

Barth Society met in Washington, D.C. November 17-18, 2006

Our meeting in Washington featured our usual Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. with a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were Philip G. Ziegler, Lecturer in Systematic Theology, University of Aberdeen, whose lecture was entitled: "Taken Out of Context: Freedom and Concreteness in the Theology of Wolf Krötke," and Wolf Krötke, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Humboldt University in Berlin whose lecture was entitled: "Barth on the Theology of the Religions". The Saturday Morning session featured a lecture by Walter Lowe of Emory University entitled: "Why We Need Apocalyptic," and presentations by George Hunsinger of Princeton Theological Seminary and Archie Spencer of Northwest Baptist Seminary, Canada on David Bentley Hart's book, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Eerdmans, 2003). David Bentley Hart responded to the presentations by Professors Hunsinger and Spencer and open discussion followed.

Barth Conference will be held at Princeton Theological Seminary June 24-27, 2007

This Second Annual Conference is entitled:

"Karl Barth and American Evangelicals: Friends or Foes?"

**This conference is cosponsored by *Princeton Theological Seminary*
and the *Karl Barth Society of North America*.**

Brochures with full details about speakers, schedules and registration are enclosed with this Newsletter.

What follows are summaries of the papers presented at the November meeting.

Philip G. Ziegler

"Taken Out of Context: Freedom and Concreteness in the Theology of Wolf Krötke"

Ziegler's presentation was intended as an introduction to the theology of Wolf Krötke and stressed the importance of two themes in Krötke's work: *freedom* and *concreteness*. The freedom evident in Krötke's work stems from God's creating the space for theological work, while concreteness arises from the fact that such work must take place in specific contemporary historical circumstances. The specific context within which Krötke's own work has taken place is one of an "atheistic and authoritarian state," and of "the massively de-christianised society left in that state's wake".

Ziegler began with a biographical introduction noting that Krötke is not yet widely known in English-speaking circles and yet he is one of the leading theologians from the former East Germany. Krötke was born in 1938 and educated in "God's beloved East Zone" and then after 1949 within the German Democratic Republic. Krötke pursued his theological studies in Leipzig, Naumburg,

Berlin and Halle. His studies were interrupted by a twenty-one month prison sentence for writings deemed "dangerous to the state"—these consisted of some satirical notes from a boring lecture on Marxist-Leninism left behind in a lecture hall that were turned over to the *Stasi*. After his release he studied in Berlin around the time the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. The Wall caused difficulties for the theology faculty because professors from the West could no longer enter the Eastern zone to teach. Teaching responsibilities were assumed at that point by recent graduates and senior students including Eberhard Jüngel whose thinking influenced Krötke and who became a close friend of Krötke at that time. After completing his studies in Halle with a thesis entitled *Das Problem "Gesetz und Evangelium" bei W. Elert und P. Althaus*, Krötke served as Pastor and University chaplain. Authorities kept him from engaging in further study with Karl Barth in Basel despite personal appeals from Barth himself and in 1967 he completed his

dissertation entitled: *Sünde und Nichtiges bei Karl Barth* which was later published and was translated into English in 2005 as *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Krötke taught systematic theology in Berlin at the *Kirchlich Hochschule der Evangelischen Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg* from 1973 to 1991 while also serving twice as Rector. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Krötke became the first Dean of the Theology Faculty at the Humboldt University in Berlin where he was Professor of Systematic Theology until he retired in 2004.

Krötke has published extensively on dogmatic issues while also commenting on the theologies of Bonhoeffer, Barth and the Barmen Declaration. He has written on the relation between the church and society in the former GDR. Festschrifts to honor Krötke were held for both his fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays and an international conference was held at the Humboldt University to mark his retirement. In 1976 he received an honorary degree from Tübingen, while in 1990 he received the prestigious Karl-Barth Prize and was elected to the *Europäische Akademie der Wissenschaften*.

Freedom and Concreteness

In an age where “contextualism” and “historicism” abounds in such a way that the truth of theology is often equated with what can be decided on socio-historical or religio-cultural grounds, Krötke offered a kind of concreteness that attempted to remain faithful to the truth in a way that avoided what could be termed a kind of “ethnographic captivity” of theology.” His thinking emphasized *freedom* over concreteness because he wanted to stress that concreteness is a consequence of *faith* rather than a “general methodological requirement put upon theology as a humane science”. Following Jüngel, Krötke believed that “the freedom of theology is the expression of the right of theology to be exclusively *theology*”. In other words theology must be at the exclusive disposal of God so that the Gospel of redemption must always remain the “horizon of all theological work”. With this proviso it would represent a massive misunderstanding to limit theology to what can be discovered as a human religious possibility. Without God, theology would become superfluous.

Under the constraints of the former GDR, theology was always under pressure to co-exist within the boundaries set by the state’s official ideology in such a way that the political demands remained normative and constant while “theology and church doctrine were, as ever, thought ‘indefinitely negotiable’”. Not only was there no serious “Christian-Marxist dialogue” in the GDR but the church itself was considered by the government to be an ideological threat to be overcome. This fostered a church that was built within a socialist state or a “church *in socialism*”. In this way the church was pushed to think only within the limits established and maintained

by the socialist state. Such thinking would of course limit the freedom of theology to be concrete in its proper sense and thus make theology “curbed by socialism” mere “nonsense”. For Krötke any theology “which exhausts itself along with the place in which it was pursued is unworthy of its object—God!” since God always leads us to “what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth” (Eph. 3:18). Thus one could not honor the “Wall in people’s minds” as a “methodological necessity or virtue” but instead one must acknowledge that theology is an “exercise of spiritual superiority with respect to the limits of the situation”. Concreteness in theology therefore could never mean “resigning ourselves merely to negotiating the socio-religious possibilities currently inherent in church and society”.

This spiritual superiority certainly does not come from some “transcendental potential” within us for Krötke but rather from the Gospel itself because the freedom of theological existence is really an aspect of salvation itself. Theology thus is a free science only as it lives from the forgiving Word of God as a “science of redemption”. Thus the ability to reach beyond social and political circumstances is a possibility only because of the forgiveness of sins. It is because God himself sees to “humanity in every situation” that Krötke insists that theology is led into the actual situations of those for whom God comes in Jesus Christ. By paying close attention to God in this particular way theology will pay proper attention to its circumstances.

The Gospel then forces theologians to be “contextual” in a proper way in the sense captured by John Webster according to Ziegler: “Christian theology . . . is responsible *in* its context but not in any straightforward way responsible *to* its context. For context is not fate; it may not pretend to have a necessary character, to be anything other than a contingent set of cultural arrangements which stand under the judgment of the Christian gospel.”¹ In this sense concreteness without the exercise of Christian freedom has not been properly conceived.

In this way, according to Ziegler, Krötke pursues the difficult task of discerning “the significant in the factual,” that is, of trying to understand what actually “is going on in what takes place”. Here he follows Bonhoeffer and pursues a realist theology that allows Jesus Christ himself to act and not to replace him with some idea or principle. Hence Christian faith is open to all of life’s “phenomena” and does not diminish its variety. This is especially important because in the GDR the common charge was that Christian faith led to

¹ John Webster, “Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 2, no. 1 (2000): 15-16.

“illusions about reality” so that Krötke’s presentation of a realist Christian theology directly countered such thinking. While this thinking was generally politically powerless it did lead to a “humanizing resistance to the false official optimism of the Party”. For Krötke it is only by keeping ourselves focused on the “concreteness of God in Christ” that we will be able to perceive the meaning of our actual circumstances and how they fit within theology itself. Following Bonhoeffer’s belief that the church’s “relation to the world is completely determined by God’s relation to the world,” Krötke maintains that theology too “belongs to Christ, and only in Christ is the world what it is”; hence it is only through Christ that the world may come to theology.

All of this means that God himself establishes the context for theology so that one may only properly pursue concreteness by thinking after God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In this sense it is precisely because God became incarnate and suffered for us in his Son that theology is led directly “into the midst of everything human”. Here Krötke follows both Barth and Bonhoeffer who believed that because God is present in Christ there could be no “thinking in terms of two spheres,” that is, it would be wrong to assume that we must look away from Jesus Christ to get a better glimpse of reality because “the *abundance* of God’s reality in Jesus Christ is the path on which we come to encounter the breadth of our earthly reality in truth”.

Much of Krötke’s critical work focuses on this important insight. He criticizes both Pannenberg and Rahner for their attempts to find a basis for theology in some sort of universal religious experience and thinking. Any effort to establish the unity of God and creatures apart from Christ really separates what is already united in Christ himself and then only artificially tries to put them back together, thus causing difficulties for dogmatic theology later on with some idea that people could truly come to God without Christ. Krötke therefore opposes all apologetic attempts to maintain the concreteness of theology that bypass the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

The Freedom of God in an Atheistic World

Ziegler concluded his presentation by discussing briefly how Krötke responded to the “inarticulate, amorphous and diffusely vague” atheism (*Gottesvergessenheit*) that marks the situation of the churches in eastern Germany. This kind of atheism offers no arguments against God for it is simply assumed that “God is not there”—this thinking pervades society and is simply taken for granted. In Krötke’s understanding then most people “know nothing about that which they reject in practice”. Consequently there is no real sense that they have lost anything by not believing in God. *Gottesvergessenheit* it turns out is simply the result of “two centuries of secularization, and four decades of state sponsored

atheism”. This was the context in which Krötke worked as a theologian. His understanding of God took place in a social context in which God was not even asked about. The theologian’s responsibility, he believes, is heightened by the fact that in such a situation one is, as it were, beginning “from scratch”. Confronted by this indifferent type of atheism the community can present God as he really is present in Christ for the world with particular freedom because one does not have to be concerned with all sorts of false understandings of God in the first instance. In this context the spiritual superiority of the theologian can be seen for what it is: “an exercise of human freedom which derives from and corresponds to the reality of divine reconciliation”. It is thus not a freedom born of any sort of mastery on the part of the theologian but simply a function of the promise that when the Word of God goes abroad in the land, it will not return “empty handed” (Isa. 55:10-11).²

Wolf Krötke

“A New Impetus to the Theology of Religion from Karl Barth’s Thought”

Wolf Krötke began his paper by noting that Barth’s theology does not really pay special attention to the religions of the world. While there are a few passages where Barth does pay attention to other religions, especially Amida-Buddhism, according to Krötke, the religions only appear in his thought in a general way. When Barth uses the term religion what he normally has in mind is the “*human capacity* to be receptive to God or to the divine, and to give shape to the relationship with God in religious behavior”. Barth’s thinking about religion then mainly represented his attempt to think about Christian faith and the church in relation to this concept of religious persons.

In fact Barth’s famous presentation of “God’s Revelation as the Abolition of Religion” in *Church Dogmatics* I/2 uses the term revelation to refer only to God’s revelation in Christ as understood within Christian faith. In this context religion “and along with it the religions, represent a ‘human’ (!) possibility and reality”. This distinction between revelation and religion determines most of what Barth has to say about religions. This explains why Barth is often taken to be an “exclusivist” because of his belief that revealed truth is “only made accessible to Christian faith”. Within this framework, according to Krötke, Barth held that all religions other than Christianity could never become “true religion”

² For a full treatment of the implications of Krötke’s thinking for a wide range of dogmatic issues see Philip G. Ziegler, *Doing Theology When God is Forgotten: The Theological Achievement of Wolf Krötke* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

while such “true religion” only is possible for Christians as they are “determined by God’s revelation”. Therefore all other religions “stand *a priori* under the verdict of being false religions” for Barth even as late as 1959.

Krötke argues that at present such views cannot be helpful for a dialogue among religions. Today, he believes, we must ask what precise value this thinking has for our actual encounter with persons of other religions—people who are our neighbors and with whom “we share responsibility for common life in mutual respect”. In view of the fact that religions are a significant force in history, politics, culture and ethics we are confronted with an important question: how can the different religions “serve the welfare of humankind”?

In light of this question Christians are asked how the “spirit of reconciliation” effected in revelation “affects the relationship between religions”. Should Christians not seek what “is common to all religions”? Krötke asks: is this “commonality not the foundation of all cooperation between religions for the good of humanity”? People who ask this question will lean toward an “inclusivist model” of a theology of religions. This model, Krötke notes, has been the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II and has roots in Christianity from the very beginning. It acknowledges that other religions contain elements of the truth perceived by Christians in faith.

Krötke notes that others object to this model because it characterizes other religions in Christian terms. Indeed he says Vatican II “blithely considered them preliminary stages in the participation of all humankind in the Roman Catholic Church, while simultaneously refusing to recognize other religions as independently significant phenomena”. Still others espouse what is called the “pluralist model” according to which “all religions are equally true in each “*subjective faith perspective*” so that “No religion can claim to be the only true one”. Thus while all religions tend toward God’s truth, that very truth remains concealed “behind all the various forms in which it is perceived”. In this sense all religions are both equally true and equally relative.

But this relativistic view fails to do justice to the self-understanding of any particular religion according to Krötke because it is itself a construct of the philosophy of religion. In light of these difficulties Krötke asserts that the following question arises: how far does the truth disclosed in any one religion “enable it to enter into relationships with other religions—relationships marked by an openness for dialogue and understanding?”

Krötke believes that posing the question this way places Barth’s view of religion in a whole new light. While he remains skeptical of Barth’s view that all religions are arbitrary and mistaken according to his perception of

Christianity, Krötke nonetheless believes that he was correct to warn against disposing of the truth of God revealed in Christ “as if it were a possession”. Accordingly, any movement in this direction would indeed be legitimately characterized as “unbelief”. Barth’s statement to this effect in *CD I/2* enabled the Confessing Church in Germany to resist the religion of the “German Christians” who sought to bring the racism and anti-Semitism of the national socialist ideology into the church. This statement points all generations of Christians toward the “*event* of the truth of God” which must be distinguished from all ecclesial and theological interpretations—including that of Barth himself, according to Krötke.

What then was Barth’s positive theological intention in his critique of religion? According to Krötke it was to “serve . . . the *freedom for encounter with God*”, that is, with the God who is neither constrained by ecclesiastical boundaries nor by any theology. It is this insight Krötke believes which enables Christians to keep an open mind concerning whatever truth of God has been disclosed to these other religions. Barth, he says, did not make use of this potential. But that, he says, is up to us to do.

“God and the gods”—a Deleted Paragraph of the *CD*

According to Krötke there are enough of Barth’s published texts to suggest that his negative assessment of religion was not his final judgment on the subject. But he also believes it would be helpful to understand Barth’s decisions in this matter by exploring a few passages which Barth used in his lectures but never included in the *Church Dogmatics*. Krötke is referring to texts that are now only available on *CD* among which is a paragraph on creation taken from *CD III/1* and presented by Barth in 1942-43. The title of the section is: “The Creator and his revelation” and this included two parts: “God and the gods” and “faith and worldviews”; the former concerned the objective power of the “gods” while the latter concerned the subjective reaction to the “gods” that takes the form of worldviews. Hence, “wherever the gods have existence, worldviews develop”. Differing theories have been offered as to why Barth deleted this passage from the *CD* but Krötke does not find them convincing and offers his own theory: Barth simply was not satisfied with his treatment of the topic. Krötke notes that from this point on Barth refers to the “gods” only rarely in his *Dogmatics* and instead refers to our “self-made idols” or “demons” or “lordless powers”. But with this change Barth ceased his concern with the topic of other religions as well.

The Religions and the Meaning of “Revelations in Creation”

What was it that Barth actually presented in this deleted paragraph that could shed some light on how to think theologically about other religions? Because Barth assumes that the “gods” have some objectivity and can

exert some real power over people, Krötke concludes that one cannot simply say that religion is a “human capability” since people actually experience a real power that affects them. In one deleted passage Krötke says that Barth asks whether or not it was possible for the various “revelations of the creaturely world” to be a “kind of ancillary event of the one true God”? But he says Barth does not want to compromise the unique revelation of the God of the covenant by setting up “another” revelation that would end up being in conflict with his special revelation. This explains why Barth does not pay attention to what those who believe in such “gods” actually have to say about them. Thus, according to Krötke, Barth never asked about whether a dimension of God’s truth might also have been perceived by religious people through “revelations of creation”.

Krötke thinks this is unfortunate in light of Rom. 1:19f. which, he says, suggests that God’s eternal power and deity could be recognized through the “revelations of creation”. Arguing from within faith in the God of the covenant Barth properly argues that these revelations are “reflections” or “echoes” of special revelation because those who know God in faith are thus able to interpret the “revelations of creation”. One simply cannot know God without faith in the revelation of the God of the covenant. The results of thinking about God on the basis of the “revelations of creation” were evident enough among the “German Christians” and also in the church.

Krötke contends that Barth never abandoned the idea that there are manifestations of the true God that are perceptible to all as is evident in his treatment of the “doctrine of the little lights” in *CD IV/3* fifteen years later. Here “revelations of creation” came to be seen as Christ’s own true words outside the church—they reveal the intrinsic goodness of creation but not God himself. But this says less than what was said in the paragraph deleted from *CD III/1*. Nonetheless, “they can be ‘integrated’ into the self-attestation of God’s revelation”.

Krötke’s point is that if the “revelations of creation” are seen in relation to the doctrine of the “little lights” then other religions cannot be said to be operating “entirely outside the revelations of God” so that one has to expect at least an “impression” of God in the world. But Krötke asks where, if not in the religions, is one to find this impression? This he thinks is a legitimate question that arises from Barth’s own theology. Why did Barth himself not follow up on this question?

Barth’s Phenomenology of the “gods”

To answer this question Krötke begins by considering what Barth meant when he spoke of the “abolition” of the “gods”. First, he meant that only God himself could do this; any human attempt to do it simply ended in sinful attempts resulting in idolatry. Barth’s point is simply this: where the God confessed in the first

commandment operates, the “gods” “are forgotten like ‘snow in burning heat’”; God the creator has no other gods beside him and God in Jesus Christ is in reality the only true God. But the question remains: how can there be “gods” at all? It is possible for Barth only as the “impossible,” as the nothing from which “God has snatched the creature by its very creation”. Creatures are called to affirm God’s choice of being and not nothing. Nothingness therefore is what those who accept God are called to reject. It is in the choice of nothingness then that the “gods” come to life and it is in this way that they are a “human affair”.

Through human imagination the “gods” have a reality—this does not mean they are not real but that they are powerful and effective and as such are taken seriously by God himself who, when he turns toward sinful humanity, actually resists them. Thus their reality cannot be denied. Barth spends time illustrating his point by describing those natural and spiritual powers sought and found by people and in which they place their trust. These powers which can be seen throughout the history of religions, however, are false gods.

What is the nature of these “gods”? For Barth they “imitate” the true God and thus are nothing in and of themselves. Their power comes from human beings investing them with power by believing in them and entrusting themselves to them. This is why there are so many of them and why also they rise and fall with the different religions themselves. The bottom line for Barth is that we cannot learn the truth about God from the “gods” because their power comes from the human imagination and so it is from there that they acquire their power over people. In this Feuerbach had it right. But he was wrong in thinking that the “gods” could be eliminated by exposing them as false gods. Krötke concludes his presentation of the “phenomenology” of the “gods” by noting that in contemporary secularized Europe there is talk of a “return of the gods” as if this were momentous news. But, he says, Barth has already given us a much more impressive description of these “gods” in his own presentation.

Christian Faith’s Encounter with Religions

In a final section Krötke sets out to explain the “new impetus” for a theology of religions that becomes visible in Barth’s phenomenological description of the “gods”. The question is this: in the reverence of God in the religions, are they encountering something of the real God or are they merely giving expression to their imaginations? Krötke concludes that Barth’s deleted paragraph is finally deceiving because while it suggests some objective reality to the “gods,” it finally assigns that reality to the subjective imagination of human beings. Krötke thinks that Barth noticed this problem and for that reason deleted the paragraph. In this paragraph Barth had attempted to offer a positive

explanation in relation to the God revealed in Christ of how people could put faith in the “gods” even though the connection of this attempt with nothingness seems to disallow this.

Here Krötke explores Barth’s theological anthropology and says that all humans are “structurally open towards God” and that our “hearts are restless until they rest in Him”. This applies to everyone, he says, including those in other religions. Christians therefore must approach others with respect for this distinction of their creaturely being because even if it should be misused “it still holds true, for ‘the world simply cannot be absolutely godless, as it would like to be’”. According to Krötke then this means that “somehow or other the God who is present to each and every person also draws attention to himself for people of other religions”.

So for Barth there is a formal correspondence of these “gods” to the true God; they are his “offspring” as is suggested in Acts 17:28. Hence the job of Christian theology is to differentiate that which is genuinely from God from that which is false in these expressions. This does not just apply to the “gods” of other religions but to philosophy and to Christianity itself. Christian idolatry consists in “lying with the truth” which means that Christians make the truth into an element of a religious worldview arbitrarily constructed.

Because of this, Christianity has no reason for arrogance towards other religions: its sole task is to distinguish between the true and false God. Christians must engage in this task as they encounter those of other religions. That is why Christians cannot have a theology of religions without “the critique of religion”. This is what theology can learn from Karl Barth.

Still, what Barth never actually accomplished was “to make concretely visible those dimensions and signs of God’s truth which we can encounter in all the religions of the world”. Because of the diversity of religions Krötke claims that it is inadvisable for anyone to offer blanket judgments about all religions at once. He believes it is unfortunate that Barth gave the impression of doing just this with his negative views of religion. He did not intend this, Krötke says. But it is for this reason that Krötke believes Barth deleted that paragraph from CD III/1 of the *Church Dogmatics*. For it is the task of Christians precisely to help people in other religions understand that they are respected and treasured by Christians as “creatures of God, just as God respects and treasures them”. For this reason Christians will attend to those aspects of other religions which resonate with faith in Christ even though there might be much that is strange and different in them. It is hoped that this will lead to peace and mutual understanding among the religions. “Yet, the enlightenment of humankind with the light of his truth lies solely in the hand of God”.

Walter Lowe

“Why We Need Apocalyptic”

Walt Lowe’s thesis offered at the Saturday morning session was that “an appropriate apocalyptic is remarkably pertinent, perhaps essential, in addressing certain theological challenges of our time”. Guided by an “ongoing conversation with Barth” in CD II/1 Lowe presented his argument first by exploring the issue of “concreteness” and second by means of a concept of “contextualization”.

Issues: Experience and History

Referring to the conclusion of Paul Molnar’s “excellent study, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*,” Lowe notes that the author named a number of damaging tendencies in recent theology: 1) there is an inclination to elevate experience above the Word of God. While Molnar affirms the importance of experience, he stresses that in experiencing God in the economy we are nonetheless pointed away from our experiences toward “God’s Word and Spirit as the source of theological knowledge”. For Lowe this means in effect: “experience, yes—but experience needs to be transitive to God’s Word and Spirit” as its “true and ultimate source”. 2) There is a trend today to begin theology “with experiences of *self-transcendence*”. One might automatically assume that such experiences are indeed transitive, Lowe stated. But today such experiences are read as “an experience of the self who is experiencing the transcending”; in other words the focus is on the self and thus the perspective is of immanence.

Answering the question of how this situation occurs, Lowe points to another criticism of Molnar’s, namely, the trend to make God “in some sense, dependent upon and indistinguishable from history”. Today Lowe noted history is usually seen as “an ongoing process of growth, understood as growth of the individual and/or growth of some larger reality”. In this way history becomes the realm of “immanent self-transcendence”.

The Absolute Incarnate: Modernity

From here Lowe offers a picture of “existentialism on the march”: a view of the infinite that does not include finite experience and of eternity that is timeless; in this schema human experience is seen as something the infinite cannot include. In this light one can appreciate why “it is not just a facile empiricism that makes experience so central to modern theology”. Pursing this immanentist logic, Lowe contends that such reasoning supposes a “deficit in the Infinite *per se*”. What follows then is an imperative: the Absolute must cease to be absolute in order to become something more, that is, the Absolute united with the finite or temporal. More exactly, here the Absolute becomes one with *the experience of being* finite and mortal. This leads to the idea that “the finite plus the

infinite is greater than the infinite alone". In theological terms then one might say that "God plus creation is greater than God alone". Lowe notes that this thinking clearly relates to Molnar's second criticism of modern theology—the fondness for thinking of God as somehow dependent upon and indistinguishable from history. For Lowe it is no accident that "God should be conceived as dependent on a history that supplies what he lacks". God actually becomes indistinguishable from history since it is only in and through history that God comes to "a fuller" and "more concrete self-realization". Before developing this idea Lowe turns to another point of criticism of modern theology made by Molnar, namely, that the Holy Spirit is not clearly distinguished from the human spirit. Up to now Lowe says he has presented what George Hunsinger calls a "processional" view of reality without referring to a particular figure. But with this particular criticism he must mention the figure of Hegel who held that spirit is "the very capacity for self-transcendence". Understanding this, for Hegel, meant understanding the force of life itself. God and creatures together demonstrate that "self-transcendence" is "self-realization", that is, the "realization of oneself as Spirit".

Lowe believes that reference to Hegel brings us to an issue that underlies the disputed points that Molnar discerns. Hegel's thought attempts to overcome what Whitehead termed "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness". Conceiving the "concrete" as the place where "the greatest intensity of being resides" one can see that for Hegel world history is the "truly concrete"; it is the place "from which even such powerful notions as infinity and eternity are, in truth, abstractions". In other words the world process is life with a capital "L" while the divine remains "abstract and unrealized".

While the modern processionalist worldview is not always this explicit, Lowe notes that it often proves seductive because no one really wants to find himself outside of life with a capital "L". Confronting this worldview squarely, "rather than implicitly trying to hitch a ride on it" as some theologians have, is the major issue that emerges. Lowe wants to see how Barth himself engages this.

The Issue of the Concrete

Here Lowe refers to Barth's treatment of "The Eternity and Glory of God" at the end of *CD II/1* and to George Hunsinger's "*Mysterium Trinitatis*: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity" and notes that Hunsinger gives examples of diverse thinkers who hold a "processional view of eternity": Ogden, Tracy, Pannenberg, Moltmann and Jenson. In this view "eternity . . . requires time for its own self-actualization". Accordingly, "God needs the world . . ."

Lowe asks: "how does one counter a vision that seems so compelling?" For Barth the answer is by "beating it at

its own game". That was accomplished in Hunsinger's essay: it identified the central thesis that guided Barth's thought, even though Barth himself was not always consistent in articulating it. It is God's "Trinitarian life" that "includes a form of beginning, middle, and end". In other words Barth presents a form of time *within* God's eternity. This time within the Trinity represents God's "readiness" for finite time as we know it, but remains completely distinct from it. In light of the processional challenge it is easy to see what Barth is getting at. With his unconventional idea "of time in eternity" Barth's aim was to undercut the idea that God needed to find something elsewhere that was not his already.

According to Lowe this confirms the importance that Molnar attaches to the immanent Trinity. The immanent Trinity can be seen as Barth's "counterproposal regarding the actual locus of the authentically concrete" where the concrete is seen as the locus "where the greatest intensity of being is found". While Hegel fused nature and history "in an all-inclusive process that contains, or brings to concrete realization, the divine," Barth says that "even time—even the process of becoming—finds its truest, aboriginal intensity *within* the God of scripture".

Lowe closes this section with an anticipatory word about "contextualization". Within the processional view one who misses out on "the march of history" never actually *lives* but only remains an abstraction or a shadow of the real. For Barth, however, history is quite real; "but *its* reality is that of an abstraction". In his treatment of natural theology in *CD II/1* Barth notes that in light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, human beings in and for themselves have "become an abstraction which can be destined only to disappear" (*CD II/1*, 149). Here abstraction is combined with the notion of apocalyptic: "our seeming independence is 'destined to disappear'". It is here that Barth's reference to Col. 3:3 is important: our lives are really hidden from us because they have their reality "hid with Christ in God".

Did Barth Abandon Apocalyptic?

In "The Eternity and Glory of God" Lowe notes is an "autobiographical" footnote of some seven pages where Barth discusses his reaction to liberal theology's tendency to find "eternity in a single moment" with his statement that "a Christianity that is not wholly and utterly and irreducibly eschatology has absolutely nothing to do with Christ" (*CD II/1*, 634). This signaled the fact that the "theology of crisis" was "apocalyptic in content as well as in tone".

Lowe notes that it is commonly assumed that Barth abandoned this radical apocalypticism but that Barth's own nuanced self-critique does not support this view. Barth concedes that the theology of crisis might have gone too far to the extent that it did not find a place for the element of truth in the position it rejected. By

overstressing futurity, it did not properly present God's "abiding presence". But this did not mean Barth rejected apocalyptic as becomes clear in Barth's second point of self-criticism. Here Barth relies on Paul's statement that "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand (Rom. 13:11-12)". So Barth actually concludes that his own theology was not apocalyptic enough! By asserting the "pure and absolute futurity" Barth had actually undercut "the lived specificity of time" and so he had obscured the fact of "an hour that is nearer now" than before. "Pure futurity" does not "press in upon us" as it should.

By affirming an "utterly radical occurrence that is nearer now than when we first believed" Barth is still affirming the importance of apocalyptic, despite the many difficulties that accompany it.

The Need for Apocalyptic

Lowe noted that sometimes Barth's text turns upon the reader as when, in his treatment of natural theology, he says of his own answer "we do not press forward to it . . ." in some processionist fashion but rather the answer "presses forward to us" (*CD II/1*, 149). Similarly, God's futurity or post-temporality cannot be seized by us and "handled by us as an instrument or weapon. On the contrary, it seizes and handles us" (*CD II/1*, 637). Our tendency is to "contextualize" things, that is, to label and handle them. But sometimes we become "contextualized" so that we find ourselves being placed in an unfamiliar setting that "exceeds and relativizes us". This is what Lowe proposes to call "contextualization".

While the event of "contextualization" ultimately takes place only through the Holy Spirit and theology is a reflection of this, the early Barth did this by "rhetoric" and the later Barth by "Mozartian perichoresis and comprehensiveness". Barth's early theology developed concurrently with "existentialism" so that the problem came to be how to convey the "existential bite" of the gospel without "existentialism". For Lowe it is just here that philosophy can be beat at its own game. In a way existentialism confronts our relation to death with a kind of "internal apocalyptic" which stresses how facing death makes our present more concrete. Since existentialism comes from Kierkegaard (who was distinctly apocalyptic) and Heidegger (who was familiar with Barth's *Römerbrief*) in different ways it seems fair to suggest that "demythologization" as an act of abstraction leads to "apocalyptic" as a proper characterization of "existentialism's bite". In this circumstance Lowe proposes that "an appropriately apocalyptic gospel has the greater power of contextualization".

Being Contextualized

A passage from *CD II/1* captures what it means to be "contextualized". Barth speaks of faith as "being

suspended and hanging without ground under our feet" while many who speak apocalyptically seem all too sure of the ground under their feet. In the *Left Behind* series for instance there is visible both a triumphalism and a clear timeline. Triumphalism rests upon the ground of the timeline. Such thinking uses futurity as a weapon in a way that is more akin to Gnosticism than to the kind of futurity suggested by Barth. Here the notion of being "raptured" "guarantees exemption". "It is", says Lowe, "a doctrinal expression of the complacent assumption that one cannot, oneself, be contextualized by the message one so ardently proclaims".

For Barth the situation is quite different. In the *CD* the language of apocalyptic is seldom used—the word does not even appear in the index. Yet its theology is self-consciously apocalyptic because it is contextualized "by the reality of which it speaks" and so this is a truer form of witness. But in *CD II/1* there is a moment of overt apocalyptic: when Barth speaks of judgment hanging over our attempts to appropriate God's likeness which seem to confirm the failure to distinguish the Holy Spirit from the human spirit. One also thinks of the drive within all of our theologies toward some direct encounter with the divine in an authenticating moment of immediacy. With this in mind Lowe says the first reason we need apocalyptic is to "counter our own triumphalism, to keep us appropriately off balance". And Barth accomplishes this by stressing that if we could find a point of contact for revelation, even that would not help us in face of the actual approaching divine judgment. Apocalyptic reminds us that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom". Yet apocalyptic also stresses the Yes of the gospel as we are reminded by such passages as: "God has revealed" or "it has been revealed" seen in the writings of the apostle Paul, whose etymological root is "apocalyptic". As Louis Martyn reminds us in his commentary on Galatians in the Anchor Bible, Paul actually substitutes the word apocalypse for the word revelation and this reminds us that what is revealed is God himself and not some message, symbol or metaphor. What matters then is "the new creation" which cannot be reduced to a new social order, though that is included. This means that in a real sense the new creation, the apocalypse, has already occurred. Such a notion is devastating for the "pretensions of modern professionalism". But for those who "hang suspended within the event that is Jesus Christ, news of apocalypse accomplished" means that their hope is grounded, "even as they themselves are not".

Lowe concludes with two important theological insights that are fundamental to Barth's thinking: 1) traditionally apocalyptic visions situate time and history within eternity in the form of a "heavenly court" or "a divine plan". In a similar way Barth located authentic time within the immanent Trinity. 2) Yet Barth insists that it is precisely the immanent Trinity who "invades a captive

world in Jesus Christ". Barth's distinction between primary and secondary objectivity in *CD II/1* underscores the fact that revelation is "mediated" and "indirect" rather than direct; and with this distinction in place he also insists that secondary objectivity does not refer to "a lesser degree of truth" but only to the fact that its "form" is a form suitable to us as creatures. In other words it is the self-knowing that occurs within the immanent Trinity into which we are actually drawn by God's revelation, because for Barth truth is equated only with the triune being of God himself. It would seem then that the word apocalypse would be best suited to describe the fact that God's inmost essence is itself the truth of revelation present for us within the sphere of secondary objectivity.

Next, **George Hunsinger** and **Archie Spencer** each spoke for about 15 minutes on **David Bentley Hart's** book, *The Beauty of the Infinite*. Then after **David Hart's** response there was open discussion.

George Hunsinger

"David Bentley Hart: An Attempt to Understand Him"

Hunsinger began by saying that he does not believe in the *analogia entis* and that, if it did exist, we would be obligated to ignore it because it can only do us harm. Commenting on Hart's book, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, Hunsinger said there is a lot to like in the book: 1) the doctrine of the Trinity is nicely presented, especially the formulation of the *filioque* which could work for both East and West; 2) Hart's account of God's relation to the world is well done dogmatically. His critique of Robert Jenson in particular and his detailed account of Anselm were especially noted; and 3) there are good sections on J. S. Bach and the problem of evil.

Stating there is much to like in this book, Hunsinger went on to note that there is much also to worry about such as the author's brilliant but vague and tendentious handling of certain subjects. Hunsinger wondered why Hart spoke of the "form of Christ" and the "pattern of Christ" rather than just of Jesus Christ himself, explaining that he was not sure if he had understood Hart. Moreover, Hunsinger asserted that Hart's view of salvation as union with God, that is, our being joined by the Spirit to the Son and thus to the Father is exemplary and demonstrates that Hart is a profoundly ecclesial theologian but that there is a "metaphysical strand" that includes the *analogia entis* that is perplexing.

Hunsinger then presented one version of the *analogia entis* that promoted the idea that God and creatures are not analogous by virtue of some common category of

being but rather in their difference. Hence there is an assertion of some type of "continuity" of God and creatures under the category of beauty. The question here for Hunsinger then is whether we are talking about an analogical interval or an ontological divide. In Hunsinger's view there is an element of proportionality such that there seems to be a principle of mediation between God and the world. This is the point of deepest conflict as far as Hunsinger is concerned because this seems to undermine the unique mediation of Christ. In Hunsinger's estimation there is an actual relation between God and the world but it is grounded in the ongoing miracle of God's freedom. God enables our knowledge through participation in himself, that is, in his own self-knowledge. And this is not to be understood as *methexis* which is more metaphorical than Christocentric, but rather as *koinonia*.

In further reflection Hunsinger suggested that there were places in the book where Hart appeared to embrace the idea that the incarnation was the condition of the possibility of the soul's assent to God in a way that made him wonder whether or not a Neo-Platonic manner of thinking had undermined his theology. The question in Hunsinger's mind concerns whether God just repairs the broken ladder of Adam and if Christ is a ladder for souls. Such thinking seems to undercut the mediation of Christ's humanity by implying that there is some sort of *direct* mystical union with God. But in Hunsinger's view, because there is only one hypostatic union, Christ's uniqueness tends to be blunted by talk of Christ as a pattern or form. Here Hunsinger identifies the problem by noting that for Hart it seems that this "Christ pattern" assumes the form of an *analogia entis* which risks taking the place of Christ's humanity as the mediating principle between Creator and creatures. Hunsinger says that Hart speaks of salvation as a practice (which for Hunsinger calls into question the fact that salvation is a completed work in Christ's own life history). Furthermore, Hart speaks of Christ's pattern entering history to the degree that Christ makes his story identical with the Church's practice. Yet, the wondrous exchange involving Christ's taking our death on himself to give us his righteousness is rooted in Passover. A further worry expressed by Hunsinger concerned the notion of "divinization" which might imply that humans actually end up losing their nature instead of being re-created by virtue of their new lives in Christ.

Archie Spencer

"Causality and the *Analogia Entis*: Barth's Rejection of the Analogy of Being Reconsidered"

Spencer began by noting that he agreed with the positive features of Hart's book noted by Hunsinger saying that

he thought it was a book worth reading. Then he argued that Barth's rejection of the *analogia entis* is better understood in light of his rejection of the Catholic view of causality at the heart of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy. He spent some time developing this thesis in relation to the tradition and noted that David Bentley Hart considered Barth's rejection of it as "barbarous" and as both a misunderstanding of Przywara and very likely a rejection of natural theology. Barth's declaration that the *analogia entis* was the "invention of the 'Antichrist'" was, in Hart's thinking, "nothing but an example of inane (and cruel) invective". Spencer believes that while any misunderstanding of Przywara by Barth needs to be corrected, still what Barth rejected when he opposed the *analogia entis* remains a threat to theology today.

Spencer noted that the Thomistic idea of causality was demolished by Kant's critique and that in his view of the "divine accompanying" in *CD III/3* Barth specifically argued against an "ontological" approach to causality. This is why Barth opposed Molinism in *CD II/1*—Barth resisted the Catholic form of omnicausality, according to Spencer, because it was based on a type of analogy of being and undercuts the necessity of keeping to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ for knowledge of our relations with God in history. Spencer appealed to the thinking of Eberhard Jüngel to make the connection between the *analogia entis* Barth rejected and the inherited notion of causality that came from the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist tradition.

In addition to Jüngel, Spencer follows the thinking of Colin Gunton and Robert Jenson to oppose what he understands to be the Thomistic analogy of proportionality. Because both Kant and Aquinas depend on the same analogical method which is "traceable to the Neoplatonic reading of Aristotle's conception of causality" Spencer believes that Kant's critique applies equally to Thomas. Therefore it is questionable in his mind as to whether or not we can have actual knowledge of God following this method because, in his attempt to preserve God's transcendence, Thomas leaves us with a God who is unknowable and unspeakable. For Kant, of course, it is not possible to know God because there "is nothing within our experience which reveals to us the nature of a being who transcends all experience". All we know are the ideas of a final cause or of a supreme being. Spencer's critical assessment of analogy here applies to the thinking of David Hart because he believes that Hart's idea, that the difference between Creator and creature actually discloses God's transcendence and immanence, is mistaken. In the end Spencer intends to call attention to the fact that those scholars, including Hart, who think Barth's critique of the *analogia entis* is inappropriate today, have really misunderstood exactly what Barth was opposing in the first instance. Barth's challenge was to any attempt to understand who God is

and what God's actions in history might mean without attending to the fact that this is impossible outside of faith in the God revealed in the history of Jesus Christ himself and attested in Scripture. According to Spencer this is the genuine problem of the *analogia entis* that needs to be addressed if there is ever going to be real ecumenical agreement among theologians.

David Bentley Hart's Response

Hart first noted that he did not think that Archie Spencer got his point because he believed that Spencer took phrases from the book out of context. He sees nothing of human nature sacrificed in his statements. For Hart "divinization" is a living union with Christ that does not sacrifice our creatureliness. Hart then noted that before a genuine conversation on these issues can take place it is necessary to clarify just where one's assumptions are.

What then is the *analogia entis*? According to Hart this question concerns very elementary matters which are misunderstood and he suggests that Hunsinger actually does believe in an *analogia entis* whether he knows it or not! Hart insisted that his view of the *analogia entis* did not overwhelm Christ and that therefore there was no problem with his position. He claimed that his view of the *analogia entis* coincides with the *creatio ex nihilo*. The question in his mind concerns what exactly it means to believe in radical contingency. Even being is analogous between God and creatures, he said. He also mentioned that he was indeed a Platonist in some sense and that by divine providence that was alright. He went on to explain that for Christians, God is so transcendent that there is no univocity. Still, there is a likeness between God and creatures as stated in Scripture. We are indeed radically dependent upon God. Why the *analogia entis* then? If God is not just a supreme being—if he is the transcendent source of all and the world is from nothing but him, that, Hart claims, is the *analogia entis*. He believes that the disastrous folly of the Reformation was to allege that the *Logos* of John's Gospel was not Platonist. Nonetheless, according to Hart, the *analogia entis* cannot be equated with Platonism so that *koinonia* and *methexis* really are not the same. Why does he insist on the language of participation? Because without it God becomes a kind of finite being, he said. If all comes from God then that is sufficient reason to speak of participation. We are graced Hart said. If Przywara is right, then everything comes from the generosity of God. No mere natural metaphysics is possible. *Analogia entis* is the opposite of what Hunsinger thought it was—it is an interruption of our thought by the Trinity as far as Hart is concerned.

According to Hart there is no immediacy to God here because God is self-sufficient and free and thus God is present immediately in the work of creation and salvation. There is therefore no medium between us and God. How then does Hart connect his thinking to Christ? Christ, he said, subverts all our metaphysical systems. He shatters such things and his resurrection shows us where God is as the source of outpouring love. Hart claimed that his discussion of the *analogia entis* consisted only of an eight page discussion to show how we get there. There must be an ontological recognition of radical contingency which is not bound to Platonic hierarchy in Hart's estimation. Accordingly, God shows us who he is and draws us into his life in Christ in the abasement of the cross. That, Hart maintains, is the *analogia entis*.

The Saturday morning program ended with an interesting and animated discussion of the differences between Hart and both Hunsinger and Spencer. It is clear that more conversation is needed to see just what theologians on both sides mean when they say that Christ himself and not a Christ-pattern must be in evidence as the one who actually dictates the meaning of theological inquiry. That of course was the original factor that gave rise to Barth's objection to the *analogia entis* in the first place. Unless analogy is enclosed in the mystery of the Trinity from beginning to end, then in Barth's mind, there is a genuine danger of reducing theology to anthropology in one way or another.

What follows is an important **Book Review** written by a member of the **Barth Society** for this **Newsletter**, **Mike Dempsey** of **St. John's University, Queens, NY**. We are grateful for his thorough and insightful review.

Any member of the **Barth Society** interested in reviewing books for this **Newsletter** is welcome to get in touch with the **Editor** by email at any time.

Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies. By John Webster. London: T & T Clark, 2005. Pp. v + 144. \$ 39.95.

In this latest installment from master theologian and interpreter of Karl Barth *par excellence*, John Webster, we are presented with a commanding study of the early years of Barth's career, 1921-1925, as Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen. Taking a fresh look at the mostly neglected writings of this period, Webster focuses on Barth's early lecture cycles on Zwingli (chapter 2), the Reformed Confessions (chapter 3), 1 Corinthians (chapter 4), and 19th century Protestant thought (chapter 5). In a study that combines the rare gift of readability with

sophisticated academic nuance, each chapter shows how Barth gained an early and impressive command of the historical, biblical, and ethical issues that helped form the bedrock of his later theological knowledge in the *Church Dogmatics*.

Most impressive about Webster's latest foray into Barth's theology is not only his ability to show the influence of these formative years on Barth's later theological development, but also the way in which he implements Barth's own hermeneutical principles in his study. Not content to present Barth's thought according to general thematic expositions, changing socio-historical and cultural contexts, or theological common denominators (though these too have their place), Webster simply offers close and attentive readings of specific texts in order to grasp "what Barth is seeking to communicate in a single piece of writing" (9). Like Barth, Webster learns and teaches us to listen, to hear, and to question relentlessly following the divine subject matter of Christian theology to which the text itself bears witness. In essence, then, these studies are not simply academic representations of neglected strains in Barth's thought or attempts to overcome common misunderstandings; they are the reflections of a seasoned expert endeavoring to give "theological readings of Barth" that need to be "read with an eye for the interpretation of the Christian gospel" (9) in various periods of Christian thought. In this Webster follows Barth and seeks to grasp (or to be grasped by!) the divine activity which underlies all genuine theological reflection. It is precisely this activity which brings forth the "astonishment" and "shock" that "stands at the beginning of every theological perception, inquiry, and thought," whenever "the mind is seized" by the object of its investigation (9). As Webster makes clear throughout this work, for Barth theological investigation in historical, biblical, and moral theology derives the perception of truth from the self-communicative and "revelatory presence of God" (3). This crucial observation makes Webster not only an astute reader of Barth's theology, but also a sagacious interpreter of the key *theological* and *spiritual* foundation of God's activity which sustains and nourishes all theology that adequately conveys its divine subject matter.

Although their purpose is principally theological, these essays also go a long way toward correcting common misperceptions of Barth's thought. From the beginning, Webster notes, Barth was seen as a "theological dissident whose natural genre is the polemical essay or highly charged address, and whose presentation of the Christian faith is dominated by an oppositional view of the world" (3). However, as each chapter so clearly demonstrates, from the very start of his career Barth was determined to rebuild a positive theological foundation for the human and ethical challenges of modern theology. Eschewing a one-sided theology of divine freedom, transcendence, and aseity, Barth was always concerned with the other side of the

dialectic: the human ethical response to divine sovereignty and grace. As Webster repeatedly argues, Barth by no means championed the wholesale rejection of the anthropological, historical, and ethical preoccupations of 19th century theology. Rather, he sought to take these concerns seriously and to develop a positive response on the solid foundation of God's prior and present revelatory activity in and for the world in Jesus Christ. Such issues are confronted head-on throughout this volume, nowhere less so than in Barth's interpretation of his fellow Swiss Reformer Huldrych Zwingli.

According to Webster, when Barth arrived at Göttingen and began to teach Zwingli, he became immediately embroiled in the controversy between the Lutherans and his own Swiss Reformed tradition. Unwilling to enter the debate, either as a partisan defender of Zwingli or as a detractor of Luther, Webster shows how Barth relativized the differences among Protestant theologians by focusing his attention directly on Zwingli's text and the *Sache* of the Reformation itself, even as he remained sensitive to prevailing Lutheran criticism at that time. What first fascinated Barth about Zwingli was his unique way of handling the human and ethical challenges that constituted the "distinctive genius of the Reformed tradition" (17) on the basis of God's radical transcendence, freedom, and aseity. Indeed, for Barth, Zwingli could remain a "total Humanist, a total man of the Reformation, a total politician, [and] a total Swiss" (17) precisely because he understood that God was *God* and cannot be confused or commingled with any created reality, as in Lutheran and medieval Catholic thought. Thus, it was Zwingli who nurtured the seed which had already germinated during the writing of Barth's *Römerbrief*, the seed that God's radical transcendence and sovereignty do not undermine human agency but rather constitute and engender it by preventing its absorption or divinization in the divine being and activity, and by demanding the free ethical response for others. As Barth states, "[t]he majesty and transcendence of God allowed, even required, humankind to live on the earth in an earthly way...and it was precisely from justification by faith alone that Zwingli derived the duty of such obedience" (26).

The remainder of the chapter focuses on Zwingli's theology of Eucharist, providence, and baptism. Here, Webster shows that despite Zwingli's strong influence on Barth's understanding of God's relation to the world, Barth did not assume Zwingli's thought *tout court*. In particular, he objected to the way in which Zwingli was too eager to resolve dialectical tensions and settle theological disputes once and for all through applying regulative concepts or principles that dominated his thought. For example, although Barth appreciated Zwingli's theology of the Eucharist as an effort to avoid the "false adoration of creaturely realities" (29) that would replace ethical responsibility with cultic participation, he thought that Zwingli's denial of the

bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist risked vitiating the doctrine by relegating it to the psychological domain of the believer's faith. Barth also criticized Zwingli's theology of providence for being founded upon a concept of God's absolute originality that failed to give sufficient weight to the doctrine's Christological core. Confronted by Zwingli's pure and abstract theocentrism, Barth believed Zwingli was incapable of developing a sufficiently positive doctrine of God's relation to the world. Thus, while Zwingli may indeed have taught Barth not to identify God and the world in order to protect both God's absolute originality and the integrity of creaturely agency, Barth still needed to take what he had learned from Zwingli and move on, so as to develop further the implications of sovereign grace for the concrete life of ethical action.

In the third chapter Webster offers a penetrating analysis of Barth's lectures on the Reformed Confessions during the summer semester of 1923. Following Barth's analysis, Webster groups his discussion thematically and as follows: "the debate with Rome; the positive doctrine of Christianity; the controversy with Lutheranism; and the battle against modern Christianity" (44). More important, however, are Barth's two preliminary discussions on the nature of the Confessions in the Reformed Church and the scripture principle, both of which set the tone for Barth's lectures and elucidate his clear and distinct grasp of the power and promise of Reformed theology in opposition to Roman Catholic and Lutheran thought.

According to Webster, what is distinctive of the Reformed approach to the confessions in Barth's view is that they are "less institutionally settled and more transparent" (45) than those of Catholicism or Lutheranism. "Essential to the *Reformed* church," Barth writes, "is the fact that...it is *not* a pure and *not* a secure church...[T]here is no victorious confession like that of the Augsburg Confession" (45). Rather, framing the discussion in the context of God's revelatory presence and action, Webster shows that Barth "reinterpreted [the confession] as [an] event" that is made known by God through "the constant process of attending to Holy Scripture" (45). As such, it eschews any easy identification with "a given reality in a well-seated religious culture" and makes no claim at an absolutism or finality that would sanctify or enthrone a religious or social culture. Indeed, as Barth would proclaim throughout his career, the significance of the Reformed confession is that it makes "merely provisional, improvable and replaceable *offerings* [which are] never...an authority" in themselves (46). The confession is simply a human work that speaks humbly from below and does not bellow from above. Its significance consists in its "essential *nonsignificance* . . . relativity, humanity, multiplicity, mutability and transitoriness" (46) which must ever appeal to scripture and the voice of the living God. Thus instead of seeing the confession as a secure possession of a Church that is "at home in

public history,” Barth understands that the reality to which it points is *disruptive* of church and social life so that the church always stands under God’s judgment and receives its authority from God’s Word in scripture, “the *viva vox Dei*,” through “the self-communicative presence and activity of God” (46-47).

Hence, for Barth, the conditional and relative character of the Reformed confession is not something that can be separated from the life of the church and the voice of God, but stands in absolute dependence upon the continuing activity of God, of which no person or church can lay claim as exclusive property. The heart of the Reformed confession, then (and what is lacking in some Lutheran and Catholic quarters), is the life of utter dependence upon God’s continuing activity which comes to fruition in the church. Without sundering the activity of God from the human response and responsibility, the remainder of this chapter develops Barth’s criticisms of Catholic, Lutheran, and modernist shortcomings in their tendency to identify God’s activity with church or culture. Positively stated, the Reformed confession tolerates no mediation of creaturely realities which would usurp the freedom and sovereignty of God and thereby undermine the human responsibility to turn to God’s continuing, authoritative presence and action in the church. There is no human or ecclesial mediation because God alone provides that possibility through the gracious presence of the very Word of God, who brings the transcendence of the Father and the immanence of the Spirit together in Jesus Christ.

In the fourth chapter Webster offers an incisive analysis of Barth’s exegetical lectures on 1 Corinthians, also given in the summer of 1923. Although these lectures have been published for more than eighty years, Webster notes that few interpreters have grappled with the key exegetical and theological issues that had occupied Barth’s mind during this time. Even recent studies of Barth’s hermeneutics and theology prior to the *Church Dogmatics* have failed to offer careful readings of the specific content of Barth’s study, preferring instead to offer “excessively conceptual” interpretations that subject his work to abstract intellectual schemas (69). Hence, Webster’s exposition is concerned to uncover Barth’s *Erklärung* of this important epistle, particularly as it pertains both to the unique manner of scripture and to Barth’s centering theme of 1 Cor. 15 on the resurrection of the dead for understanding the relation between eschatology and ethics.

Webster begins by posing two pointed questions: “What kind of text does Barth consider himself to be interpreting? and: What is the relation between the biblical text and Barth’s *Erklärung*?” (69) These questions are significant because they show Barth trying to break free from the hegemony of much historical-critical studies to forge a new path toward theological exegesis. Webster points out that Barth understood himself to be interpreting a unique text, i.e., *scripture*, which has its origin in the manifestation of divine

revelation which creates a new relationship with human beings after the fall (70). As such, his exposition of 1 Corinthians is concerned both with God’s revelatory economy in its direct address to Paul and with its contemporary reception for the faithful interpreter. Aware of Barth’s concern over understanding the theme and content of Paul’s address, Webster shows that biblical exegesis cannot ignore important historical and philological questions as Barth is so often accused of doing. Instead, Webster argues, Barth understands Paul’s epistles as a form of “apostolic address” that is not simply “a religious text from the past” but also provides “the occasion and means of present divine revelation” (71) in which God makes the past revelation in Jesus Christ known through the apostle Paul in the present event of revelation. Clearly, this has immediate consequences for the life of the faithful believer, for it “requires that the interpreter adopt a particular stance before —or, better, beneath— the matter to whose active presence the text testifies” (71).

But what kind of interpretation is Barth offering here? According to Webster, it is neither a standard biblical commentary that comments on every line, nor simply a thematic study of Paul’s epistle. Citing its location as somewhere between a commentary and a theological exposition, Webster shows that Barth’s intention is “to re-present the matter of the text, not to articulate it in a more secure or coherent or potent way than Paul himself” but to “re-state what the text itself states...in order to allow the inherent clarity and force of the matter of the text to make itself felt” (77). Through “paraphrase, imagery, and conceptual restatement or analysis” (78), Webster explains how Barth attempts to get to the heart of biblical revelation by “drawing the reader into his own process of discovering the *Sache*” of the text itself, in order that the subject matter might make itself known. In this sense, then, Webster offers a valuable exposition of some of Barth’s most ingenious expositions of scripture which shine forth with the sheer originality and creativity of Barth’s project and its promise for returning biblical exegesis to its proper theological foundation in God.

The latter half of this chapter offers a dense and compelling reading of Barth’s exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 as the culmination of Paul’s argument on the resurrection of the dead. Here especially Webster is concerned to vindicate Barth from charges that he has underestimated Paul’s eschatology in favor of an unhealthy obsession with God’s pre-temporal eternity and that Barth has little to say with regard to the general resurrection of the dead. Rather, as Webster insists, Barth’s point is not to offer general comments on ethics or the resurrection but to re-establish human action comprehensively “on the basis of a theological-eschatological ontology and corresponding moral anthropology” (87). It is not that we are simply to turn to Paul’s discussion of love in 1 Corinthians 13 to understand Christian ethics apart from God’s raising

Jesus from the dead, but rather to understand the ethical command in light of God's reconciling work in Christ and promise for future redemption. Positioned, as it were, between "the perishing of the old" and "the becoming of the new" (86) human beings are to recognize that they are already dead in sin, yet alive in the newness of eternal life. To misunderstand the ethical ontology of the resurrection is to understand Christian ethics in a general and abstract manner that overlooks "the all-determining reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [which] is rich in recreative power" (85). Hence, Easter Day itself enables those who are already dead to live anew in a life that is not yet. This dialectical juxtaposition of the "already" and the "not yet" not only prevents establishing Christian ethics in general virtue ethics or in a psychological/sentimental moral theory of love but also enables Christians to see that the miracle that God performs in the resurrection of Christ has already set them free from death. In redrawing ethical ontology in terms of Christ's resurrection, Barth is well on his way toward developing a fully theological and biblical vision of God's recreative power in Christ between present reconciliation and future redemption in the *parousia*.

The final chapter on Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* offers an original and important exposition on the nature and task of historical theology. It also shows that Barth is a far more "perceptive, sophisticated and modest" (91) historian than is usually thought to be the case. According to Webster, one of Barth's reasons for publishing this collection of essays in 1947 was not to denigrate or dismiss his Protestant forbears of the previous century, for those giants of the 19th century also belong to the church in the communion of saints and had grappled with common theological tasks and responsibilities that occupy theology in every age. Rather, it was to admonish Barth's followers to be more loving, attentive, and appreciative of their theology. Thus against every misperception of Barth as a theological iconoclast and polemic despiser of natural and experiential theology, Webster shows Barth to be a careful and lovingly attentive reader of 19th century Protestant thought as he struggles to see the issues of their day, clearly and on their own terms.

Most important, however, is Webster's treatment of Barth's explicitly *theological* understanding of historical theology. Against the modern trend to ground historical theology in the neutral and detached investigation of the non-partisan observer (e.g., Harnack), Barth understands historical theology to be concerned with the investigation of the Christian gospel, an investigation that comes only from the event of divine revelation. Just as Barth in the *CD* sought to ground world history in the history of the church and salvation, so too does he seek to establish historical theology in terms of God's activity in the history of the church. Historical theology is thus a theological task "because it is concerned with the history of the church not simply in its externality, but in its

character as an episode in the divine knowing and forming of creaturely occurrence" (102). This means that historical theology is not "directly perceptible" to human eyes, but is only indirectly conceived when its own historical investigation is gripped by the power and the presence of its subject matter. As Webster writes, "a theological interpretation of the history of the church does not simply read off its verdicts from the empirical surface of events; rather it reaches its judgments on the basis of a perception that those events are caught up in the divine governance of things" (104). Therefore, the present perception of theological truth in the past is possible only through God's acts of justification and sanctification "in the event of grace" itself (104).

Crucial to this interpretation of historical theology, however, is that "the visibility of the history of the church is spiritual visibility" (105). Yet this does not "remove Church history from...history generally," as Peter Hodgson has argued, so that the church is relegated to a private sphere that is cut off from the general study of history. As Webster shows, Barth's point is simply to re-center historical theology around its divine object so that the perception of church history is seen through God's eyes. In other words, it is a matter of distinguishing God's primary agency from the secondary agency of created beings in order that history is understood as the object of God's gracious action and presence. As such it does not preclude the possibility of general historical investigation but places that investigation in a theological ontology of the church. Moreover, since the present perception of truth in the past depends upon the presence of God's revelatory activity, historical theology, just like biblical interpretation, requires a specific attitude on behalf of the interpreter who must be "caught up in God's reconciling activity" and enabled to see the "the spiritual visibility of the divine work taking shape in forms of human life and activity" (110). In this Webster offers an unparalleled interpretation of Barth's timeless contribution to the theological and spiritual foundation of historical theology in that historical interpretation requires a "special participation" with a "certain attitude" of openness, attentiveness, and loving trust to see that the theologians of the past also belong to the church of the present. As Barth puts it, "Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher and all the rest are not dead but living . . . There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology. 'In him they all live'" (112).

With the four studies of this text, Webster brings his characteristic lucidity, depth, and nuance to some of the most neglected writings of Barth's corpus. Though he is chiefly concerned to bring forth the early insights which Barth would develop brilliantly in his later years, this book makes a long lasting and significant contribution to one of the most fruitful periods in Barth's theological career. Yet despite Webster's obvious agreement with Barth on the issues that pervade Barth's work, Webster is no slavish admirer who holds back criticism in favor of

praise. He is quick to point out examples of where Barth's lectures, running out of time and steam, were hastily put together near the end of the semester; or where Barth had lost control of his material by indulging in sweeping historical generalizations, not to mention the occasional unkind polemic (e.g., Albrecht Ritschl). Webster's analyses are also accompanied by a continuous stream of excerpts from Barth's own letters which show Barth's own understanding of these texts and the development of his thought in such a short and intense period of study. Webster's book thus offers a fair and balanced look at these earlier lectures with a clear and profound presentation of Barth's early integration of biblical, historical, and ethical materials according to the self-communicative and revelatory presence of God. Unfortunately—and this is the work's greatest shortcoming—it is far too short, covering only a fraction of Barth's earlier writings and leaving untouched the rest of Barth's lectures of that period (e.g., Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, Schleiermacher, *etc.*). We can only hope for a companion volume to these compelling studies.

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Books of Interest

The Resurrection in Karl Barth. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Hardback only. By Dale Dawson, Tyndale University. "The resurrection may be described as the way of the crucified Lord to others, and is, for Barth, the essential and efficient link between Christology proper and the extension of Christ's saving work to others."

Doing Theology When God Is Forgotten: The Theological Achievement of Wolf Krötke. (Issues in Systematic Theology) (Hardcover). New York: Peter Lang, 2007. By Philip G. Ziegler, University of Aberdeen. "The whole book will be a treasure for everyone wanting to know what it was, and still really is, like to do Christian theology in a situation of mass practical-atheism." *Wolf Krötke*, Professor Emeritus, Humboldt Universität, Berlin.

Revisiting the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes: In Dialogue with Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Wolf Krötke. (Issues in Systematic Theology) (Hardcover). New York: Peter Lang, 2007. By Christopher Holmes, Providence Theological Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba. "This is the best concise account in English that I have seen of this new development in theology [that breaks with the tradition of discussing the divine attributes of a 'Supreme Being']

and is, at the same time, a sound introduction to the doctrine of God in the works of Barth, Jüngel and Krötke." *David E. Demson*, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto.

On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion (Paperback). New York: T & T Clark, 2006. By Karl Barth, Translated and Introduced by Garrett Green. "This superb new translation not only catches the vigour and nuance of Barth's prose, but also helps liberate the text from some conventional misperceptions." *John Webster*, University of Aberdeen. "Garrett Green gives us a Barth who is a shrewd, critically sympathetic interpreter of the human phenomenon of religion . . . This book should be required reading in courses on religion and post-modernism." *Joseph Mangina*, Toronto School of Theology.

Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology. Edited by Sung Wook Chung, Denver Seminary in Colorado. Baker Publishing Group, 2007. Paperback. "This work explores the substantial convergences and divergences between Barth's theology and the historic evangelical faith." Contributors include: Gabriel Fackre, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Sung Wook Chung, Oliver D. Crisp, Henri A. G. Blocher, Kurt Anders Richardson, Frank D. Macchia, Alister E. McGrath, Timothy George, John Bolt, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and John R. Franke. A foreword by Donald Bloesch is included.

Hearty Congratulations to **Meehyun Chung** for winning the prestigious **Karl Barth Prize** for 2006. She is currently a **Minister** in the Presbyterian Church of Korea and **Vice President** for the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and is the head of the Women and Gender Desk in Mission 21, Basel, Switzerland. She has lectured at the Ewha Womans University at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. We are happy that **Meehyun Chung** is now a member of the **Karl Barth Society of North America**.

Ben Myers, a member of the **Barth Society** and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for the History of European Discourses at the **University of Queensland** in Australia was kind enough to let me know of an interview he conducted with **Meehyun Chung** in the fall of 2006 after she received the Karl Barth Prize. Ben translated the interview from German. The interview is reprinted here in its entirety.

Ben Myers

“Interview with Meehyun Chung, recipient of the Karl Barth Prize”

BM: Meehyun Chung, congratulations on receiving the prestigious Karl Barth Prize this year.

MC: Thank you very much.

BM: In your doctoral work, what were your own conclusions about the relationship between Karl Barth and Korean theology?

MC: Most of the Protestant churches in Korea are Presbyterian. In reviewing the Swiss Reformation, Reformed identity and the development of Reformed tradition in Barth’s theology, I adopted the Barthian approach in the context of Korean theology. In this way, I underlined the social component of theology (over against both fundamentalism and nineteenth-century liberalism). In addition, in Barth’s position during the cold war period I found an impulse for the theology of reunification in Korea.

BM: And how did you get involved with Mission 21 in Switzerland?

MC: Since I had studied in Basel, I already knew about Basel Mission (reorganized in 2001 as Mission 21). At that time, Basel Mission had shown solidarity with the Korean church during the politically difficult time in Korea. So I was already in contact with Basel Mission. Later, I was kindly informed of the Mission’s advertised position, and I was encouraged to bring a woman’s voice from the south to attention here in Europe. And so I came to Basel for the second time in my life.

BM: What does your current work at Mission 21 involve?

MC: Three main things: 1) To strengthen theology from a woman’s perspective in our partner countries, and to bring the voice of women to attention here. 2) To promote women’s networks in our partner churches and organizations, especially by providing information in the *Women’s Letter* and by providing a special fund for the promotion of women. 3) Gender mainstreaming: to support gender as a transversal subject in all of Mission 21’s programs and projects.

BM: Do you think Karl Barth’s theology offers resources for the contemporary struggle to improve the place of women in the church?

MC: Not directly. But nor does feminist theology help directly in this struggle. The important thing is the way Barth’s theology took the church so seriously (cf. his

change in 1931 from *Christian Dogmatics* to *Church Dogmatics*). Feminist theology could and should also take seriously this aspect and impulse of Barth’s theology. In my opinion, contemporary feminist theology around the world has tended to neglect ecclesial things. Feminist theology has achieved various things in the academic sphere, but the voice of women in the church has not actually been accepted—or rather, feminist theology has neglected the everyday voice of women in the church. So I think there are different aspects of Barth’s theology that could be taken into consideration in the discourse of feminist theology. Above all, gender equality in the church could be developed further.

BM: Meehyun Chung, thank you very much for your time. I wish you all the best for your continuing work and ministry.

MC: Many thanks. It was my great pleasure.

ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES

Everyone interested in joining the **Karl Barth Society of North America** is invited to become a member by sending your name, address, email address and annual dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

Professor Paul D. Molnar
 Editor, KBSNA Newsletter
 Division of Humanities—Bent Hall
 St. John’s University
 8000 Utopia Parkway
 Queens, New York 11439
 Email: molnarp@stjohns.edu

Checks **drawn on a U.S. bank** should be made payable to the **Karl Barth Society of North America**

Food for Thought: “The dogma of the Holy Spirit means recognition that in every respect man can be present at God’s revelation only as a servant is present at his master’s work, i.e., following, obeying, imitating and serving, and that this relation—as distinct from that of human servant and master—cannot be reversed in any way or at any point. This developed recognition of the unconditionality and irreversibility of the lordship of God in His revelation is what makes the dogma of the Holy Spirit difficult, difficult, of course, intellectually too, but difficult intellectually only because man does not want the very thing that it states to be true [namely that God is factually and miraculously there for us not only from above but from below, not only objectively but subjectively, not only from without but from within and that this presence of God is no creaturely force that can be co-opted or controlled by us],” Karl Barth, *CD*, I/1, 468.