Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology

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Kimlyn J. Bender

New Paperback Edition

with a foreword by D. Stephen Long

and a new preface by the author

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KARL BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

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For Trudy

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PART TWO: BARTH'S MATURE ECCLESIOLOGY

Foreword to the Paperback Edition

In 1927 Karl Barth published his *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics*. On December 12, 1930, Barth wrote a letter to Karl Stoevesandt in which he first noted his plan to develop a "five part work that includes an ethics dispersed over the doctrinal loci."[1] That monumental work is now well known as his *Church Dogmatics*. The transition from a "Christian" to a "church" dogmatics was obviously central for Barth. Had he been satisfied with his first effort at a published dogmatics, or his earlier lectures at Göttingen, there would have been no need to begin the five-part work. What prompted his shift in language? Moreover, what did Barth mean by "church" and "dogma"? Why did he produce a *church* dogmatics?

Some of Barth's colleagues saw this shift as a turn away from Protestantism and toward Catholicism. Making "church" and "dogma" central to theology was the very move Protestantism had overcome, or at least this is how Georg Wobbermin, Barth's colleague during his Göttingen days, saw it. After the high-profile conversions of Oskar Bauhofer and Erik Peterson from Protestantism to Catholicism, Wobbermin published an editorial on May 31, 1932, blaming Barth's theology for these conversions. Having come under the influence of Barth, they abandoned a proper understanding of the Reformed doctrine of faith, which was "a heartfelt confidence in the grace and goodness of God, revealed and experienced through the Word" that then takes precedence over and arranges "dogmatic formulations." Their abandonment of the Reformation then gave rise to an "unevangelical version and evaluation [of faith] in the catholic-scholastic sense" with its "claim of an infallible papist church."[2]

Barth would have none of this. He responded "acerbically" to Wobbermin's accusation. Barth's public response is worth repeating:

> I want to say to you, and concerning this I become acerbic, I don't take matters of Catholicism as a joke. I take it as an incredibly strong and deep conversation partner; to be the only real conversation partner Protestant

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[1]Cited in Gerhard Sauter, "Vorwort zur Neuausgabe," to *Die Christliche Dogmatik*, xvi.

[2]Karl Barth, *Offene Briefe 1909-1935*, ed. Diether Koch (Zurich: TVZ, 2001), 214.

> theology can take seriously. I hold idealism, anthroposophy, folk religion and the death of God movement [*Gottlosenbewegung*] for children in comparison to this opponent. I am seriously affected [*leide*] about this, [especially] that Protestant Theology is here blind; that it does not recognize to what intellectual and spiritual insignificance it has descended on the line, which you Herr Colleague, hold as salvific, [and] how little it has grown internally today to Catholicism. My entire work asks the desperate question (yes: to our long and completely desperate methods used in these two hundred years) about a Protestant Theology, which would oppose Catholicism, which I hold as great heresy—as *theology* and as a worthy *Protestant* Theology.[3]

This response, I would suggest, provides insight into why Barth took on the task of a "church" dogmatics. Despite its rapprochement with Catholic theology, Barth's purpose was to provide an understanding of "church" and "dogma," now inextricably linked together, that could stand up to Catholicism as a "worthy *Protestant* theology." His work was not simply one more "protest" theology, another "counter" to the proliferation of "counter" theologies originating from the sixteenth century. It bore witness to a positive, non-reactive, Protestant theology. To accomplish that witness, he returned to theological topoi Protestants too often abandoned—"church" and "dogmatics."

No one can understand Barth's work well without considerable reflection on what he means by "church." Given its importance, it is surprising how little work has been done on this central Barthian topos. Fortunately, Kimlyn Bender's *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, originally published in 2005 and republished here so it will be more widely available, provides the best and most thorough analysis of Barth's ecclesiology. To close readers of Barth, his main thesis will be somewhat surprising. Barth always maintained the uniqueness of the hypostatic union and denied those all-too trendy analogies between the incarnation and created realities that turned the substantive "incarnation" into the adverbial "incarnational." Yet Bender's main thesis is that Barth's ecclesiology cannot be properly grasped without the "analogical application" of the anhypostatic and enhypostatic relations of Christ's two natures to ecclesiology. Bender acknowledges the force of the objection, but then responds. Although there is no such analogy in the created order so that it is "merely a type or exemplification of a more fundamental union of God and humanity" (11), the hypostatic union is nonetheless the "pattern on which all other divine-human relations are predicated" (12). He points to places in Barth's corpus where he applies "the language of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* to ecclesiological concerns such as the relation between Christ and the church" (*CD IV.2*, 59-60;

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[3]Karl Barth, *Offene Briefe 1909–1935*, ed. Diether Koch (Zurich: TVZ, 2001), 227.

CD I.2, 348) (12). His argument is convincing. Barth interpreters who fail to acknowledge it will miss something significant in Barth's work. Already in his defense of this main thesis, Bender points in an important direction in Barth's ecclesiology. The church is the body of Christ. Such a statement explains why Barth left his unsatisfying ecclesiology of the *Romans* period behind when he embarked on his *Church Dogmatics*. Bender's analysis and comparison of these two different epochs in Barth's work should also put an end to any interpretation that finds too much continuity between them such that it cannot account for the "Church" in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. There are continuities between his criticisms of the church in both epochs. Bender reminds us of Barth's vigilance against "cultural Christianity" and "an ecclesiastical triumphalism." But with his move to Münster Barth begins to take on, and take more seriously, Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

Because Barth's theology was not reactive, he did not dismiss what he learned of Roman Catholic ecclesiology; nor did he take it on without a critical 'reformation' of what he found objectionable in it. Bender puts it well: "What Barth opposed in Catholicism was its transformation of revelation into historical and temporal realities so that revelation could be identified with the dogma of the church or grace with the sacramental elements" (56). For this reason, Barth never relented of his dismissal of the Roman Catholic claim that the church is an extension of the incarnation. As is well known, he called such a teaching "blasphemous." Bender helps us understand why. Barth did not deny the church is the body of Christ. Bender points out the importance of the *totus Christus* in Barth's theology. In his "mature ecclesiology" Barth's "reconceptualization of election" grounded ecclesiology "in election and thus in an eternal decision." The church, he notes, " is viewed as part of God's eternal covenantal intention" (101). Why then did Barth refer to the Catholic teaching as blasphemous? For a simple reason: only if Jesus is absent does his presence need to be mediated through an institution that stands in his place. Because Christ is already fully present in his church, the church need not "continue" his body. The church effects a witness that is Christ's own words.

Bender offers important criticisms of Barth's ecclesiology. He notes:

> Barth's strength is preserving the distinction and irreversibility between the divine and human agency, as well as that between the work of Christ and the church. He is less successful in describing their relation and inseparability. Especially in the final volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth often speaks of a parallelism of action, rather than an embodied action, so that divine and human activity are portrayed as in conjunction rather than in terms of the divine acting in and through the human, Christ acting in and through the church. The point might be illustrated by asking whether Christ comes to us *through* the proclamation of the church or *along side* of it. (279-280)

That is an important criticism. He also notes that Barth takes up Joseph rather than Mary as an image for the church, and asks why must it be an either-or? Nonetheless, Bender shows us what Barth set out to do in his response to Georg Wobbermin. Here is a Protestant ecclesiology founded upon the confidence that God has spoken fully and definitively in Jesus and continues to do so in and through the Holy Spirit in the gathered community that is the church. It is both event and institution. Barth's ecclesiology may not be fully satisfying. His answers may not be our answers, but he returned theology to questions that mattered and to a conversation worth having. Bender's work is a must read for anyone who desires to join in that conversation.

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Preface to the Paperback Edition

As any author would naturally say with reference to a work produced with hard labor and long hours, I am very grateful to see this book receive second life in a new form. With this in mind, I am grateful to Cascade Press for bringing this new paperback edition into print. I would like to thank Charlie Collier especially for his help with this endeavor. Charlie has been a wonderful editor, and I am thankful not only for his insight and wisdom but also for his flexibility and patience through the entire process of bringing this book into existence. I am also thankful to Christian Amondson, Diane Farley, Patrick Harrison, and Jim Tedrick at Cascade for their help along the way.

Many of my other grateful recognitions remain the same as those found in the original Acknowledgements included herein. In addition to those there mentioned, I am appreciative to D. Stephen Long, who has written the Foreword to this new edition.

Finally, changes in my life since the original appearance of the book bring with it other new thanksgivings. I am thankful to Truett Seminary (and Baylor University), my new academic home, for the wonderful place it is and the context it provides in which to teach and think and write. My colleagues here are a gift to me, providing not only intellectual conversation but also true fellowship. I am particularly grateful to David Garland, Dean of Truett Seminary, and Dennis Tucker, Associate Dean, both who have worked to make my transition to Truett a smooth one and who, with all of my colleagues here, are a constant source of encouragement and support.

Finally, there is one last change of note. Since the Ashgate edition first appeared, there is a new addition to our household. Andrew, Stephen, and now Karalyn, continue to fill my life with joy, as does my wife, Trudy. My thanks to all of them continues on from those originally given.

Acknowledgments

In producing this study, a revised version of my doctoral dissertation written at Princeton Theological Seminary, I have become indebted to many. While some debts are no doubt overlooked, and most must go unmentioned, the greatest ones merit special recognition.

I thank first my advisor, Daniel Migliore, for his wisdom and patience in overseeing the original dissertation. His wealth of insight into Barth's thought and careful direction were invaluable for the completion of the project and kept me from many errors. My work has benefitted greatly from his sound guidance. Similarly, special thanks are extended to Bruce McCormack for providing valuable insight as well as ongoing encouragement and support. Recognition is also extended to Ellen Charry for her helpful advice during the writing of the dissertation. My debt to these members of the dissertation committee is great and extends beyond the pages of this study.

As Director of the Center for Barth Studies, George Hunsinger helped in obtaining access to materials therein and has provided ongoing support. I also extend my thanks to the editors of *Barth Studies*, Dr. Hunsinger, John Webster, and Hans-Anton Drewes, for choosing to include this work in the series, as well as to Sarah Lloyd, Ann Newell, and Pete Coles of Ashgate for providing gracious help in numerous areas and oversight of the project. Dr. Drewes and the members of the Nachlaß Kommission of the Karl Barth-Archiv granted permission to cite from unpublished materials from Barth's Göttingen lectures that have only recently come into print. Clifford Anderson assisted in obtaining bibliographical information, and his friendship reminds me of the truism that 'iron sharpens iron.' Dieter Heinzl provided much appreciated help in German translation. Stanley Grenz and Lee McDonald provided helpful and gracious advice on the publication process.

In my new institutional home, the University of Sioux Falls, I greatly enjoy the friendship and encouragement of my colleagues in theology, John Hiigel, Christina Hitchcock, and Dennis Thum. They have not only patiently listened to litanies of ideas, but have sacrificed time and energy to allow me to undertake this endeavor. Judy Clauson, Laura Olson, and Katie Pelzel of Mears Library provided ongoing, cheerful assistance in obtaining materials. Larry Ort, Kirby Wilcoxson and Beth Jernberg in their administrative leadership roles have also supported the project in numerous ways. The members of the Karl Barth Society of Sioux Falls always provide stimulating discussion as well as encouragement to me. These conversations are a highlight of every week.

Finally, my deepest thanks are reserved for my family members to whom I owe the most. My parents, Clarence and Sadie Bender, and my brother, Kerry Bender, have supported me all along the journey. My two wonderful sons, Andrew and

Stephen, fill my life with joy, happiness, and laughter. My greatest earthly debt and gratitude is due to my wife Trudy, whose love, friendship, and encouragement helped me to stay the course through good and bad alike. With her unfailing support, she has truly borne, believed, hoped, and endured the most of all (....πάντα στέγει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομένει – I Corinthians 13:7).

Abbreviations

CD	*Church Dogmatics*
ET	English Translation
GD	*Göttingen Dogmatics*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Römerbrief/ Romans	*Der Römerbrief.* 2nd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1923). ET: *The Epistle to the Romans.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Chapter One

Introduction

Even the most superficial reading of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* reveals its massive scope and ambitious attempt to leave no theological stone unturned. Yet only a careful and extensive examination discloses its equally impressive coherence and deeply-woven structure in which each doctrinal strand of this gigantic theological tapestry is intertwined with others, so that no thread is entirely independent of another. Barth's doctrine of the church is no exception in this regard.

In dialogue with his students, Karl Barth once described Christian truth as 'a globe, where every point points to the centre,' and asserted that dogmatics may in theory begin with any doctrine, including that of the church.[1] In fact, however, Barth began his dogmatics proper with the doctrine of God's revelation as the triune God, and the doctrine of the church followed discussions of revelation, the Trinity, and Christology. These prior discussions were not peripheral but integral to Barth's understanding of ecclesiology. Even from a developmental standpoint, while the question of the church arose for Barth early in his theological career, it was always inextricably entwined in a web of related questions.

These observations are not surprising, for ecclesiology itself is a derived system, dependent upon other theological doctrines and their attendant propositions and principles to provide it with shape and substance.[2] This is especially true with regard to ecclesiology's relation to Christology, for the identity of the church is intimately connected to that of Christ. The inclusive and complex nature of the doctrine of the church poses a problem for any study in ecclesiology, for such an investigation cannot limit itself to an examination of the question of the church *per se*, but must also take into consideration these pertinent theological presuppositions and convictions. A further related difficulty is posed by the fact that ecclesiology is a synthetic doctrine — it includes within it many aspects of theology. It is therefore impossible to say that it is either purely dogmatic or ethical, for ecclesiology includes both aspects, with

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[1]*Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), 13. George Hunsinger has likened Barth's understanding of the interconnectedness of Christian theology to the examination of a multi-faceted crystal, where each doctrine serves as a facet through which to view the whole structure of dogmatics (*How To Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*, [New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 28-29).

[2]See Maurice B. Schepers, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit: Karl Barth on the Nature of the Church,' in *Theological Studies*, 23 (1962): 625.

either coming to the fore depending upon whether one is focusing on the church's nature or activity.[3]

Both of these difficulties are present when one attempts to examine the ecclesiology of Karl Barth. As has been noted, Barth's concept of the church is greatly influenced by other theological doctrines and convictions. Furthermore, Barth's ecclesiology, like his theology as a whole, is comprised of both dogmatic and ethical elements, joined together in an intimate way. Indeed, it is misleading to say that for Barth ethics follows ecclesiology — it is much more accurate to say that ecclesiology *is* ethical, a point that will become evident in the course of this study.[4] Many missteps in the interpretation of Barth's ecclesiology (both past and present) can be traced back either to a failure to place Barth's doctrine of the church within his larger dogmatic framework, or to understand its implicitly ethical nature. I hope to show how these missteps have been made, and also how they can thus be avoided. Indeed, the present work is nothing less than a re-narration of the historical development and re-presentation of the inner logic of Barth's doctrine of the church.

To fulfill this task, this study will attempt to explicate Barth's ecclesiology by drawing attention to the Christological logic that governs its inner shape, structure, and content. Other theological patterns will be discerned as well, but these are subordinate to the distinctive Christological ones, for it is the Christological patterns that are in general inclusive of the others, not surprising in light of the centrality of Christology in Barth's theology. So, while Barth's ecclesiology will be examined in light of other central doctrines such as election and reconciliation, it is preeminently the Christological aspects of these doctrines that influence and shape Barth's ecclesiology.

It has in fact often been said that Barth's theology is Christocentric, but what does this mean? Perhaps with some careful qualification one could even say that Schleiermacher was a Christocentric theologian, but this of course should not be taken to imply that Barth and Schleiermacher shared a similar theological method. To say that a theology is Christocentric may mean a number of things — what we must understand is what it meant for Barth.

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[3]Ibid, 625.

[4]Barth can therefore claim in his discussion of the ethics of creation that 'the active life of man willed and demanded by God is primarily and decisively the active life of the community of Christ' (*CD III.4*, 486). Likewise: 'In other words, the obedient action of man consists basically in joining the community' (ibid, 493; cf. 515). For the relation between ecclesiology and ethics in Barth's theology, see Robert E. Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 97-102; 273-427; also Reinhard Hütter, *Evangelische Ethik als kirchliches Zeugnis: Interpretationen zu Schlüsselfragen theologischer Ethik in der Gegenwart* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 25-105.

The short answer is that for Barth theology *is* Christology.[5] To say this is to affirm that every Christian doctrine must be determined and shaped by God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This does not entail that every doctrine need be strictly deduced from Christology, or that all theology becomes Christology so that all other doctrines are excluded. But it does mean that no doctrine can be formulated independently from Jesus Christ. For Barth, to consider and formulate a Christian doctrine in isolation from the revelation given in Christ results in an abstract doctrine that has lost its moorings and can be regarded only as speculative. To say that Christology is the center of Barth's theology will be examined further in the coming chapters, but for now it is sufficient to say that for Barth, every Christian doctrine must be determined in light of the particular person of Jesus Christ, and this holds true for ecclesiology.

Three primary elements comprise the Christological logic that shapes Barth's ecclesiology and provides its inherent principles of reasoning.[6] This logic is the formal and internal skeletal structure upon which the material substance of Barth's doctrine of the church is hung. These elements are related in an inclusive fashion, in that the second element serves as a further detailed explication of an aspect of the first, and the third as a further detailed explication of an aspect of the second. They are therefore unfolding elements, each intricately related to the other.

The first and most comprehensive element is what George Hunsinger has identified as the Chalcedonian pattern.[7] This pattern serves as the constitutive paradigm for understanding the formal relation, itself unique and irreplaceable, between the divine and human natures of Christ in the incarnation. In Barth's thought, however, it also serves as the regulative pattern for all divine and human relationships

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[5]See *CD I.2*, 123; 883; also *CD II.1*, 148-149.

[6]To say that Christological logic rules Barth's ecclesiology is not to say that every aspect of Christology directly applies to ecclesiology. For instance, while Barth can discuss the church's mission in terms of its prophetic task and at times can allude to a priestly one, Barth does not allow for any lordship within the church, i.e., there is no strong correlation between the kingly aspect of Christ's *munus triplex* and the mission of the church, which is always that of a servant, though Barth can provide a very qualified and brief discussion of how the Christian and the community do indeed participate not only in the prophetic and priestly aspects of the office of Christ, but also in the kingly one (see *CD III.3*, 287-288). Nevertheless, Barth does not like to speak of offices within the church at all; Christ alone holds the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king, and the church simply witnesses to the Lord who fulfills this unique office, as will be seen below.

[7]See Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 85; 173-180; 185-187; 204f.; 286-287; et al. See also *Barth, Barmen, and the Confessing Church Today: Katallegete*, James Y. Holloway, ed. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992/1995), 289-292. I am greatly indebted to these works for the current discussion. Barth himself described the decisions of the ecumenical councils as 'guiding lines' for an understanding of Christ's existence and action, (*CD IV.1*, 127).

that stand in analogy to the incarnation itself, as well as for a few carefully qualified relationships between created entities.[8] The Chalcedonian pattern is comprised of a unity, a differentiation, and an asymmetrical relation between the divine and human natures in Christ, and by analogy between the members, or terms, of the other designated relations. The unity of the natures entails that they cannot be thought of as severed so that the intimacy of their relation is lost — in the language of Chalcedon, they are 'without division or separation.' The distinction of the natures entails that they cannot be thought of as mingled so that the integrity of either is sacrificed — in the language of Chalcedon, they are 'without confusion or change.' The asymmetry between the natures signifies that they exist in an ordered and irreversible relation whereby the first is independent and superior in relation to the second, whereas the second is dependent and subordinate to the first, the first being different from the second in kind, not merely in degree. Just as the distinction between the natures or terms guards against an identification of them, protecting the integrity of each, so also the asymmetry of the natures or terms ensures that there is no parity between them.[9] The Chalcedonian pattern is used by Barth to guard against mistaken positions on the left and the right, those that either exalt humanity by granting it autonomy, or those that denigrate humanity by positing a divine determinism or monism.[10]

The second element of the Christological logic follows from this final aspect of the Chalcedonian pattern. In essence, it may be described as a further exposition clarifying the nature of the asymmetrical relation itself with primary reference to the personal union of Word and flesh in Christ and then to the communion of the natures, and with secondary application to defining the relationship between divine and human subjects. This element is articulated in terms of the patristic *anhypostasia/enhypostasia* formula in Christology.[11] This doctrine, as Barth

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[8]Hunsinger states that 'there is virtually no discussion of divine and human agency in the *Church Dogmatics* which does not conform to this scheme' (*How to Read Karl Barth*, 187).

[9]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 177.

[10]'The Chalcedonian pattern is used to specify counter positions that would be doctrinally incoherent (and also incoherent with scripture). "Without separation or division" means that no independent human autonomy can be posited in relation to God. "Without confusion or change" means that no divine determinism or monism can be posited in relation to humanity. Finally, "complete in deity and complete in humanity" means that no symmetrical relationship can be posited between divine and human actions (or better, none that is not asymmetrical). It also means that the two cannot be posited as ultimately identical' (ibid, 204).

[11]*CD I.2*, 163; cf. *CD IV.2*, 49-50; 90-91. For a discussion of the place of this couplet in Barth's Christology, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 198-201; also 125. In reference to this couplet, Torrance writes: 'As Barth used it...this was a technically precise way of speaking of the

understood and articulated it, made two statements, one negative and one positive. The negative assertion (expressed by the *anhypostasis*) is that the human nature of Christ has no independent existence apart from the Word in the incarnation. This safeguards both the divine freedom and initiative as well as the utter dependence of the creature upon the Creator. It therefore protects against any form of adoptionism. The positive assertion (expressed by the *enhypostasis*) is that the human nature does have a real, true, and complete existence in the Word. This ensures the integrity and wholeness of the creature, that Jesus was a complete human being. The Christological couplet preserves both the sovereign freedom and benevolent goodness of the divine self-giving in the incarnation, as well as the wholeness and bestowed dignity of the creature, thus expressing 'the essential logic in the irreversible movement of God's grace.'[12]

When applied by analogy to designated divine and human relationships, then, this Christological formula entails that the human partner and work has no independent existence apart from the divine initiative, but at the same time ensures that the human subject does have a real and true existence and activity as established by and in relation to the divine Subject and activity. The human activity is not abolished or denigrated but established and dignified by the divine activity, even though it cannot supplement or replace the divine work and exists on an entirely different plane. Barth's anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christological formula allows him to speak of a true unity of the Word and flesh in Christ and of the Creator with the creature, without sacrificing the distinction and superiority of the divine to the human on the one hand or the integrity of the creature on the other. It is the ontological complement to the soteriological 'justification by grace alone.'

The final element of the Christological logic follows from the two preceding. It further describes the nature of the human life of Christ in relation to his divine life, and thus describes the character of the real, true, and whole human existence that is established by the divine Word in material rather than purely formal terms. Barth answers the question as to the positive relation of the second term to the first, of Christ's human life to his divine life, by positing the notion of correspondence [*Entsprechung*].[13] Correspondence itself includes both ontological and ethical aspects

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reality, wholeness and integrity of the human nature of Jesus Christ in the incarnation, without lapsing into adoptionism, and of speaking of its perfect oneness with the divine nature of Christ without lapsing into monophysitism' (ibid, 200).

[12]Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 199; cf. 125.

[13]For a discussion of Barth's concept of correspondence (and the accompanying concepts of 'parable' [*Gleichnis*] and 'analogy' [*Analogie*], see Helmut Gollwitzer, 'Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth,' in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 97-99.

and is related to the epistemological concept of the analogy of faith [*analogia fidei*].[14] It is a specifically Christological notion, however, for it is defined by and refers first and preeminently to the manner in which Christ's human life mirrors and indeed represents the divine life of God in its own proper sphere of being and activity.[15] It is then applied by analogy to obedient human activity that reflects the divine will as established by grace.

The concept of correspondence speaks neither of an identity, continuity, and cooperation between divine and human action, nor of a purely radical separation, opposition, and contradiction between them. It is neither univocal nor equivocal, but analogical, in nature. On the one hand, it guards against any type of identification or conflation of divine and human activity, excluding any synergistic or cooperative understandings of salvation. Divine and human activity remain distinct and do not exist on the same plane. Positively, it entails that human activity not contradict but reflect the divine will and activity in a manner appropriate to the creature, neither replacing nor supplementing the divine activity.[16] And it is for this positive affirmation that the negative judgment is made: human activity is relativized and limited not so that it is to be set aside as irrelevant or purely sinful, but so that human activity might be given its own proper place as a truly ***human*** work, rather than the work of God. The eschatological reservation gives rise, and does not destroy, an ethical and historical affirmation of human life and activity.[17]

This human life and activity corresponds, or lives in analogy to, the divine life, but does so only in light of the previous logic whereby the radical asymmetry between the partners and their work is affirmed, and the complete and utter dependence of the human upon the divine is safeguarded. Barth's notion of correspondence describes the character of the human life and activity that exists enhypostatically in the divine Word in the incarnation, and by analogy the character of the life of the church and the

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[14]Correspondence may be thought of as the ontological and ethical parallel to the epistemological 'analogy of faith' [*analogia fidei*] in Barth's theology. Referring to the concept of correspondence and to the related one of parable in Barth's theology, Gollwitzer concludes: 'It is indicative of academic theology's idealist way of thinking that it is not these concepts, but their correlate from the theory of knowledge — the concept of analogy — which has held the center of attention in the discussion and interpretation of Barth....*Analogia fidei* corresponds at the theoretical level to "parable" at the level of social praxis; the former is necessary in that it grounds and secures the correct occurrence of the practice of the Christian life,' (97).

[15]See *CD IV.2*, 166.

[16]Gollwitzer, 97-99.

[17]Gollwitzer writes: 'Here the eschatological reservation loses the paralyzing effect it has exercised for so long,' (98). Likewise: 'Eschatology does not brake, but propels, our activity,' (99).

Christian established by God within the covenant of grace. It thus ties the theological and the ethical, the vertical and the horizontal, together. An analogous relationship of being and a correspondence of activity are made possible by divine grace rather than a natural human capacity. The action of the human partner does not replace nor supplement the divine activity, but does have a real, true, and important place that reflects and bears witness to God's salvific work. There is nothing insufficient in the divine activity that requires completion in a human act, but the human act does by grace accompany and serve the divine activity as a witness, taking the form of obedience rather than disobedience.

Once again, correspondence is first and foremost a Christological principle before it is an ethical one, however, in that the correspondence of the creature to the Creator finds its ultimate and normative example in the obedience of Jesus Christ to God, the life of the New Adam lived in conformity to the Father's will. This is seen preeminently in the fact that Jesus Christ is not only the electing God but also the elect human being, not only the humble and obedient Son of God but also the exalted and glorified Son of Man. Yet this Christological correspondence is complemented by an ecclesiological one, in that the church is to attempt and bear within its life and in the life of each member 'an imitation and representation [*Nachahmung und Darstellung*] of the love with which God loved the world.'[18]

These Christological elements of the Chalcedonian pattern, the *anhypostasia/enhypostasia* formula, and the motif of correspondence, serve both a critical and constructive purpose. They are critical in that they help to criticize and avoid mistaken positions whether conceived on the theological left or right. The close affiliation between Christology and ecclesiology in Barth's thought is made evident in that these mistaken ecclesiological positions are construed by Barth in terms of Christological heresies. For Barth, to consider the true church to be an invisible reality behind the visible institution, and indeed opposed to and in contradiction with it, was to succumb to a docetic ecclesiology. On the opposite side, to conceive of the church solely and purely as a historical phenomenon and as one human society among others, without regard to its grounding in the activity of the Holy Spirit as an eschatological event, was to fall into an ebionitic heresy. While Barth explicitly identified these errors as docetic and ebionitic, he also implicitly speaks of a third error: that of confusing the historical institution, life, and practices of the church with revelation itself, what might be termed a Eutychian heresy. Here the dialectical relation itself is sacrificed so that history is divinized and revelation is historicized in a confused and amalgamated relation. The first error sacrifices the historical form to the divine event, thus failing to account for the enhypostatic character of the church. The second sacrifices the divine event to the historical form, thus failing to account for the anhypostatic character of the church. The third sacrifices the dialectical

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[18]*CD III.4*, 502.

character and confuses the realities, so that the asymmetrical and irreversible character of the relation is lost, the correspondence of the church giving way to a synergism of cooperation.[19]

Barth's own position is to speak of the church as both divinely constituted and historically situated, a reality comprised of both an inner mystery of the Spirit and a society of human persons in fellowship and joint activity. The church is for Barth both invisible and visible, so that the inner mystery is not sacrificed to the external form, nor vice versa, maintaining the integrity of each. Barth seeks neither to confuse nor separate the divine event and the historical and sociological form, presented in a highly dialectical construal of the relation between divine action and historical duration.[20] He regularly defines the church dialectically with reference to rejected and opposing dyads — the church is neither docetic nor ebionitic, neither idealized nor historicized, neither antinomian nor legalistic, neither sacralized nor secularized.

The Christological patterns are not only critical but also constructive, and are so in two senses. First, they are constitutive for Christology itself, describing the real and irreducible aspects and relations of the incarnation — the unity, differentiation, and irreversible ordering of the divine and human natures, the irreversible relation of the Word and flesh of Christ, as well as the positive relation between them. They are constructive in another sense, however, in that they are also the regulative patterns that both govern and illustrate other complex divine and human relations.

With specific regard to the question of the church, Barth's Christological logic, as comprised of these three elements, is witnessed in three specific relationships, each closely though not exclusively tied to three aspects of the church's existence. The

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[19]For an insightful description of ecclesiology in terms of the relationship between divine event and historical form and duration, see Martin Honecker, 'Kirche als Gestalt und Ereignis: Die sichtbare Gestalt der Kirche als dogmatisches Problem,'in *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus*, ed. Ernst Wolf, No. 10, v. 25 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), 1-238; esp. 11-15. I am indebted to this study for the current discussion of this problem. Honecker identifies this relationship between eschatological event [*Ereignis*] and historical form [*Gestalt*] as central to the Reformation understanding of the church, and states that the central theological problem pertaining to this relationship can be stated succinctly: 'the church stands in history but does not originate from history,' ['*die Kirche in der Geschichte besteht, aber nicht aus der Geschichte stammt*'], (12). In Biblical parlance, the church is in, but not of, the world. Honecker's analysis and description of the problem is better than his assessment of Barth's own position, however. He concludes that Barth sacrifices visible form to invisible event (see 157-204; esp. 201-204). This is a common criticism of Barth's ecclesiology, but one that is either mistaken or, at best, one-sided, as will be seen in due time below.

[20]As we shall see, Barth perceived a mistaken docetic position in Brunner and Sohm, a mistaken ebionitic position in much of Protestant liberalism and in German nationalism, and a Eutychian confusion in Roman Catholicism.

first aspect, that of the church's *origin and nature*, pertains to the overarching relationship between the Spirit and the church and to the question of the church's reality as both an event called into existence by the Spirit and an institution existing as a human society within time. Barth can speak of this two-fold nature of the church as comprising a mystery, and he also designates these two aspects in his idiosyncratic understanding of the relationship between the invisible and the visible church. This relationship constitutes the reality of the church itself.

The second aspect is that of the church's *order and form*, pertaining to the overarching relationship between Christ and the church and to the question of the church's structure as this is expressed in a concrete rule of law. Here Barth speaks of the church as a community that possesses a definite form and order within the world. He speaks of this form primarily in terms of the concept and imagery of the body of Christ, and of its order as Christologically-derived.

The final aspect is that of the church's *ordination and mission*, pertaining to the overarching relationship between the church and the world and to the question of the church's commission to a specific and divinely-entrusted task. This relationship between the church and the world is both similar and different from the previous two, for now the church takes the place of the first term in the relation. This entails a modification, though not an abandonment, of the Christological patterns found in the two previous relations.

These three aspects of the church's nature, form, and mission constitute Barth's ecclesiology, which is determined by the distinctive relationships between the Spirit and the church, Christ and the church, and the church and the world. These primary and dialectical relationships are in turn ruled by the Christological logic we have outlined, and are also complemented by other sub-relationships, represented by but not limited to the relation between the invisible and visible church and the relation between the providence of God and the confusion of humanity. The Christological logic therefore holds not only *within* the terms themselves (Jesus Christ as both divine and human; the church as both invisible and visible; world-occurrence as marked both by the providence of God and the confusion of humanity), but also *between* the terms (between Christ and the church, and between the church and the world).

Christ, church, and world thus exist in a relation of concentric circles, with Christ as the center of both the church and the world, and with Christ and the church together comprising the center of world-occurrence and its history.[21] In each relation, there is a unity of the terms, a differentiation between them, and an asymmetrical relation in which the second term has no independent existence apart from the first term, but has a true existence as established by the first. This relation of the second

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[21]Hunsinger notes that the 'root metaphor' of the *Church Dogmatics* may be thought of as 'the metaphor of the circle comprising center and periphery — a metaphor which is constantly employed to bring out the centrality of Jesus Christ' (*How to Read Karl Barth*, 59).

term to the first is marked by a correspondence which is neither univocal nor equivocal, but rather analogous, to the being and activity of the first term. This correspondence is therefore both theologically grounded and ethically oriented.

All of these relations together fall within the larger framework of Barth's Trinitarian dogmatics. Barth's doctrine of the church, in all of its varied and multi-faceted complexity, is best understood when its Christological logic is delineated and understood, and its strengths and deficiencies can be assessed more fairly and accurately when the deep substructure of Barth's doctrine of the church is more accurately mapped. Such is the claim and justification of this study.

The purpose of this work therefore influences its organization. Barth's ecclesiology (like his Christology and theology as a whole) did not arise *ex nihilo* in his thought, but was the result of theological development in a concrete historical and intellectual context of reflection, activity, and debate. Chapter two recounts the development of Barth's theology of the church in his early writings and as it came to expression in conflict with theological opponents on the left and on the right, Neo-Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Here it will become evident that it is precisely the lack of an adequate Christology in Barth's early theology that led to defects in his early ecclesiology. In chapter three, the emergence of Barth's Chalcedonian Christology is examined and its effect upon Barth's first dogmatic ecclesiology, articulated in his Göttingen lectures, is assessed. These two chapters form the historical backdrop of the following systematic investigation, a backdrop necessary to cast light upon Barth's mature ecclesiology, for his later thought was rooted in earlier struggles and never escaped their influence.[22] In chapters four and five we turn from primarily historical to systematic investigation, describing the close relationship between the doctrines of election and reconciliation within the *Church Dogmatics* and their bearing upon Barth's mature ecclesiology.[23] Chapter four examines the doctrine of election as the foundation of Barth's mature ecclesiology, with particular attention to the interrelation of election and Christology and their significance for Barth's ecclesiology. In chapter five the doctrine of reconciliation is examined as the context of Barth's mature ecclesiology, with particular attention to Barth's conception of

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[22]These chapters do not pretend to be exhaustive in presenting Barth's thinking on all church-related questions in his early years, but are only intended to present the early development of Barth's *doctrine* of the church, thus providing the historical background necessary for understanding Barth's mature ecclesiology. The same may be said for all the chapters that follow. For this reason, limited space and a definite purpose have required that various significant episodes pertaining to the question of the church, such as Barth's involvement in the German church struggle and his role in the ecumenical movement, be left largely unexamined.

[23]For the relationship between Barth's doctrines of election and reconciliation with particular regard to ecclesiology, see Hütter, *Evangelishe Ethik*, 25-105.

correspondence and understanding of history, and to their bearing upon ecclesiology. Chapters six, seven, and eight form the heart of this study and examine the questions of the nature, form, and mission of the church, respectively, with the first of the three focusing upon the relationship between the Spirit and the church, the second, upon the relationship between Christ and the church, and the third, upon the relationship between the church and the world. Barth himself divided his ecclesiology in the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics* into three sections, speaking of the gathering, the upbuilding, and the sending of the Christian community.[24] While each of our three chapters roughly corresponds to each of Barth's three ecclesiological sections, respectively, the relationships and issues described in each chapter are not exclusively limited to one of Barth's sections but cross their boundaries. After these three chapters, this study comes to a close with a final concluding chapter summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of Barth's doctrine of the church in light of recent evaluations of his ecclesiology and an assessment of these evaluations themselves.

Here an initial objection might be raised and should be addressed. Barth can state that the hypostatic union has no analogies.[25] If this be true, then an analogical application of Christological categories like the Chalcedonian pattern and the anhypostatic-enhypostatic formula to ecclesiology as here presented may be deemed questionable. In response, a number of points must be made.

First, Barth's statement itself must be clearly understood. Barth's insistence that the hypostatic union has no analogy means that there is no analogy for the incarnation in the created order such that it be construed as merely a type or exemplification of a more fundamental union of God and humanity. The hypostatic union of Christ is unique, singular, and irreplaceable, and therefore it must be understood solely on its own terms. One only knows Jesus Christ, Barth states, if one begins with the acknowledgment that no analogy exists to express 'his own being and becoming.'[26] The incarnation is therefore not an illustration of a more fundamental union between God and humanity (mystical, ethical, or other), but is itself the ground and basis for God's relationship with the world and thus for all other interactions between the Creator and the creature. In this sense, the hypostatic union can truly be said to have no analogy.

It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from this that Barth does not extend Christological patterns of thought beyond Christology proper. Barth does not negate, but reverses, analogical predication. While no analogy exists for the hypostatic union

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[24] *CD IV.1*, §62 — 'The Holy Spirit and the Gathering of the Christian Community'; *CD IV.2*, §67 — 'The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community'; *CD IV.3.2*, §72 — 'The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community.'

[25] See, for example, *CD IV.2*, 57-58.

[26] *CD IV.2*, 58.

in the created order, Barth does believe that this unique union serves as the source, foundation, and paradigm for all of God's ways with the world, and therefore is reflected in those relations. Make no mistake — the union of God and humanity in Christ for Barth is *sui generis* and has no true parallel. Yet, precisely because this singular relation is God's self-elected means to establish a covenant with all of creation, the incarnation is the pattern on which all other divine-human relations are predicated, though they stand on a different plane and exist only in subservience to and as shadows of this unsubstitutable event.

Barth therefore can say that the relation between Christ and the Christian stands 'in analogy to the mystery and miracle of Christmas,'[27] and that Christians exist in 'proximity to Him and therefore in analogy to what He is.'[28] Furthermore, Barth can explicitly attribute Christological formulas, such as the language of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*, to ecclesiological concerns such as the relation between Christ and the church.[29] Ecclesiology is thereby construed along Christological lines, and mistaken ecclesiologies likened to Christological heresies. Hence, the formal Christological patterns described above are not read into Barth or superimposed upon his thought, but arise out of his own concrete depictions of the church, and the remainder of this study will attempt to highlight the formal patterns by examining them in the actual material content of Barth's ecclesiology. The final refutation of this initial objection is therefore something that must await the end of our investigation. If such patterns are valid and useful, they are so only insofar as they arise out of Barth's own ecclesiological descriptions and in turn help us better understand them. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, so to speak.

One final clarification is in order. We must define what Barth means when he speaks of the 'church.' For Barth, the referent for the church is first and foremost the congregation of believers in a specific place and time, gathered by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, built up together into a common life of fellowship, entrusted with the task of worship, witness, and service, and sent into the world to fulfill this task. Barth thinks of the church more in terms of a *people* than an *institution*, as a personal congregation rather than as a bureaucratic organization, and this leads to his favoring of the term 'community' [*Gemeinde*] over the term 'church' [*Kirche*], the latter in German referring more to the polity and organization than to the personal

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[27]*CD IV*.3.2, 542; cf. 554.

[28]*CD IV.3.2*, 532. Barth later writes: 'Their new and distinctive being as Christians is their being in this real similarity, for all the dissimilarity, to His being as the Son of God' (*CD IV.3.2*, 533; see also 532-533).

[29]*CD IV.2*, 59-60; cf. *CD I.2*, 348.

fellowship that the first term expresses.[30] Barth could, however, use the latter term to express or include the concept of the former, and for this reason, in conjunction with the lack of such a nuanced distinction in English, these terms are here used interchangeably, their meaning to be interpreted by context.[31]

Barth could speak of the church not only as a local congregation (his primary manner of speaking of the church), or as an institution (a much more rare occurrence), but also as a universal fellowship, as the corporate body of God's people across spatial and temporal boundaries. The referent for Barth's term must be determined by context. For this reason, the words 'community' and 'church' will consistently be used in the lower-case, rather than in the upper-case (which in normal use generally refers to the universal church), though quotations will never change the capitalization of any translation cited. A similar rule applies to the use of inclusive language — while I have attempted to use gender-neutral terminology as much as possible, I have not changed any translations that follow more traditional usage. All quotations cited are from the standard English translations of Barth's works unless expressly noted to be my own, though references to the original German works are frequently included as deemed appropriate. Finally, this work came into existence through a slow process. Readers are gently encouraged to read slowly, and to read the notes.

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[30]See, for example, Barth's discussion of the difference between the terms in *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 37. Barth could elsewhere write: 'We assume that by the Christian community or Church is not meant an establishment or institution organised along specific lines, but the living people awakened and assembled by Jesus Christ as the Lord for the fulfillment of a specific task,' (*CD III.4*, 488). Barth's conception of the church was distinctively non-hierarchical — Barth had little regard for strong distinctions between clergy and laity, or for distinctive 'offices,' favoring an emphasis upon the ministry of service and witness entrusted to each member of the Christian community, extending even to the discipline of theology itself (see *CD III.4*, 488-490; 497-499; 505; cf. *CD IV.2*, 690-695).

[31]Barth speaks of the 'church' [*Kirche*] when he is discussing the church as a problem of theological prolegomena (*CD I.2*), whereas he speaks primarily of the 'community' [*Gemeinde*] when providing his formal ecclesiology. Whether this difference is due to the different topic at hand, or due to the time lapse between the writing of Volumes I and IV, is not entirely clear. See Sheldon W. Sorge, *Karl Barth's Reception in North America: Ecclesiology as a Case Study* (Unpubl. Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1987), 66-67. For a discussion of the multivalent character of the term 'church,' see Erwin Fahlbusch, 'Church,' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity: Volume 1 A-D*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, Jan M. Lochman, et al., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999; and Leiden: Brill, 1999), 477-478.