Barth's superiority to postmodern efforts to provide a theological response to human suffering was demonstrated through his ability to ground in the divine being itself the suffering which brings an end to all suffering. This has led me increasingly to an interest in Christology, election, and Trinity (in that order).<sup>12</sup>

But what of my other term—"orthodox"? In what sense do I mean to employ this term in relation to Barth's theology? "Orthodoxy" means "right teaching" or "right doctrine." But what and who determines what is "right teaching"? The what-question is more easily answered. For any Protestant theologian worth his or her salt, the material norm of what can and must be said within the bounds of Christian dogmatics can be only Holy Scripture. But Scripture must be interpreted—and it is at this point that the who-question becomes pressing. Protestantism in its originating form did not really differ from Catholicism in its insistence that the proper "subject" of theology is finally a church and individuals only as servants of the Word in and for a church—"doctors of the church," in other words. It was for this reason that Calvin could insist that confessions of a church ought not to be written by an individual but by a company of learned pastors. In cases of doctrinal conflict, he wrote, "we indeed willingly concede, if any discussion arises over doctrine, that the best and surest remedy is for a synod of true bishops to be convened, where the doctrine at issue may be examined. Such a definition, upon which the pastors of the church in common, invoking Christ's Spirit, agree, will have much more weight than if each one, having conceived it separately at home, should teach it to the people, or if a few private individuals should compose it. Then, when the bishops are assembled, they can more conveniently deliberate in common what they ought to teach and in what form, lest diversity breed offense."<sup>13</sup> But he could also say, "Whenever the decree of any council is brought forward, I

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were forward looking, a country possessed with a "manifest destiny." A well-developed historical consciousness never took root here—not even in the 1960s and 1970s, when interest in hermeneutical questions was high.

11. See the essays contained in part 1 of this volume.

12. See the essays contained in part 3 of this volume. The reader may also wish to consult the following essays: Bruce L. McCormack, "The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 185–242; idem, "Divine Impassibility or Simply Divine Constancy? Implications of Karl Barth's Later Christology for Debates over Impassibility," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

13. John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), IV.ix.13.

should like men first of all diligently to ponder at what time it was held, on what issue, and with what intention, what sort of men were present; then to examine by the standard of Scripture what it dealt with—and to do this in such a way that the definition of the council may have its weight and be like a provisional judgment, yet not hinder the examination I have mentioned.”<sup>14</sup> Both traditional Protestantism and traditional Catholicism held that a church must finally decide questions of controversy. For both, the ancient councils and their creeds and definitions have a high degree of authority as interpretations of Holy Scripture. But for the older Protestants, the ancient councils were not to be regarded as irreformable—and that marked a major difference from the Catholic view. Protestants also believed that the confessions of their own churches constituted a relatively binding, authoritative interpretation of and/or addition to the ancient councils and, as a consequence, had to be taken with as much seriousness as the pronouncements of the ecumenical councils.

I say all of this to indicate that even the ecumenical creeds are only provisional statements. They are only relatively binding as definitions of what constitutes “orthodoxy.” Ultimately, orthodox teaching is that which conforms *perfectly* to the Word of God as attested in Holy Scripture. But given that such perfection is not attainable in this world, it is understandable that Karl Barth should have regarded “Dogma” as an eschatological concept.<sup>15</sup> The “dogmas” (i.e., the teachings formally adopted and promulgated by individual churches) are witnesses to *the* Dogma and stand in a relation of greater or lesser approximation to it. But they do not attain to it perfectly—hence, the inherent reformability of all “dogmas.” Orthodoxy is not therefore a static, fixed reality; it is a body of teachings which have arisen out of, and belong to, a *history* which is as yet incomplete and constantly in need of reevaluation.

All of this is relevant to an evaluation of Karl Barth’s “orthodoxy.” On the face of it, it would seem to be very hard to deny to anyone who affirms, as Barth does, the doctrine of the Trinity, a two-natures Christology, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, the visible return of Christ, the immutability of God, and so on, the honorific of “orthodox.” And yet the issue is not quite so simple. The truth is that Barth has not simply taken over unchanged *any* doctrinal formulation of the ancient or the Reformation churches. He has reconstructed the whole of “orthodox” teaching from the ground up. It is not the case that he simply tinkered with the machinery. What he did was to ask, in the case of each piece of authoritative teaching, exactly what Calvin would have him ask: What was at issue? What was the intention? How was it formulated? Did the formulation do justice to the theological subject matter to which it sought to bear witness? And most important, perhaps, is it necessary to affirm the philosophical commitments which aided the ancients and the

14. *Ibid.*, IV.ix.8.

15. *CD* I/1:269.

Reformers in their efforts to articulate the theological subject matters under consideration? Or may one draw upon more modern philosophies in one's efforts to explain the creeds and confessions today?

My own view is this: what Barth was doing, in the end, was seeking to understand what it means to be orthodox *under the conditions of modernity*. This is the explanation, I think, for the freedom he exhibited over against the decrees of the ecumenical councils and the confessions of his own Reformed tradition. He took the creeds and the confessions seriously—how could he not, believing as he did in the virgin birth and so forth? But he did not follow them slavishly. His was a confessionalism of the spirit and never of the letter. This is why he was willing to think for long stretches with the help of Kant's epistemology and (later) Hegelian ontology. This is why he was willing to set forth an actualistic understanding of divine and human being. Still, I would argue, his reconstruction of Christian orthodoxy succeeded in upholding all of the theological values that were in play in its originating formulations. For this reason, Barth was both modern *and orthodox*.

The essays contained in this volume were all written after the appearance of my book in 1995. Taken together, they constitute a record of how my thinking has progressed and where it is now headed. To that end, revision has been kept to a minimum.

Part 1 begins with an essay on the place of Barth in the discussions of the independence of religion and/or theology which took place at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. There follow two more essays which seek to assess Barth's relationship to the Schleiermacherian tradition. The fourth essay, on Barth's hermeneutics, helps to locate his work against the background of one of the most seminal developments in German theology in the 1920s.

Part 2 contains responses to postliberal and postmodern readings of Barth. When I wrote these essays, postmodern readings were very much in vogue. Today the tendency of Anglo-American Barth research is decidedly away from the postmodern and towards the postliberal—accompanied by the attempt to make Barth seem more orthodox (in the classical sense of the word) than he actually was. Were I now to write something on postmodern readings of Barth, I think I could afford to be more generous (since they do not pose the threat they once did).

Part 3 contains the essays which have set the course of my most recent work. As this book goes to press, I am still adding to the number of essays in which I seek not only to defend my point of view as a Barth scholar but also to elaborate this point of view more fully in relation to other doctrines treated by Barth after the revision of his doctrine of election in *CD II/2*. The cutting edge of Barth scholarship in the coming years will be centered in contextualized readings of *Church Dogmatics*. The day when *Church Dogmatics* could be read as though it had been written in the space of a single afternoon, as

though every part were fully consistent with all the others, is over. The real challenge now is to understand how Barth's mind changed even as he was writing his magnum opus over the thirty-five-year period from 1932 to 1967.

Part 4 contains essays written on various occasions. The occasion for the first was a daylong conference which celebrated the signing of an agreement between the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and the Karl Barth-Stiftung and Nachlaßkommission. With the help of a Lilly Grant, Princeton Theological Seminary had paid for the digitizing of materials found in the Karl Barth-Archiv in order to ensure the survival of materials which were suffering degeneration because they had been written on acid-based papers. The Stiftung and the Nachlaßkommission showed their appreciation by giving to Princeton Seminary copies of all digitized materials (including photographs). The agreement ensured protections and proper uses. The second essay in this section was given at an international doctoral colloquium, held at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany. The third essay is, as the title clearly indicates, the foreword to the German translation of *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*. In it, I seek to assess the responses the book received in the English-speaking world—in an effort to provide my German friends with a sense of the trajectories of Anglo-American research in the last decade. The collection concludes with two reviews. The first assesses the importance of neo-Kantianism for Barth's theology; the second makes the provocative suggestion that there is indeed a form of an “analogy of being” in Barth's theology.<sup>16</sup>

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Keith L. Johnson, who did the copyediting and formatting required to turn these essays into a book. My best wishes to Keith as he takes up his duties as assistant professor of theology at Wheaton College this fall.

16. This is a thesis I defended more fully in a paper (“The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or the Wisdom of God”) presented at a Roman Catholic-sponsored colloquium at the Dominican House of Studies and Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington DC on April 4–6, 2008, devoted to the theme of the *analogia entis*.

Part 1

Karl Barth's Relationship  
to Nineteenth-Century Theology



# 1

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## Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective

*Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation  
with a Schleiermacherian Tradition*

### Introduction

In an essay published in 1924, Rudolf Bultmann made a claim which must surely be startling to most Anglo-American readers today:

In the polemic of the latest theological movement—a movement which is particularly associated with the names of Barth and Gogarten, the attack against the so-called liberal theology is not to be understood as a repudiation of its own past, but as a discussion with that past. The new movement is not a revival of orthodoxy, but rather a carefully reasoned consideration of the consequences which have resulted from the situation brought about by liberal theology. It is no accident that the latest movement originated not from within orthodoxy but out of liberal theology. Barth was a student at Marburg, Gogarten at Heidelberg, Thurneysen at both.<sup>1</sup>

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This essay was originally published in a slightly different form under the title “Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth’s Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition,” in *Journal of Religion* 78 (1998): 18–37. Reprinted by permission.

1. Rudolf Bultmann, “Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,” in *Faith and Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 28.

Not surprisingly perhaps, there are those who have been willing to grant the validity of this claim with regard to Gogarten and Bultmann himself. But Barth? Surely Bultmann's reading of Barth rests on a misunderstanding.<sup>2</sup>

Where Barth was concerned, the basis for Bultmann's claim had been laid two years earlier in his review of the second edition of Barth's commentary on Romans, and it is this passage especially that I would like to reflect on for a moment.

Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* may be characterized by one sentence, the formulation of which he would contest but which would still be valid in terms of the use of language which is customary to this point in time. The book wants to prove *the independence and the absolute nature of religion*. It thus places itself—though in the original form of a commentary—in the same line with such works as Schleiermacher's *Speeches On Religion* and Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*; with modern attempts to demonstrate a religious a priori. . . . However different all these attempts may be in detail, they seek to give verbal expression to the consciousness of the uniqueness and absoluteness of religion.<sup>3</sup>

Bultmann was right: Barth would not have accepted the terms employed in this description.

Barth was not in the least interested in demonstrating a religious a priori; quite the contrary. We might accurately state Barth's concern by saying that he was interested in proclaiming the independence of revelation and, with that, an ineradicable difference between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of creaturely (empirical or nonempirical) reality. Still, Bultmann's reading was not simply mistaken. Barth's attempt to establish the independence of revelation *did* belong to a tradition of thought whose source lay in Friedrich Schleiermacher's effort to make religion independent of metaphysics and ethics.

In what follows, I am going to interpret Karl Barth as a nineteenth-century theologian. But I should point out that such an attempt goes against the grain of much recent Barth research—in the English-speaking world at any rate.<sup>4</sup> At the present, Barth is most often understood as a nonfoundationalist narrative theologian and, for some, as a precursor of postmodern, even

2. See Robert Morgan, "Ernst Troeltsch and the Dialectical Theology," in *Ernst Troeltsch and the Future of Theology*, ed. John Powell Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 33–77.

3. Rudolf Bultmann, "Karl Barths 'Römerbrief' in zweiter Auflage," in *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann (Munich: Kaiser, 1977), 1:119; translated as "Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* in Its Second Edition," in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. James M. Robinson (Richmond: John Knox, 1968), 100.

4. The attempt to establish links between Schleiermacher and Barth—even on the methodological level—are not uncommon in European Barth research. See esp. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:40–48.

deconstructionist tendencies.<sup>5</sup> Against such readings,<sup>6</sup> I would contend that the wealth of problems to which Barth addressed himself were, in many cases, given their characteristic shape as a result of nineteenth-century developments and that even his solutions to those problems often took up elements of nineteenth-century solutions and transformed them by placing them in a different framework of thought. In this essay, I want to direct my attention to just one of those problems: the problem of the independence of religion or, as Barth would have preferred, the independence of revelation.

The argument will be developed in three sections: (1) the independence of religion in Schleiermacher and Herrmann; (2) Barth's transformation of the independence of religion into the independence of revelation by means of a new theological epistemology in his second commentary on *Romans* (1922); and (3) Barth's christological revision of his theological epistemology in his Göttingen lectures on dogmatics (1924–1925). I will conclude with some programmatic suggestions regarding the tasks which a proper understanding of Barth's theological epistemology places on the theological agenda today.

### The Independence of Religion in Schleiermacher and Herrmann

As we shall see in a moment, the central problem addressed by the famous second edition of Barth's *Römerbrief* is that of the knowledge of God.<sup>7</sup> It was not just a problem for him, however; the question of whether and how God is known stood at the heart of theological reflection in the modern period.

5. On Barth as a narrative or "intratextual" theologian, see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); idem, "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* 43 (1986): 361–76; and (more cautiously) Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). On the more recent poststructuralist or postmodern reading of Barth, see the following: Stephen Webb, *Refiguring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Richard Roberts, *A Theology on Its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Graham Ward, "Barth and Postmodernism," *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993): 550–56; and idem, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

6. This is not the place to mount an argument against such misreadings of Barth. The reader is referred to ch. 5, "Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth: Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology," in this volume. See also Bruce L. McCormack, review of *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, by Graham Ward, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 97–109.

7. On the centrality of the problem of the knowledge of God in Karl Barth's theological development, see, above all, Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (Munich: Kaiser, 1985). For a systematic discussion of the fundamental importance of the theme for Barth's theology as a whole, see Walter Kreck, *Grundentscheidungen in Karl Barths Dogmatik* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978).

The problem had been created by the coincidence of two developments: the rise of biblical criticism with its concomitant distinction of revelation from the Bible and the much celebrated “turn to the subject” which occurred in philosophy from Descartes through Kant. It was, above all, Kant’s limitation of theoretical knowing to the intuitable which made knowledge of God so deeply problematic to modern theologians. For if God is a transcendent, wholly spiritual being as the Christian tradition maintained, then God is unintuitable and—if Kant’s restriction holds—cannot be known. Moreover, Kant had also shown that the attempt made by traditional metaphysics to overcome this limitation resulted invariably in antinomies. The result was that Kant reduced God to a regulative idea wholly lacking in content, a postulated Guarantor of the meaningfulness of moral behavior.

Schleiermacher’s response to this challenge, as is well known, was to assign the origins of religion to a region of human being and existence which he called “feeling.” Feeling, as Schleiermacher described it, is not a faculty standing alongside intellect and will. It is distinguished from knowing and doing in two ways. First, unlike knowing and doing—each of which involves a self-movement of the human subject towards something which lies without—feeling “is not effected by the subject, but simply takes place in the subject.” Feeling, in other words, belongs wholly to the realm of receptivity.<sup>8</sup> Second, and even more basically, the Source of this feeling does not belong to the series of “objects” known and acted upon by the human subject but is to be fundamentally distinguished from them. That this is so is something Schleiermacher knows through reflection upon the essential content of piety in all its diverse forms of expression. Schleiermacher describes this essential content in a well-known formula: “The self-identical essence of piety is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.”<sup>9</sup> That humans are conscious of being absolutely dependent upon an Other for the whole of their receptive and active lives sets that Other apart from all other objects of our experience. For with respect to the “world”—that is, the totality of the “objects” belonging to nature or human society—we are not absolutely dependent. Rather, we are relatively dependent (in that such objects or persons can exercise an influence on us) and relatively free (in that we, in turn, can exercise an influence on them). To put it another way, humans stand in a relationship of reciprocity with respect to the “world.” Not so with respect to God. God, as the Whence of our feeling of absolute dependence, may not be given directly to us as intuitable objects and persons are given; for in that case, we could exercise a counterinfluence upon God and would not be *absolutely* dependent upon God. “Any possibility of God being in any

8. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), §3,3, p. 8.

9. *Ibid.*, §4 (definition), p. 12.

way *given* is entirely excluded, because anything that is outwardly given must be given as an object exposed to our counter-influence, however slight this may be. The transference of the idea of God to any perceptible object . . . is always a corruption, whether it be a temporary transference, i.e., a theophany, or a constitutive transference, in which God is represented as permanently a particular perceptible existence.”<sup>10</sup> So, if it is true that there is a Source of our feeling of absolute dependence, then that Source will have to be—if I may be permitted the phrase—“wholly other” than the totality of intuitable objects.<sup>11</sup> In sum, feeling is to be located at a different level of human being and existence than knowing and doing and is prior to both.

It is clear what Schleiermacher has gained from this move. Kant had made theoretical knowledge of God an impossibility. Schleiermacher has located a point of access to God—or, more accurately, a point in human consciousness of God’s access to us—which overcomes the restrictions Kant placed on theoretical knowledge without recourse to practical knowledge. The knowledge of God is a special kind of knowledge which is distinguished from all other acts of knowing by the fact that here a *purely* receptive moment is involved. Knowledge of God, if it is truly to be knowledge, must somehow *include* the theoretical; and yet the limitations of the theoretical are transcended through the exercise of divine power on the level of feeling.

To see how this takes place, we must look at a particular example. In the realm of Christianity, consciousness of God on the level of feeling is aroused and strengthened through the stimulus provided by (1) the hearing of the Word about Jesus proclaimed by the community of faith and (2) the impression made by the lives of the redeemed men and women found in that community. Thus, knowledge of God takes its rise in the coincidence of the external and the internal; theoretical knowledge acts as a spur to enliven a redemptive power which, to this point, had been (unconsciously or consciously) suppressed. To put it another way: revelation has both an objective and a subjective moment. The objective moment is constituted by the impression made by Jesus on the lives of his disciples which is mediated historically by the Christian community. The subjective moment is constituted by the “commandeering” (grasping, enlivening) of a weak (up to then) and undeveloped God-consciousness.

Now it must be conceded with respect to these two moments that the subjective has a certain priority. What occurs on the level of feeling prior to the encounter with the Christian community has, after all, the character of an original revelation.<sup>12</sup> Given that this is so, it will never be possible to completely eliminate the suspicion that the picture of Jesus which has

10. *Ibid.*, §4,4, p. 18.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 16: “This ‘Whence’ is not the world, in the sense of the totality of temporal existence, and still less is it any single part of the world.” Cf. §105, postscript, p. 474: “The difference [*Abstand*] between God and every finite being is infinite.”

12. *Ibid.*, §4,4, p. 17.

been found both in the witness of Scripture and in the proclamation of the church has been carefully tailored to the needs of an understanding of redemption whose chief features are the product of a particular philosophical construal of human subjectivity. Still, in fairness to Schleiermacher, it has to be said that he makes every possible effort to confirm his reading of Christian experience of redemption through close attention to Scripture and tradition. Those who, in their own way (I have in mind my fellow Barthians), are equally committed to making theological knowledge a special kind of knowledge will be well advised to proceed charitably with Schleiermacher. For they too will inevitably be regarded with suspicion by those who give priority to secular knowledge and experience in their efforts to defend the rationality of Christian belief.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the theme of the independence of religion underwent a radicalization due, above all, to the work of Wilhelm Herrmann (the chief theological mentor of both Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth). The primary source of this radicalization lay in Herrmann's commitment to the so-called Marburg neo-Kantianism of his philosophical colleagues Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. The great advance (if that is what it was) of the neo-Kantians over Kant lay in their rejection of his residual realism. For Kant, the content of human knowledge at least, if not the form, came from without and was received through the senses. Over against this, Cohen held that there is nothing given to thought which is not itself the creation of thought. Thought, in other words, provides not only the form of the objects known; it also *generates* the contents of its objects.<sup>13</sup> For Cohen, then, being is a function of thought; his was a wholly constructivist epistemology. For his part, Herrmann was happy to grant the validity of Cohenian epistemology insofar as it touched on knowledge of the "world." But if the being of God were "known" in this way, then it too would be a human construct (full stop) and the objective reality of God would be placed in serious doubt.

For this reason above all, Herrmann followed Schleiermacher in insisting on the independence of religion. But his approach to the problem differed from Schleiermacher's in two ways. First, he did not make "feeling" to be the (created) ground in human consciousness of the relationship to God. He did not deny that feeling was an essential part of consciousness, but he maintained that the source of this feeling was natural law or the unity at the heart of things. It was not the God of faith.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the ground of faith is something that is given by God in the individual's encounter with God. As such, it is not something that is generally available. Second and most important for our

13. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 44.

14. *Ibid.*, 57.

purposes here, Herrmann repressed the role played by knowledge in revelation more thoroughly than Schleiermacher had. Schleiermacher had not doubted the ability of the historian to identify those features in the life and teachings of Jesus through which he had made a saving impression on his followers. Herrmann, by contrast, drove a wedge between the inner life of Jesus on the one hand and his teachings and works of love on the other, and he did so because he believed that these merely external features belong to the realm governed by the constructivist epistemology of the neo-Kantians.<sup>15</sup> Along similar lines, Schleiermacher had held that the proclamation of the Word (a Word with a more-or-less definite content) played an essential role in the *mediation* of revelation to the individual by the Christian community, whereas Herrmann treated the content of the message as having less significance. For Herrmann, such doctrinal expressions were highly individual in character because the experience that they sought to interpret was highly individual. As such, they could, at most, provide the *occasion* for the religious experience of another. In sum: Herrmann remained as convinced as Schleiermacher that the Christ outside us (whose redemptive influence entered into the stream of history) *is* the Christ in us, but theoretical knowledge played almost no role in the confirmation of this belief. For confirmation, the believer was to be referred to a self-authenticating religious experience. It was not without good reason, then, that Ernst Troeltsch should have seen in Herrmann a radical example of what he called “the agnostic theory of religious knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> And on this point at least, Troeltsch was undoubtedly right. It is a mistake to want to banish all that can properly be called “knowledge” from the sphere of religion as Herrmann seemed bent on doing.

To conclude this consideration of Schleiermacher and Herrmann: the theme of the independence of religion was a decisive one for defining a very significant tradition in modern theology, a tradition to which Karl Barth also belonged. In the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, his solution to the problem followed that of Herrmann in precise detail.<sup>17</sup> After his “break” with Herrmann, the problem continued to be shaped by the challenge originally posed by Kant. But his new solution represented an attempt to relocate the problem and thereby to transcend Kant’s restrictions in what Barth believed to be a way less prone to ideological manipulation and distortion.

15. *Ibid.*, 61.

16. Ernst Troeltsch, “Half a Century of Theology: A Review,” in *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings in Theology and Religion*, ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 58.

17. Karl Barth, “Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909): 317–21; *idem*, “Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte,” *Schweizerische theologische Zeitschrift* 29 (1912): 1–18, 49–72. For reflection on the Herrmannian character of the positions taken in these essays, see McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 68–77.

## The Independence of Revelation: Theological Epistemology in Barth's Second *Römerbrief*

At the heart of Barth's move beyond Herrmann's existentialized Schleiermacherianism in 1915 was the attempt to articulate a theological epistemology which would more fully integrate with theoretical knowing the special kind of knowledge proper to faith. The motivation for the attempt is well known: Barth was deeply shaken by the ease with which German theologians confused war-hysteria with religious experience at the outset of the First World War. The only way he could see to overcome the weaknesses surrounding a starting-point in religious experience was a new *divine-act* "synthesis" of revelation and reason, faith and knowledge. Revelation, Barth now wanted to say, occurs within the realm of theoretical knowing. If it nevertheless remains a "special" kind of knowing (distinguished from all other acts of theoretical knowing), it is because it has its source in an act of God by means of which the human knowing apparatus described by Kant is "commandeered" (laid hold of, grasped) by God from without and made to conform to God as its object.

To put it this way is to suggest that Barth's "break" with Herrmann did not entail a break with the Kantian tradition where questions of philosophical epistemology were concerned. The restrictions placed by Kant on the knowledge of God still had to be overcome, but now Barth would approach the problem on the basis of a new, critically realistic starting-point. Briefly put, the solution now read: *if the unintuitable God is truly to be known, God must make Godself intuitible*. Whereas Kant and Schleiermacher had left God unintuitable, Barth wanted a conception of a God who could make Godself intuitible. For in that case alone would God be truly knowable in the theoretical sense.<sup>18</sup> But it was not enough that God become intuitible. If God were, so to speak, simply transformed into a creature, God would have placed Godself wholly and without reserve at the mercy of the constructive activities of the human knower. God would have become an object like any other—constructed by human epistemic activity and, as such, the clear possession of the human knower. Such a conclusion would not entail any real advance over a starting-point in religious experience. It too would be subject to ideological manipulation. But Barth's solution, as I have stated it thus far, is incomplete. The complete formulation would be this: *If the unintuitable God is truly to be known, God must make Godself intuitible. But God must do so in such a way that the unintuitability proper to God is not set aside*. With this formal description in place, we are now in a position to look more

18. The source of Barth's shift to a concern with the more theoretical aspects of religious knowledge is well known and need not be rehearsed at length here. The ease with which German theologians interpreted the sudden emergence of national unity in the face of an external enemy as a work of the Holy Spirit and as evidence of God's favor caused Barth to seek more solid ground for theology than religious experience.

closely at the material character of the theological epistemology found in the second edition of *Romans*.

The relation of revelation and history—and with it, the contours of Barth’s theological epistemology in the second edition of *Romans*—is given classic expression in the following passage:

“*Jesus Christ our Lord*,” that is the message of salvation, that is the meaning of history. In this name, two worlds encounter and separate from one another, two planes intersect, one known and one unknown. . . . The point on the line of intersection, however, has, like the entire unknown plane whose presence it announces, no extension whatsoever on the plane known to us. The emanation or, much rather, the astonishing bomb-craters and depressions by means of which it makes itself noticeable within the realm of historical intuitability, are, even if they be called the “life of Jesus,” not the other world which touches our world in Jesus. And insofar as this, our world, is touched in Jesus by another world, it ceases to be historical, temporal, material, directly intuitable. . . . Jesus as the Christ can *only* be understood as a problem, *only* as myth, within the realm of historical intuitability. Jesus as the Christ brings the world of the Father, of which we who stand within the realm of historical intuitability know nothing and never will know anything. The *resurrection* from the dead, however, is the turning-point, the “fitting in” of that point from above and the corresponding insight from below. The resurrection is the *revelation*, the discovery of Jesus as the Christ, the appearance of God and the knowledge of God in Him, the entrance of the necessity of giving God the glory and reckoning with the Unknown and Unintuitable in Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

For the Barth of the second edition of *Romans*, the resurrection event *is* revelation. But the resurrection is an event which is “unhistorical.” By this, Barth did not mean that the resurrection occurred in some other realm than that of the space and time in which we live. The resurrection was already understood by him at that time as a “bodily, corporeal, personal” event.<sup>20</sup> That which happens to a body (whether living or dead makes no real difference) happens in space and time. In stressing the “unhistorical” character of the resurrection, then, what Barth meant to say was that it was not an event to be laid alongside other events. It was not an event produced by forces operative in history. History does not produce something like a bodily resurrection—not in our experience, anyway. For that, an act of God is required. But an act of God is just as unintuitable as the being of God. We may see its effects, but we do not see the thing itself; hence, Barth’s insistence that the resurrection event has no extension whatsoever on the historical plane known to us; hence, also, his insistence that Jesus *as the Christ* can be understood only as a problem, as a myth. Seen in material terms, Barth’s solution to the problem created by Kant

19. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief, 1922* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1940), 5–6.

20. *Ibid.*, 183.

was to suggest that the unintuitable divine power which was at work in raising Jesus from the dead cast a light backwards, so to speak, on an event which is intuitable, namely, the event of the cross.<sup>21</sup> Light is cast on this event, a power is exercised, so that without setting aside or altering the human cognitive apparatus as described by Kant, the limitations inherent to that apparatus are transcended. The unintuitable God is revealed to faith through the medium of an intuitable event. Revelation reaches its goal in the human recipient, and knowledge of God is realized.

The inadequacy of this formulation of Barth's theological epistemology, as measured by his later work, lies in the fact that God has not really become intuitable at all. Barth clearly wanted to say more than he was in a position to say. The problem created by the unintuitability of God has been overcome in the second edition of *Romans* by means of an appeal to divine power. Ironically perhaps, there is nothing in the appeal itself which would secure it from the suspicion that the divine Reality to which it points is anything more than an idea, a postulated Whence of a particular kind of religious experience.<sup>22</sup> Little wonder, then, that Bultmann was able to see in the second edition of *Romans* a work which maintained contact with Herrmann's theology even as it sought to go beyond him. What is missing from Barth's account is a doctrine of the incarnation. Without this, it would not be possible to speak coherently of *God* becoming intuitable without setting aside God's unintuitability.

Still, what Barth had accomplished to this point was a transformation of the theme of the independence of religion into the independence of revelation. And this would remain a permanent feature of his theology.

### Christological Revision in Barth's Göttingen Lectures on Dogmatics

It was the discovery of the Reformed version of an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology in Heinrich Heppe's textbook of Reformed theology which prompted Barth, in the spring of 1924, to a new articulation of his theological epistemology.<sup>23</sup> For the Barth of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the epistemological

21. *Ibid.*, 132–38. For a closer analysis of these passages, see McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 251–56.

22. It is to be admitted, however, that it would never be possible to eliminate that suspicion entirely—nor would Barth wish to do so. One cannot lay as much stress on the hiddenness of God in his Self-revelation as Barth did (and would continue to do) without granting a sizable role to the experience of faith—if not as a source of theological reflection, then at least as the confirmation of the claims which emerge from this reflection. Still, if it were possible to say more about God's having become intuitable, then the needle might shift from the subjective moment of revelation back to the objective moment, and other criteria, in addition to the experience of faith, might be brought into play in assessing the truth of the knowledge claim in question—as we shall soon see.

23. See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 327–28, 358–67.

significance of the incarnation lies in the fact that God has entered into the realm of historical intuitability through the assumption of a human nature while surrendering nothing of the unintuitability proper to God. To put it this way is to acknowledge that the requirements of Barth's theological epistemology controlled to a considerable degree his appropriation of the classically Reformed model of Christology even as that Christology forced him to significantly revise his theological epistemology. What we catch sight of here is a "correlation" of modern epistemological considerations with traditional christological materials or, expressed in a way which captures the extent to which Barth still remained faithful to the spirit of the Schleiermacherian tradition, a mediation of tradition by means of a modern theological epistemology.<sup>24</sup> To explain this correlation in greater detail is the purpose of this section.

The Christology which Barth sought to mediate was the classically Reformed Christology which, judged in terms of more ancient controversies, belonged to the Alexandrian type. To speak of this Christology as Alexandrian is to call attention to the fact that, like Cyril of Alexandria, the Reformed tradition to which Barth made appeal understood the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ to be a unity of Subject. Not the indwelling of a human subject by a divine Subject but the union of two natures in a single divine Subject (the Person of the Logos) is the view Barth wanted to affirm. He explicitly rejected the Nestorian option (to which he thought that Zwingli, unlike Calvin, had come dangerously close).<sup>25</sup> Thus, all of the attributes proper to each nature are rightly ascribed (realistically and not merely figuratively) to the one Person of the Logos.

Now, if all the attributes proper to Christ's human nature are rightly attributed to the Logos, as the Subject in whom this "nature" has its being and existence grounded from the moment of its creation,<sup>26</sup> then the first half of the requirements of Barth's theological epistemology will have been met, and met in a way which does not suffer from the weakness we observed with respect to the formulation found in the second edition of *Romans*. For if that is the case, then what it means is that the Second Person of the Trinity entered fully into history as the Subject of a human life. God, the Logos, lived as humans lived, suffered and died and was raised from the dead. The epistemological significance of this lies in the fact that God is here seen to have entered fully into the subject-object relation which governs our knowledge of things in this

24. In describing Barth's view of revelation as modern, I have in mind, above all, the cogent suggestion of Wolfhart Pannenberg that the concept of divine *Self-revelation* has its origins in Hegel and was perhaps taken over by Barth in a form which linked God's *Self-revelation* with the thought of its unique, once-and-for-all occurrence in Jesus Christ. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:223.

25. Karl Barth, "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion" III, §28, pp. 40, 48; typed manuscript in the Karl Barth-Archiv, Basel, Switzerland.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

world. God has fully entered the world of intuitability. Whereas in *Romans* Barth could secure intuitability only by means of an appeal to an exercise of divine power which bridges the gap between unintuitability and intuitability, here it is God—and, Barth would add, the whole of God, complete and undivided<sup>27</sup>—who has become intuitable. The life of Jesus of Nazareth is God's life; his intuitability is God's intuitability.

Seen in the light of possibilities resident in the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, what Barth has done here comes very close to an affirmation of the so-called *genus tapeinoticum* (literally, the genus of humiliation) though he himself does not put it in these terms and would not have wished to associate himself with the implications given to it by nineteenth-century kenoticists. On Barthian soil, it would have to be taken to mean simply the realistic ascription of human attributes to the Person of the Logos—without entailing any self-emptying of divine attributes. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the affirmation of such a communication raises questions about the ontological conditions for its possibility. How is it possible for God to become human without ceasing to be God? How, in other words, is it possible for God to become human without undergoing change and thereby setting aside that immutability which is proper to God as God? Barth had not as yet fully worked out the conception of divine ontology necessary to explain this possibility and would not until he set forth his mature understanding of election (sometime after 1936).<sup>28</sup> It also must be acknowledged that Barth was here moving in a direction which, for those standing in the Schleiermacherian tradition (though not only for them), looked suspiciously Hegelian. Schleiermacher himself could not have approved of the *genus tapeinoticum*, given his own commitment to a more nearly Platonic conception of the immutability, impassibility, and simplicity of God. But on this point at least, it is Schleiermacher who was the more traditional, and Barth, the more modern. The crucial point, however, is that the life of Jesus is God's life, and his intuitability, God's intuitability.

27. See esp. Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, 1924, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 110–14; translated as *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:91–93.

28. After 1936 Barth would secure the ontological ground for this action of God in time by means of a doctrine of election according to which the eternal being of God is Self-determined being, a being determined precisely for the outcome which we see occurring in the incarnation. By means of a free, eternal decision, the eternal being of God *in se* (in protology) is constituted by way of anticipation by the incarnation of God in time (and, we must add, by the outpouring of the Spirit in time). Given this understanding of divine ontology, the actualization of this primal decision in history entails no alteration of the eternal being; divine immutability is preserved. But as yet, Barth had not fully worked out the ontological preconditions necessary for the affirmation he makes here, namely, that the life of Jesus is the life of God. Still, there are already present in the Göttingen lectures hints of that which was to come—as, for example, when Barth said that God is “a free Lord” not only “over the principle of non-contradiction but also over His own deity” (*Prolegomena*, 166 [*The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 1:136]).

But what, then, of the other requirement? What of the need for God to remain unintuitable even as God becomes intuitable? To explain Barth's handling of this aspect of the problem, it is necessary to take another look at the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran sacramentology, the desire to affirm a local physical presence of the risen humanity of Christ in the elements of bread and wine led to the affirmation of the so-called *genus majesticum*—the idea that, as a consequence of the hypostatic union of the two natures, the human nature of Christ participates in the attributes of the divine nature (above all, omnipresence but also omnipotence and omniscience). To this, as Barth rightly observed, the Reformed said an emphatic no. Barth followed the Reformed in rejecting all thought of a “divinization” of the human nature of Jesus:<sup>29</sup> “A principled transgression of the limits of the creaturely does *not* take place in all that which is properly attributed to the human nature of Christ, to the historical Jesus as such. For humanity, which is finite, is not capable of the infinite. Therefore His knowledge, for example, however penetrating we may think it to be, is not omniscience; His power is not omnipotence, . . . etc.”<sup>30</sup> In adopting this position—for good, sound christological reasons, be it noted—Barth was not unaware of its epistemological significance. If there is no “divinization” of the human nature of Christ, then revelation cannot be read directly “off the face of Jesus” as Werner Elert, for example, maintained in his 1924 book, *Die Lehre des Luthertums im Abriss*.<sup>31</sup> “The life of Jesus does not *in itself* impart the knowledge of God (John 14:8–9). In itself it is instead a riddle, a mystery, a veiling.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, God remains unintuitable even as God enters fully into intuitability. God remains unintuitable as the hidden, never directly to be recognized, Subject of the life of Jesus.

The affirmation of the hiddenness of God in the medium of God's Self-revelation creates a new difficulty, of course. If God is to be recognized as the Subject of this life, if the medium of human flesh in which God has veiled Godself is to become transparent, then a third element must be introduced.<sup>33</sup> The Holy Spirit must make the veil transparent by giving us the eyes of faith to see that which is hidden beneath the surface.

29. Barth, “Unterricht in der christlichen Religion” III, §28, p. 52. It is worth noting that Barth says that the rejection of the *theopoiesis* of the human nature of Christ is also, at the same time, a rejection of the *theopoiesis* of history: “That means the cutting off of the way that leads to romanticism, to Hegel, to monism.”

30. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

31. Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, vol. 2, *Die Lehre von Gott/Die Lehre vom Menschen*, 1924/1925, ed. Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 22 (*The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 1:334); Werner Elert, *Die Lehre des Luthertums im Abriss* (Munich: Beck, 1924).

32. *Ibid.*, 23 (*The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 1:334).

33. *Ibid.*, 20 (*The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 1:333).

At first glance, such a solution to the Kantian problem may not seem to have advanced beyond the one offered in *Romans* at all. At the end of the day, Barth is still making appeal to an exercise of the power of God to disclose to us something which is unintuitable to us. Has Barth really made progress here? I would say yes, for the following reason. While it may be true that, for Barth, the true identity of Jesus can be known only through an exercise of the power of the Holy Spirit, it is still the case that the life of Jesus is God's life. Whereas in *Romans* Barth restricted the encounter of the unintuitable God with the realm of historical intuitability to a single mathematical point, without extension on the plane of history, his claim now was that the unintuitable God had *fully*<sup>34</sup> entered the realm of intuitability and lived a life which did have extension on the plane of history. The difference this makes is that if the life of God has become historical, then appeals by the individual theologian to the Holy Spirit are not made in a vacuum. They are made with respect to a reality in history; the *veil* of the divine Self-revelation at least is something to which the church as well as the guild of historians have access. And because this is so, claims to knowledge of this reality can be discussed and debated by church theologians and historians without either side supposing that their method is fully adequate on its own to deal with the reality in question. I will return to this point in a moment.

To conclude this discussion with a critical question: has Kant really been overcome *by means of Kant*? God has become intuitable . . . without becoming intuitable? Is this even a coherent notion? The answer, it seems to me, cannot be decided by philosophers as such; it must be resolved theologically through attention to the Christology and soteriology which make it possible. On the objective side, the coherence of Barth's solution will have to be decided on the basis of the adequacy of his Christology. If there are good and sound theological reasons for advancing precisely this Christology, then the meaningfulness and coherence of Barth's assertion that the intuitability of Jesus is God's intuitability will be guaranteed. On the subjective side (which I have had to leave unexplored here), the coherence of Barth's solution will have to be decided on the basis of the adequacy of his soteriology. If the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit completely reorients our thought without altering our rationality is theologically defensible, then it will not be incoherent to say that God "commandeers" the human knowing apparatus described by Kant without altering it. And finally, if both sides of this theological explanation are successful, then what we have before us is a clear and coherent explanation for the possibility that human knowledge of God can be made by an act of God to conform to God's knowledge of Godself, that the knowledge of

34. See Barth, *Prolegomena*, 114 (*The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 1:93): "The *hiddenness* of God, however, His *incomprehensibilitas*, is His hiddenness not next to or behind but precisely *in* His revelation."

God is really *knowledge* (in the theoretical sense), that the revelation of God to us has the character of a Word addressed to human *reason* by means of a historical mediation. Of course, it is true that Kant is no longer Kant by the time Barth has finished with him. Barth's solution is not Kantian. My contention is simply that the *problem* being addressed is described in Kantian terms. For a solution, Barth has had to look, as Schleiermacher did before him, to the divine causality.

### Conclusion: Some Programmatic Suggestions

A. It is not at all uncommon to read in recent treatments of the contemporary relevance of Barth's theology that he was a forerunner of the theologies in our day which are sympathetic to the nonfoundationalist philosophies of Wilfrid Sellars, Willard Van Orman Quine, Richard Rorty, and Richard Bernstein. John Thiel places Barth at the head of a tradition which today is represented by the Yale theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck together with their former students Ronald Thiemann and Kathryn Tanner.<sup>35</sup> I hope that what I have said here has made it clear that the attempt to establish such a connection is not without its obstacles.

It is quite true that Barth steadfastly refused to find a foundation for theology in anything external to revelation (e.g., in a philosophical anthropology). But to the extent that Barth had and worked with a philosophy, this philosophy was Kantian, and Kantianism is a subjective form of foundationalism (i.e., Kant's analysis of how humans know was thought by Barth to be universally valid). Seen in this light, it is scarcely imaginable to me that he would have sought aid and comfort from the likes of a Richard Rorty.

Theologically, however, Barth was not a foundationalist because he refused to allow his philosophical foundations to provide an ultimate ground for his theological truth-claims. It seems to me that if the attempt is made to bring Barth into conversation with contemporary debates over foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, it would be necessary to coin a new term to describe his position, since the existing terms are all misleading when applied to him. The term I would choose would be "transfoundationalism." Barth was seeking to describe a divine act by means of which the limitations proper to the philosophical foundations he presupposed were transcended. So the *trans-* in my term "transfoundationalism" does not refer to a human act of self-transcendence but, rather, a realistically conceived divine act. The crucial point to be underscored is that Barth's transfoundationalism was not intended to negate the possibility of philosophical foundations. Transfoundationalism, as I have described it, is the result of an attempt to transcend philosophical

35. John Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), ch. 2.

foundations *without negating them*. It should be added, however, that insofar as Barth refused to allow his philosophical foundations to become foundational for theology, he was also denying to them any ultimacy. And because they lack ultimacy, philosophical formulations of the foundations of human knowledge must be open-ended and revisable. That is, one might well wish to maintain (and I think Barth would) that philosophical foundations do exist without assuming that any one philosopher has provided *or even can* provide an exhaustively true description of them. Room must be left for taking seriously the role played by the knower in constructing descriptions of “foundations.” Only then does philosophy become truly critical. The larger implication of this line of thought is that Barth did not grant and could not have granted to his Kantianism a nonnegotiable status.

That Barth was not absolutely wedded to his Kantianism, that it was, in the final analysis, his Christology which determined both his doctrine of revelation and his use of Kantian categories in explicating it—the proof of this lies in the fact that his Christology could be elaborated and defended without resorting to Kantianism at all. So, however true it may be that, from a genetic standpoint, Barth's Kantianism played a sizable role in helping him to conceptualize the Christology he finally advocated, from a systematic standpoint, his Kantianism could conceivably be revised without serious loss to his Christology. But all of this is to say that the appeal made by theologians to philosophical foundations, if made in an a posteriori manner in an effort to explicate the subject matter of theology, is not inappropriate from a Barthian perspective.<sup>36</sup>

36. The roots of Barth's approach to this nexus of problems is to be found in the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen (who taught Barth philosophy during his student years in Marburg). Cohen's philosophy was intended as a very strict form of foundationalism, in that it sought to provide an account of the *erkenntnistheoretischen* foundations of all the sciences, foundations which he identified with those generative laws of human consciousness by means of which “objects” of human knowledge are given not only their form but even (against Kant) their content. Cohen's “critical idealism” was directed principally against the stabilization and absolutization of the “given” as occurred in empiricism and positivism. But his program was also carried out in principled opposition to the “false apriorism” of speculative idealists such as Fichte and Hegel. It sought to overcome such “dogmatism” through an insistence on the act-structure of all thought (which conceives of the generation of “objects” of knowledge as a never-completed task) as well as through constant attention to the “principles” which, in the present moment, govern the work of empirical sciences, empirical ethics, and empirical art. Certainly, to speak at all of the “reality” dealt with by empirical sciences introduced a good bit of asymmetry into Cohen's constructivist epistemology, but he felt (at least on occasion) constrained to do so by the disrepute into which philosophy had fallen as a result of the dogmatism of the speculative idealists. My point here is that Cohen opened a door, however slightly, to moving away from his own critical idealism in the direction of a critical realism of the kind which Barth would eventually advocate. On these points of Cohen's philosophy, see Johann Friedrich Lohmann, *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im “Römerbrief” und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 70–77, 82–84. For a more extensive treatment of what I am call-

B. Given that I have hinted here that Barth might justly be located within the Schleiermacherian tradition of “mediating theology,” some comment should be made regarding interpretations of Barth which would like to see him as the sworn enemy of mediating theologies of whatever form. Here again John Thiel provides a useful example. For Thiel, the tradition of mediating theology is treated as largely synonymous with the foundationalist enterprise in theology,<sup>37</sup> and if he is right in this, then, of course, Barth was not a “mediating theologian.” But if that tradition was more pluriform than Thiel seems to think, and if, in fact, the priority given by Barth to gospel over law (i.e., to revelation over philosophical foundations) was not altogether without precedent in the nineteenth century, then Barth too was a mediating theologian.<sup>38</sup> Though I cannot demonstrate it here, I am convinced that Wilhelm Herrmann’s theology was not foundationalist any more than Barth’s was. And a good case could undoubtedly be made for the later Schleiermacher also in this regard. The attempt to read Barth as a mediating theologian is, obviously, one that would require a great deal more evidence than I have given here. But it is a task well worth undertaking.

C. In a letter to Eduard Thurneysen on New Year’s Day 1916, Barth wrote, “My Advent sermon caused me to realize just how frightfully indifferent historical questions have become for me. Of course, that is nothing new for me. Under the influence of Herrmann, I already conceived of criticism only as a means to freedom vis-à-vis the tradition, not, however, as a constitutive factor of a new liberal tradition, as Wernle and company would clearly like to have it.”<sup>39</sup> Indifference to historical questions, it should be noted, is not at all the same thing as a principled opposition to them. And so Barth could also claim,

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ing Barth’s “transfoundationalism” in conversation with the so-called Yale theology, see ch. 5, “Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth,” in this volume.

37. Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 46.

38. The biggest obstacle to such an interpretation lies, of course, in Barth’s humorous but devastating picture of the “type” of the mediating theologian. See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 574. The mediating theologian, he says, is a person who “thinks ecclesiastically. He answers questions about the substance of dogmatics by pointing to what was really credible and what was really believed in such and such a year. . . . The *status quo*, understood properly, is thus the measure of all things. The mediating theologian is quite unaware of the pressure to move forwards from it; he is a *beatus possidens* and as such a born churchman.” Examined closely, what Barth is opposed to, above all, is the ethos of nineteenth-century attempts at mediation: the all-too-easy rejection of radical extremes, gravitation towards the center in all debated questions as a matter of principle, and the lack of a critical attitude towards modern culture with the result that the synthesis of the biblical thought-world and modernity becomes more or less self-evident. But to acknowledge the pitfalls that surrounded nineteenth-century attempts at mediation does not mean that the program itself was without merit. Nor could Barth have thought so; if he was critically disposed towards Schweizer, he could also find it in himself to grant a great measure of respect to the work of another mediating theologian, I. A. Dorner.

39. Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, January 1, 1916, in Karl Barth, *Briefe*, vol. 2, Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Briefwechsel, 1913–1921*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973), 121.

with justification, that he was not the “sworn enemy of historical-criticism” but only of a historical science which reduced biblical interpretation to a question of historical investigation.<sup>40</sup> Historicism, in other words, not historical investigation, was that to which he was opposed on principle.

Barth was right not to be opposed to historical research. One simply cannot affirm, as Barth did, that the real locus of the meaning of biblical texts is not to be found in the texts as such but rather in a point that lies beyond them (the Self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, understood as a real event in space and time) and then seek to bar the door to historical work. There is more than a grain of truth in Wolfhart Pannenberg's claim, made over against James Barr's preference for the category of “story” rather than “history” for depicting the true character of biblical narratives: “If we decide for ‘story’ . . . we make an interest in the reality of what is narrated secondary. But this is not in keeping with the realism of the OT (and NT) traditions. . . . If theology seeks God's historical action in the sequence of events which the Bible records, and as they appear to modern historical judgment and according to their reconstruction on the basis of historical-critical research, it will be closer to the spirit of the biblical traditions than if it treats the texts simply as literature in which the facticity of what is recorded is a secondary matter.”<sup>41</sup> Barth would, of course, have wanted to raise a question about Pannenberg's unquestioning acceptance of “modern historical judgment.” But this, I would maintain, would be a debate over the theological presuppositions which ought rightly to govern historical investigation; it would not be a debate over the propriety of historical research per se. Under no circumstances would Barth have approved of a hermeneutic which would completely localize meaning in the biblical narratives.<sup>42</sup> I am confident he would have regarded such “literaricism” (if I may coin a word) as just as serious an anthropological reduction in the realm of hermeneutics as the historicism against which he struggled. It seems to me that the most helpful response to the excesses of historical-critics lies not in the kind of flight from history which we see in many literary-critical approaches today but in serious reflection on the adequacy of Troeltsch's segregation of historical method from dogmatic method.<sup>43</sup>

40. Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1922, x.

41. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:231.

42. See Mark I. Wallace, “Karl Barth's Hermeneutic: A Way beyond the Impasse,” *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988): 396–410.

43. Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” in *Religion in History* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 11–32. In this influential essay written in 1898, Troeltsch argued that a consistent use of historical method requires commitment to three basic postulates: (1) “in the realm of history, there are only judgments of probability” (p. 13); (2) the criterion of probability is “analogy” (or the agreement of the interpretation of events in the past with “normal, customary, or at least frequently attested happenings and conditions as we have experienced them” (*ibid.*); and (3) “correlation”—“the univocity and total interconnection of historical events” (p. 17)—means that evaluation and judgment of particular events, no less than their explanation and description, must begin with the total context. The implication of this last

It has for some time been recognized that the struggle between Herrmann and Troeltsch was, on one level at least, a struggle over the theological legacy of Schleiermacher. Given the profound changes which had occurred in the theological situation subsequent to Schleiermacher's death, how might his theology be most adequately appropriated? This was one way of putting their (shared) question. It is my contention that Barth too, even after his "break" with Herrmann, continued to be a player in this debate. But in his efforts to go beyond Herrmann, he had assigned a role to history and theoretical knowing which, while not exactly constituting concessions to Troeltsch, certainly brought him a bit closer to Troeltsch's orbit than he had been as a faithful follower of Herrmann. It is a pity that Barth never chose to debate Troeltsch publicly on the subject of theology and history—and could not after the latter's untimely death in 1923. To this day, modern theology remains the poorer because that debate never took place.

In this essay, I have attempted to read Karl Barth as a nineteenth-century theologian. I have even made the suggestion that Barth represented a form of "mediating theology" which is not strictly foundationalist in character (i.e., one which allows for the priority of gospel over law)—though I could not defend it here. In a day in which the theme of "tradition and the modern world" is threatening to become an anachronism (because more and more theologians are treating modern theology as if it too has become part of "the tradition" and, as such, are consigning it to a past which no longer has any obvious relevance for us), it is my fondest hope that more and more Barthians would put aside ancient animosities and find in nineteenth-century theologies the *living* resource for theological reflection that they so richly deserve to be. For only in this way will Barth's theology continue to be the resource it deserves to be.

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postulate, I take it, is that universal history (understood as the total context for the explanation of historical events) may not be prescinded from—through appeal to a transcendent agency, for example. Now, obviously, it is this third postulate which is the most fundamental of the three. It is the principle of analogy which makes historical-criticism possible; correlation (in Troeltsch's view) provides the justification for the *exclusive* of that postulate. Troeltsch himself, rightly I think, refers to his third postulate as a "metaphysical assumption" (p. 22). What is curious about this is his failure to acknowledge the extent to which his metaphysical assumption constitutes a dogmatic position at least as "authoritarian" (because not testable by historical method) as the "traditional" dogmatic method he rejects. In my judgment, Troeltsch's distinction between historical method and dogmatic method cannot be sustained. Troeltsch's debate with "traditional" dogmatic method (he is really thinking of Julius Kaftan's historical apologetics) turns out to be a contest between two antithetically related dogmatic methods. And what makes them to be antithetically related is finally the very different concepts of God's relation to the world which they presuppose. I point this out not to defend Kaftan at every point but simply to make it clear that the attempt to restrict the use of historical method to the service of one dogmatic scheme to the exclusion of all others threatens to foreclose in advance the more interesting discussion which ought to take place, namely, that of the nature of God and of God's relation to the world.