

CULTURAL  
TRANSFORMATION AND  
RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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*The governing question I: from what place does  
theology speak?*

In order to begin an enquiry into the relationship between Christian theology, cultural transformation and the formation of public accounts of what is true, I wish to pose and examine a specific question in this opening section: from where does theology speak? Since we are concerned here with the effects of discursive practices – writing sermons and treatises, church attendance, the living out of a Christian ethic, liturgies, acts of piety, etc. – then there are two aspects to answering this question.

The first is the personal – that is, it is persons who do these things in the context of and in relation to other persons. Even the solitary reading of the Bible or the act of lighting a candle is rendered meaningful only with respect to wider relational fields: my reading of the Bible is a discipline my tradition first informs and then (it is hoped I discover) is necessary for my salvation, for example; or I have been taught that my lighting a candle can be a significant part of an act of intercession or remembrance. These solitary acts only make sense to the persons doing them when they are viewed contextually, that is, in terms of wider intersubjective practices and the institutions that structure and facilitate them. As such solitary acts have public meanings and communal significances. They are not divorced from the institutions that have judged these acts significant, and disseminated this judgement among those attached to and constituting these institutions. They are not divorced from the knowledge that other people do them and regard them likewise as important.

The second aspect of that question concerning the whence of theology is, then, social – that is, the positioning of these discursive practices with respect to other practices that also have their sites of significance and organs for the dissemination of those significances. These other practices may amplify and supplement the significance of the theological act – the lighting of a candle is now a political action found in secular contexts of resistance to forms of hegemony: claiming the streets at night for women; vigils on behalf of Amnesty International and CND; protests

against the war in Iraq. These other practices may deny the significance of the theological act, so that in certain academic circles the teaching of Christian theology is an embarrassment in an institution committed to so-called objective strategies for teaching and learning knowledge. As a teacher of philosophy of religion, I was once told by an eminent analytical philosopher of mind that he saw what I was doing as harmless nonsense. Because, as far as he was concerned, there was no object to which the word 'religion' corresponded, and so philosophy committed to examining such a chimera was not philosophy at all. On the other hand, these other social practices may enhance or extend the theological significance of the act – lending to the contingency of a public protest a transcendent value.

To answer the governing question of this opening section, then, we will begin by examining these two aspects of any discursive activity: the personal and the social. Of course, this division between the personal and the social is heuristic: they are not purely isolatable positions. But the distinction between the personal act and the social event, in theological practices as in any set of practices, maintains an emphasis upon agency and inter-subjectivity. It will become increasingly important for my argument that, in the examination of what Foucault called the 'micro-physics of power'<sup>1</sup> and I would call cultural politics, we never treat anonymous and deterministic forces.

But it is at this point that a third aspect of the question 'From where does theology speak?' presents itself. For my examination so far has dealt with theology as a social and cultural activity; not as an activity claiming divine warrant for its undertaking. In other words, part of the self-understanding of those who practise Christian theology, any theology, is some account of their calling to be among the faithful and some appeal to the foundation of all theological discourse: a revelation that opens up a radical exteriority, a transcendent horizon. In Christian theology this is explicitly the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In order then to understand as fully as possible the relationship between Christian discourse and public beliefs in what is true we need also to give an account of the basis of the Christian account of truth: revelation. For the social activity of Christian practice is given its most comprehensive meaning only when viewed in terms of this transcendent origin and destiny; that is, the work of redemption in the world and the truth of the gospel. Of course, the social activity has other more local meanings – I light this candle in a prayer for this friend in this situation,

<sup>1</sup> *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 26.

I read this passage of Scripture because I have been asked to preach on it next Sunday, etc. – but these local and contingent meanings become ultimately significant on the basis of what is believed about the operation of God with respect to the individual, the Church and the world. Furthermore, in the Christian tradition, this appeal to revealed truth is not simply an appeal to Scripture – though the question of the relationship of revelation to *sacra pagina* is not at all irrelevant at this point. But Christian *doxa* has never held that the Scriptures gave direct access to the revelation of the divine and were themselves divine.<sup>2</sup> The Scriptures bear witness to but are not themselves the Word of God. However, neither has orthodox teaching simply held that the revelation of Jesus Christ is a past event attested in the Scriptures. The Christian tradition maintains that Christ reveals Himself today, in and through the work of the Church; which, following the Ascension and Pentecost, became the body of Christ. Revelation is an ongoing activity, unfolding with the world. The coming to an understanding of what is ‘revealed’ – which would include the discernment of one’s calling to a specific Christian practice – is inseparable then from a triple hermeneutical activity. First, with respect to interpreting the Scriptures; secondly with respect to the teaching of the Church; and thirdly, with a discernment of the contemporary work of Christ in the context of any activity undertaken. In other words, and this is the point I wish to labour, the coming to an understanding of what is ‘revealed’ in Christian theology, the arrival at the conviction of what one is called to do or the site from which theology speaks, is an interpretative undertaking. As such, it is an undertaking not divorced or even differing from other social activities in which one is involved. The belief in the transcendent operation of God in, through and upon the immanent orders of the world does not translate the enunciative site from which theology speaks *out of this world*. In brief, we cannot simply state that theology speaks from God. Christian teaching would accept a pneumatological and Christological basis for that speaking, that the Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16.13), but it would also accept an ecclesiological and anthropological basis for that speaking and recognise the limits and horizons of both those bases. Limits because of the finitude of human being and the operation of sin and ignorance in all human cultures; horizons because all human being is embedded in specific cultural and historical situations. On the other hand, one cannot reduce the

<sup>2</sup> There have been believers in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, particularly among conservative Protestants, but these have been a minority. They do not constitute a continuing tradition in Christian orthodoxy.

theological practice to just a social activity. There remains that within it that justifies and legitimates by referring the local action to what is 'ultimately significant'. The practice even provides a theological account of the relationship between the particular and the universal in the doctrine of all things existing in, that is participating in, Christ. Any Christian action (and for the Christian there can be no action which is not a Christian action) is undertaken 'in the name of' that which transcends the social, but it is conducted, examined and made sense of only in and with respect to the social. The very word 'action' indicates as much. The site from which theology speaks therefore has an ultimacy that can only be gauged, recognised, shared and comprehended in negotiation with all the other social activities (and the public truths they assert and contest) that inform it.

The interpretation of what has been revealed is interrelational. This does not necessarily compromise the truth of revelation – i.e., in the sense Emmanuel Levinas uses the word 'betrayal' when he describes the betrayal of the Saying in the Said.<sup>3</sup> Revelation would only be necessarily compromised if it were totally 'other' and external to the social and interrelational such that the division between truth and its cultural expression was both ontological and epistemological. But the revealed truth in Christian discourse is itself a historical (that is, social and cultural) event. The revelation was never merely other than the world, but given in and to the world – a world made and maintained by the goodness of God. The operation of faith as a hermeneutical activity with respect to this incarnate revelation, therefore, integrates that which is ultimate and transcendent in theological discourse with social activity and its cultural horizons.

To develop this analysis further, clarifying what is involved in the way social activity is implicated in cultural negotiation and undertaken by theological discourse, let us become specific by examining the work of one particular Christian and one kind of theological activity: Karl Barth and the academic pursuit of theology. This choice is obviously determined by my own interests and preoccupations (as is the question I have raised). But because his work was a major public undertaking still highly influential today other biographical and contextual information is also available. In examining the question 'From where does theology speak?' with reference

<sup>3</sup> See *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 16–20, 64–7, 78–86, 239–53. I would not wish to disagree with Levinas's account of the Said and the Saying completely. In particular, I believe Christian theology has much to learn and revisit in its own tradition by examining what Levinas terms the pass 'from the Said to Saying or the wisdom (*sagesse*) of desire' (p. 239).

to Barth we have then access to the personal, social and cultural aspects of his work. We can therefore render visible aspects both external and internal to his published work that manifest its involvement in wider cultural negotiations; its implication in a wider politics of discursive knowledge. Nevertheless, I am only taking him as an example, and it should be possible to extend the analysis to other kinds of persona in other kinds of theological roles: the parishioner and the priest. Barth has also been chosen because his work opens up, by offering a stern challenge to, a second part of the question that we will come to investigate. For he explicitly refutes the idea that theological discourse negotiates a place with respect to other cultural discourses. He denies any apologetic role for Christian theology at all. We shall see the impossibility of such a boast: cultural negotiation is always syncretistic. In fact, the very hope for cultural transformation lies within this syncretistic process.

#### HABITUS AND THE PRODUCTION OF A THEOLOGIAN

‘Barth’ names a place from which theological activity issued. It might seem peculiar to talk of persons in terms of places; to employ a spatial metaphor for a particular individual. I do so here in order to resist both the Romantic notions of the subject – the gifted genius, struggling against hostile forces to proclaim the truth – and the atomistic view of the subject in a contract-society (which goes back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). To put this in highly mechanistic (and Marxist) terms: Barth names a production site for a grand theological enterprise. I admit this depersonalises, even dehumanises, Karl Barth, but it is only a heuristic strategy for opening up a series of questions about Barth as an author of numerous theological tomes. Questions such as: does the theologian speak simply on the basis of self-appointment? Is the theologian one who is trained in the discipline of theology and, having reached a certain point, decides to ply that acquired skill in the market-place? Who is the theologian? Who designates this person or that *as* a theologian? On whose behalf does this theologian presume to speak? Who legitimises that speaking – calls it heresy or orthodoxy? Who positions that speaking alongside the speaking of other theologians, comparing this one to that, making critical judgements about the theological work done, situating the work with respect to schools of opinion or the tradition? Barth authored the *Church Dogmatics*, but who or what authorised his authoring? Why did Barth see himself *as* a theologian? What did he see when he saw himself as a theologian?

Who gave him this image of what a theologian was and what a theologian did and what a theologian's relations were with 'significant others'? Who were these 'significant others' who were addressed by the theologian?

I begin with Karl Barth because he gives us a concrete answer to the complex question 'From where does theology speak?' In examining this one concrete example it will also immediately become evident that there are as many specific answers to this governing question as there are theologians. And what does that then say about the nature of theology? With regards to Barth, there have been a number of excellent contextual studies of his work,<sup>4</sup> but the examination I offer differs from theirs. Mostly they are concerned with Barth's political views or with the influences upon the development of his theology, but, for my purposes, it is not simply that any thesis or argument will reflect or have social and political assumptions and consequences. In a small but perceptive appreciation of Barth's work in America, Marty E. Martin points to how Barth's theology 'will live as fashions come and go'.<sup>5</sup> He reflects upon how, as a consequence of World War II, Barth's thinking was pre-eminent, but by the early 1950s and the ascendance of the affluent society, despite the Cold War, McCarthyism and the Korean War, 'we worked in an atmosphere not then conducive to Barth studies'.<sup>6</sup> It is what defines and structures these 'atmospheres' and the fashions that are conducive and non-conducive to the reception of certain ideas that I wish to examine. I want to examine how the assumptions and consequences that are embedded as hidden possibilities in a project can, because the project itself is embedded in the complex forces between different fields of cultural production, gain a cultural legitimacy, authority, even hegemony – or else become irrelevant. But let us proceed systematically, by first mapping out the making of this subject-position

<sup>4</sup> See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theologie und Socialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths* (3rd edn; Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985); George Hunsinger (ed.), *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Ralph P. Crimmann, *Karl Barths frühe Publikationen und ihre Rezeption* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981); Simon Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism? Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Timothy Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> 'Barth' in Donald Kim (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. See also Paul S. Minear, 'Rich Memories, Huge Debts' in the same collection (pp. 47–51). Minear confesses he was more allergic at first to Barth than attracted, but 'the cumulative impact of the Depression and World War II... disclosed the bankruptcy of liberal Protestantism and its reliance on historical reason' (p. 48).



from which Barth spoke as a theologian. I cannot go into too much detail here, though I will point to where these details are available. Only a sketch is required to demonstrate my point and illustrate my approach.

To facilitate this sketch I wish to draw on the work of the anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In particular I wish to make use of three terms that he has developed and employed – *habitus*, field and capital – to investigate the construction of a public space from which a theologian speaks. We will treat these terms as and when we require them. With *habitus* Bourdieu refers to that ‘system of dispositions’<sup>7</sup> we both inherit and into which we are socialised. As such, a sociological analysis of *habitus* can involve a number of quite distinct social scientific approaches – social theory, social field work, cultural anthropology, history, biography, discourse analysis, even psychology. For example, Bourdieu’s analysis of the literary work of Flaubert draws heavily upon the cultural history of nineteenth-century France, literary criticism, biography and collections of letters by authors or artists,<sup>8</sup> in order to define what he refers to as ‘a community of dispositions’<sup>9</sup>. Bourdieu points out that, ‘If agents are possessed by their habitus more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organising principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself only in the *opus operatum*.’<sup>10</sup> But what Bourdieu’s approach to examining culture facilitates is an analysis of the organising principles of an action – with respect to Flaubert, a discursive action. And so we are able to grasp something of the place from which Flaubert’s work (in this case *L’Education sentimentale*) speaks. Now the danger with such a description is determinism, that is, that there is little room left for assessment of the personal contribution made by the author. But keeping in mind this danger, and wishing to avoid it by focusing significantly upon the work of this one man, Karl Barth, we can proceed as Bourdieu did to uncover the cultural and social conditions for the possibility of certain thoughts, practices, values and evaluations. For the examination of *habitus* allows Bourdieu access to what he calls the governing social ‘structures’ that organise the space from

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, tr. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, tr. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), esp. pp. 1–112.

<sup>9</sup> *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

which one acts. In a lecture given in 1986, Bourdieu speaks of his project as ‘genetic structuralism’ which is ‘designed to understand both the genesis of social structures . . . and the genesis of the dispositions of the habitus of the agents who are involved in the structures’.<sup>11</sup> I suggest that we can employ his approach, then, to enable us to see something of the place from which theology speaks with respect to a particular theologian, Karl Barth.

### The man

We have resources now for approaching Karl Barth’s *habitus* in some depth. There are a number of studies of both Wilhelmine and Weimar culture<sup>12</sup> and of Christian socialism in both Germany and Switzerland throughout the formative years when Barth was making a reputation for himself as a theologian. There is the biographical work, of course, of his last secretary, Eberhard Busch.<sup>13</sup> There is also a psychological study of Barth by Wolfgang Schildmann,<sup>14</sup> the publication of his letters to Thurneysen, Bultmann, Harnack, Miskotte, Rade and Zuckermayer, alongside an

<sup>11</sup> ‘Field of Power, Literary Field and Habitus’, tr. Claud DeVerlie, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Most significantly for English-speakers: George Rupp, *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977); W.R. Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics: The German Protestant Social Conscience, 1890–1933* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1979); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968); Keith Bullivant (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977); T. Kniesche and S. Brockmann (eds.), *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic* (Columbia: Camden, 1994); Mark D. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> The following have been consulted: *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, tr. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); ‘Autobiographical Sketches of Karl Barth’ in *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann: Letters 1922–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, tr. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982); ‘Memories of Karl Barth’ (an interview made in November 1985) in Donald Kim (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 9–14; ‘Theologie und Biographie: das Problem des Verhältnisses der beiden Größen in Karl Barths Theologie’, *Evangelische Theologie* no.6 (1986), 325–9; ‘Deciding Moments in the Life and Work of Karl Barth’, trs. Martin Rumscheidt and Barbara Rumscheidt, *Grail*, no.2 (1986), 51–67; ‘Gelebte theologische Existenz bei Karl Barth’ in Heidelore Köckert and Wolf Krötke (eds.), *Theologie als Christologie: Zum Werk und Leben Karl Barths: Ein Symposium* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), pp. 170–92. See also Hans Frei’s essay ‘Eberhard Busch’s Biography of Karl Barth’ in George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (eds.), *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 147–63.

<sup>14</sup> *Was sind das für Zeichen? Karl Barths Träume im Kontext von Leben und Lehre* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1991).

assortment of letters, both personal and open, from 1945–68, and the biographical excavations of Renata Köbler and Suzanne Selinger.<sup>15</sup> The letters point to a disposition Selinger views as fundamental to Barth's theological thinking – his need of dialogue partners, even, as with Brunner, if these partners are to be critically assailed.

In 1986, Busch published the first attempt to correlate biography and theology, but its attention to personal history does not examine the 'schemes of *habitus*', those internalised 'signs, indices and sanctions'.<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of his thorough study of Barth's early theological development, Bruce McCormack raises the question, 'What was it that drove Barth?' He answers it by developing an answer given to that same question by Dieter Schellong: 'Expectation joined with an eschatological conditioned longing.'<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, a theologian's answer. For Barth's massive productivity also attests to an ambitious man driven by a passion to excel. In 1957, his son Markus can still write of his father's 'furious energy'.<sup>18</sup> Conscious, half-conscious, unconscious, theologically interpreted dispositions are negotiated with respect to other culturally nurtured ones. As Tim Gorringer points out, 'Barth came from a well established middle-class family, with many notable nineteenth century preachers and theologians among his ancestors.'<sup>19</sup> Though this statement can seem fairly anodyne, it in fact sums up any number of internalised values about education (of a certain conservative Protestant, that is, Pietistic kind),<sup>20</sup> social, economic and professional expectations, and particular images and associations of what a preacher's work and what a theologian's work were. The kind of theology Barth developed cannot be separated from the internalisation of the cultural values and systems that nurtured him and his response to those of which he was conscious. His Christian socialism, for example, may have first surfaced when he encountered 'the miserable living conditions of the working classes'<sup>21</sup> in his Geneva assistant pastorate or when he arrived at the industrial village of Safenwil as its pastor in 1911

<sup>15</sup> Renata Köbler, *Schattenarbeit: Charlotte von Kirschbaum. Die Theologin an der Seite Karl Barths* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1987); Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 31–2.

<sup>18</sup> *New Christian Advocate*, no.8 (May 1957), p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth und die Pietisten: Die Pietismuskritik des jungen Karl Barths und ihre Erwidernung* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1978).

<sup>21</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 80.

and began reading the Religious Socialism of Werner Sombart and Hermann Kutter, but it was also in part the legacy of his father Fritz<sup>22</sup> – also an academic theologian. Furthermore, it was no accident that this socialism was awoken on his return to Switzerland, for the *Kulturprotestantismus* of Wilhelmine Germany was not fertile soil at the time for the development of Religious Socialism.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Busch observes how being Swiss had important implications for Barth's later thinking and acting when back in Germany – impeding certain forms of political engagement and fostering a detachment from Weimar culture and its turbulent politics. Models of what theology was and what a theologian did were on hand – from his father, to his influential catechist, Robert Aeschbacher,<sup>24</sup> to his revered teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann,<sup>25</sup> to the fiery socialism of Leon Ragaz and the Blumhardts, Christoph and Johann.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, *habitus* is not static. Other values and beliefs about social reality emerge, changing or challenging established patterns. McCormack dates an important theological change that takes place in Barth and is reflected in his sermons of 1913. Barth's vision becomes darker and more apocalyptic.<sup>27</sup> Of course, war is being rumoured throughout Europe, and Barth is being stirred by the activism of the Swiss socialist movement, but McCormack forgets to mention two significant biographical and psychological factors. First, in 1912 Barth's father had died suddenly, the man of whom Barth later said 'I undoubtedly owe [to him] the presuppositions of my later relation to theology'.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, it was the year of Barth's marriage to Nelly Hoffmann, a marriage that was 'troubled and unhappy almost from the start'.<sup>29</sup> It was a marriage 'largely engineered by his mother'<sup>30</sup> and as it gets worse so Barth begins to write more theology.

<sup>22</sup> Fritz Barth knew the father of the Religious Socialist movement, Hermann Kutter, while Kutter studied for his doctorate in Berne. Later Thurneysen was again a link between Karl Barth and Kutter.

<sup>23</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth, His Life*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Barth recorded it was this man who led him to study theology at university. See Busch, 'Autobiographical Sketches of Karl Barth', p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> Barth writes that with Herrmann 'my own independent interest in theology began'. See 'The Principles of Dogmatics according to Wilhelm Herrmann' in *Theology and Church*, tr. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM, 1962), p. 238.

<sup>26</sup> On the importance of Ragaz and the Blumhardts, see Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life*, pp. 83–92. The importance of Eduard Thurneysen should not be underestimated here. He was a personal friend of the Blumhardts.

<sup>27</sup> *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 92–104.

<sup>28</sup> Busch, 'Autobiographical Sketches of Karl Barth', p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth*, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Later Barth will meet Charlotte von Kirschbaum, a companion whom he viewed as a miracle of God's grace to end his loneliness. She came to live with Nelly and himself, and she has increasingly been recognised as important for not just his emotional but his intellectual formation.

The systems of internalised significances that make up *habitus* are continually in negotiation with new experiences and encounters. The point being made here is that one speaks from out of a *habitus*, the theologian as much as anyone else. And the *habitus* is culturally constituted. In his own reflection on the difficulties of writing the biography of a Christian, particularly a Christian whose work has become so influential, Eduard Busch writes significantly about how Barth himself insisted on the distinction between the person and the theological work: 'Selbstverständlich steht für Barth auch hinter der Befolgung des Rufs zur Sache jeweils ein Mensch. Aber er steht für ihn so dahinter und muss so dahinter zurückstehen, dass zwischen Sache und Person zu unterscheiden ist und das erstere stets den Vorrang vor dem zweiten hat.' Nevertheless, Busch goes on to say, 'Mann kann nicht seine Theologie Ernst nehmen und sei bei Betrachtung seiner Person suspendieren.'<sup>31</sup> Illustrating his argument with examples that Barth himself acknowledged, Busch goes on to show how the person and the work are profoundly interconnected ('verfilzt') and that the person works within 'ihrer sozialpsychologischen Bedingtheit und Standortgebundenheit'. In fact what freedom that person has is conditioned by 'soziale, psychologische, zeitgeschichtliche Faktoren'<sup>32</sup>. The corollary of this recognition of *habitus* is not the disappearance of agency. Barth still authors his massive theological tomes – and a question arises as to why he so insisted upon the distinction between a person and their work. But agency is understood as embedded in a series of social dispositions and practices. These dispositions and practices are all forms of relation – relation to others, to the meanings, values, histories and actions of others. As Charles Taylor reminds us, 'to be a living agent is to experience one's situation in terms of certain meanings';<sup>33</sup> meanings socially produced and negotiated. Barth's theology is not simply then an autonomous event, authored by Barth: it is also a cultural event with a public meaning. It cannot be reduced to either individual genius or a product of a certain set of sociological conditions.

<sup>31</sup> 'Gelebte theologische Existenz bei Karl Barth', p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 27.

As Bourdieu explains, *habitus* as 'systems of dispositions, are effectively realized only in relation to a determinate structure of positions socially marked by the social properties of their occupants, through which they manifest themselves'.<sup>34</sup> As such, each agent is situated in what Bourdieu calls a 'space of social possibles'<sup>35</sup> that establish what it is possible to know, do, or think. This historical, material and cultural embeddedness Bourdieu examines in terms of the different fields of cultural production that compose this space of possibilities. These fields are understood as discrete and homogenous 'universe[s] of belief'.<sup>36</sup>

What do I mean by 'field'? As I use the term, a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics or economics. The existence of a writer, as a fact and as a value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works . . . [T]here accumulates a particular form of capital and . . . relations of force of a particular type are exerted . . . [T]his autonomous universe functions somewhat like a prism which *refracts* every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works.<sup>37</sup>

To begin to understand then the place from which Barth speaks we need to examine the social structures that enabled Barth to manifest, develop and modify the dispositions constituting his *habitus*. Born and raised in Basle, in 1904 Barth began to study theology at the University of Berne. Busch notes how belonging to 'societies' such as Zofingia at the University of Berne put Barth into contact with 'an impressive array of academics or potential academics. Especially in the Basle section, he made the acquaintance of people with whom for other reasons he was to have very close connections at a later date'.<sup>38</sup> In 1908, when he had spent a semester at Marburg, one of his teachers, Martin Rade, asked him to join the editorial team of the journal *Die Christliche Welt*. The journal had been running for over twenty years and was 'perhaps the most influential theological journal in Germany at the time'.<sup>39</sup> It presented Barth with an opportunity to publish his first work. Through his socialising and educational training among his bourgeois peers, Barth was being networked; he was

<sup>34</sup> *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162–4.

<sup>38</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life*, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 37–8.

participating in and establishing himself within a field of symbolic production. He was developing those practices of evaluation that would enable him to situate himself and others theologically.

But he was to be trained as a pastor. He was not trained to be a professional theologian, like Bultmann. So what then makes Barth into a professional theologian? Only to some extent was it his formal training at the Universities of Berne, Berlin, Tübingen or Marburg. He was evidently marked out as an intellectual leader in being invited to assist with the editing of *Die Christliche Welt*, and as early as 1909/10 was addressing conferences of pastors and students and publishing articles in another influential journal, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*. But when he was appointed to the University of Göttingen in October 1922, he did not have a doctorate and continued to feel intellectually insecure on account of his lack of appropriate training.<sup>40</sup> That intellectual insecurity never surfaces in his prose style; there he is a man of steely decisiveness. But it surfaces in other ways, most notably the way he is threatened by the academic backgrounds of people like Bultmann and Brunner and the manner in which he responds to them – albeit by theological means. Wolfgang Schildmann points out, ‘Barth, der weder Doktorarbeit noch Habilitationsschrift vorweisen kann, und in akademischen Lehramt periodisch mit schweren Minderwertigkeitsgefühlen zu kämpfen hat, fühlt sich durch Brunner systematisiert und theologisch vereinnahmt.’<sup>41</sup> His doctorate was honorary and bestowed later by the University of Münster on the basis of the first edition of his *Der Römerbrief*. But once established, the education system that produced Barth as a professor of theology then disseminates him through its various networks, finally establishing through those practices of evaluation a canonical value for his work, such that today there are probably very few courses in modern Christian theology that do not require critical attention be paid to the work of Karl Barth.

To attain a position of authority, he must first demonstrate what is different about his work. What is significant in taking command of a cultural field is the degree of competition that needs to be engaged in. Bourdieu does not quite lead us to believe the social world is Hobbesian, but if cultural politics are not about survival they are about recognition.

<sup>40</sup> See Busch, ‘Autobiographical Sketches of Karl Barth’, p. 156 and Barth’s letter to Thurneysen of 18 March 1921.

<sup>41</sup> *Was sind das für Zeichen?* p. 147. Schildmann examines Barth’s ideal and unthreatening relationship with Thurneysen (who also had neither doctorate nor *Habilitationsschrift*) at pp. 19–36.

Barth was pugnacious from the beginning; pugnacious by temperament. In fact, he records that in his teenage years ‘martial interests were at the center of my intellectual development’.<sup>42</sup> And of the years between 1921 and 1924, when he was establishing himself as an academic, Barth acknowledged they were difficult because ‘as the champion of a new trend in theology, I had to vindicate and protect myself in the form of lectures and public discussions of every kind’.<sup>43</sup>

The combative element finds clear expression in the polemical style of both his editions of *Der Römerbrief* (1919 and 1922). Both volumes can be viewed as violent acts of intellectual parricide, as he marks out his distinctive theological territory with respect to teachers such as Harnack and Herrmann. The parricide is clothed in a moral and righteous indignation at what Barth felt was a betrayal of the gospel in 1914 by those teachers who openly gave their approval for the war.<sup>44</sup> But if the ‘betrayal’ had not taken place the act of parricide would still have been necessary. Barth continues to sharpen the edges of his theological distinctiveness. Using his connections with *Die Christliche Welt*, in 1923 he launched an open debate between the old and the new schools of Protestant theological thinking, focused around an exchange between Harnack and himself. Harnack opened the struggle, but then the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* is at times a sustained and explicit attack on Harnack. The result of this debate was decisive; the old school no longer maintained a dominant cultural position. In Bourdieu’s terms, there was no more capital to be made from struggling with them. The ‘positioning’ that follows this debate proceeds by teasing out the new debates.

We can observe this ‘positioning’ as it takes place throughout the mid to late 1920s on three fronts. The first front is an attack on the younger representatives of liberal Protestantism – public exchanges in *Theologische Blätter* with Paul Tillich and in *Das Neue Werk* with Paul Althaus. His second front is his relationship to Roman Catholicism, following his move to the Catholic city of Münster in 1925. The third front is with respect to his dialectical colleagues. As McCormack notes with respect to one of Barth’s new sparing partners: ‘Barth was increasingly coming to regard Catholicism as his major opponent, rather than liberal Protestantism.’<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Busch, ‘Autobiographical Sketches of Karl Barth’, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>44</sup> See Barth’s ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher’ in *Karl Barth, Theologian of Freedom: Selected Writings*, ed. Clifford Green (London: Collins, 1991), p. 70.

<sup>45</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 376.



What is at stake in the new positioning is a widening of the fields of Barth's intellectual operations, for whether attacking the old-style Protestantism or its new dialectical versions, the debates were within the Reformation tradition. With his encounter with Roman Catholicism – particularly his encounter with the Polish Jesuit, Erich Przywara, and an immersion in the work of Augustine and Aquinas – Barth is situating himself as a theologian for Western Christianity. To understand what opened this 'space of possibles' between Barth and Roman Catholicism we need to step back a little. It was not simply Barth arriving in Münster. The space had already been prepared by the state of German Catholicism after World War I. The conservatism of Catholic thinking at the time, particularly its condemnation of modernism in the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Domini gregis*, circumscribed a position not at all antithetical to Barth's attacks on liberal Protestantism.<sup>46</sup> In particular Barth, like the Roman Catholics, was against historicism and progressivism and advocated a theocentrism that constituted 'le rapproche de la redécouverte du thomisme chez catholiques'.<sup>47</sup> In an essay published in *Hochland*, the Catholic theologian Karl Adam at Tübingen observed with respect to liberal Protestantism and the effect of crisis theology that it seemed 'a desert of dry sand over which the hot wind of provocative critique passed at top speed'.<sup>48</sup> In fact, German-speaking Catholic theologians had taken notice of Barth's second edition of *Der Römerbrief* from 1923 onwards.<sup>49</sup> The threat Barth identified in Roman Catholicism cannot be entirely separated from the new threat Roman Catholicism posed to German Protestantism, particular the weak, liberal

<sup>46</sup> See H. Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner verstehen: Eine Einführung in sein Leben und Denken* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1985), pp. 72–7 and Karl Adam, 'Die Theologie der Krisis', *Hochland*, no.23 (June 1926), 271–86. Adam explicitly draws the parallel between the role played in Protestant theology by the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* and the encyclical.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Corset, 'Premières rencontres de la théologie catholique avec l'oeuvre de Barth (1922–32)' in Pierre Gisel (ed.), *Karl Barth: genèse et réception de sa théologie* (Geneva: Labor Fides, 1987), pp. 151–90, p. 157.

<sup>48</sup> 'Die Theologie der Krisis', p. 271.

<sup>49</sup> It began with Przywara's essay 'Gottes in uns oder über uns? (Immanenz und Transcendenz im heutigen Geistesleben)', in the Catholic theological journal *Stimmen der Zeit*, no.105 (1923), 342–62. It continued with Joseph Engert's 'Metaphysik und Historismus im Christentum', *Hochland*, no.21 (1923–4), 507–17. Przywara persisted in thinking out the Catholic differences with respect to Barth in essays published in *Stimmen der Zeit* (he was on the editorial board) between 1924 and 1934. Karl Adam also joined in the debate in 1926, with his essay 'Die Theologie der Krisis'. The focus of these rapprochements increasingly became the nature of analogy. In 1934, Barth's Catholic colleague at the University of Bonn, Gottlieb Söhngen, published two essays on the topic in *Catholica*, but it was Przywara's pupil, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who furnished the most detailed examination and critique of Barth's work, in his 1951 volume *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Verlag Jakob Hegner).

Protestantism. For with the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the Protestant Church lost its state protection, and there were indications of a Catholic renewal in spirituality and liturgy.<sup>50</sup> Barth's response was typically, and necessarily, definitive. Once the issue of *analogia entis* came to the forefront of his discussions with Przywara, then, having acquainted himself with the writing of the early Church fathers, he pronounced that, to his mind, the *analogia entis* was the invention of the Antichrist.

At the same time these debates with Catholics continued, both outside (in private correspondence) and inside the pages of *Zwischen den Zeiten*, the tensions in the school of dialectical theology were becoming more manifest. The centre of Barth's criticism against the 'pillars' of dialectical theology is here, as with Roman Catholicism, *analogia entis*, although it is not called that to begin with. It is called 'natural theology'. In the background of this theological disagreement lie the differences of being brought up within the frameworks of Lutheranism (Gogarten and Bultmann) or the Reformed Church (Barth, Brunner and Thurneysen): *habitus*, again.

It began with Barth separating himself from Friedrich Gogarten. The separation can be seen evolving in the letters Barth wrote to Thurneysen between 1924 and 1930. The relationship begins on a high note on 16 June 1920. In fact, it is following a visit from and discussions with Gogarten that Barth sees the new direction the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* must take.<sup>51</sup> But, significantly, in a letter dated 21 July 1924, Barth writes that Gogarten 'einen ganz andern (tragisch-aristokratisch-eschatologische-esoterischen) Begriff... von "Zw.d.Z." in Besondern hat als ich'.<sup>52</sup> Two years later, in a frank exchange with Eduard Thurneysen, Barth can write about both Bultmann and Gogarten 'im Einzelnen sind [Sie] mir immer merkwürdig unfasslich',<sup>53</sup> while, four years later, he writes to Bultmann, 'I would find it hard to deny that he is not congenial to me *kata sarka*, since he plans his essays and books in a way that would be intolerable to me and above all I find in and behind him everything that is abhorrent to me in Luther.'<sup>54</sup> The open debate between them focused on

<sup>50</sup> See E. Przywara, 'Neue Religiosität' in *Ringel der Gegenwart*, Band I (Ausburg: Benno Filser-Verlag, 1929), pp. 48–78 and R. Patry, *La religion dans l'Allemagne d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Payot, 1926).

<sup>51</sup> See letters of 16 June and 27 October 1920 in *Karl Barth–Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*. Band I, 1913–1921 (Zurich: TVZ, 1973).

<sup>52</sup> *Karl Barth–Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*. Band II, 1921–1930 (Zurich: TVZ, 1974), p. 264.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 June 1926, p. 424.

<sup>54</sup> Letter of 12 June 1928 in *Karl Barth – Rudolph Bultmann: Letters 1922–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), pp. 40–3. The whole letter is a scathing attack on Gogarten.

books they had both published and erupted into the pages of *Zwischen den Zeiten* in 1929.

Barth's differences with Bultmann are much more difficult to determine. Their theological differences became increasingly apparent, first, on the publication of Bultmann's book *Jesus* (1926), which Barth did not like,<sup>55</sup> and then on the publication of Barth's *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, I: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (1927), about which Bultmann had reservations.<sup>56</sup> But from the beginning of their relationship an undercurrent surfaces as Bultmann persistently appeals for Barth to visit him in Marburg to talk through their differences and Barth is equally persistent in prevaricating. Perhaps of all the other 'competitors' in the field of dialectical theology that had been created, Barth recognised Bultmann as his intellectual equal. Certainly, it is difficult not to see that Barth treated Bultmann at least discourteously. Plaintively Bultmann writes on 16 February 1930, 'I... hope [this] is the beginning of the serious debate that we have unfortunately avoided thus far.' He adds, 'I merely ask you to do me the favor of real criticism.'<sup>57</sup> He even offers to organise a meeting between Barth, Brunner, Gogarten, Thurneysen and himself to discuss their differences in private, claiming that Gogarten and Brunner have 'often suggested' such a meeting.<sup>58</sup> But, although Barth accepts at first, through various complexities (including the fact that Gogarten cannot attend) Barth eventually withdraws. On the 2 October 1930, Bultmann pleads with Barth to come to Marburg to a conference on natural theology that Barth had accepted the invitation to speak at. But on the 3 October Barth insists he cannot come and asks Bultmann to explain this to the conference delegates.<sup>59</sup> It is plain that Barth is simply going his own way. In April 1927 he is already speaking to Bultmann about how he 'would rather pursue my own course as you are all doing – and Gogarten brilliantly!'.<sup>60</sup> The irony about Gogarten is perhaps telling – was Barth jealous of Gogarten? Certainly Wolfgang Schildmann notes how Barth employs the ironic voice whenever he is threatened by a rival.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Bultmann's letter of 10 December 1926 in *ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, exchange of letters 24 and 26 May and 8 and 12 June 1928, pp. 34–43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–3.

<sup>61</sup> *Was Sind das für Zeichen?*, pp. 148–9.

These are the practices of evaluation and self-promotion that reach a climax in Barth's debate with Brunner. Again the roots of Barth's disquiet with Brunner go back to 1923<sup>62</sup> and surface in a review of Brunner's book *Die Mystik und das Wort* in the second edition of the journal for dialectical theology that had been established in the same year, *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Brunner had in fact been involved in the establishment of the journal. Barth begins their theological collaboration with some hesitancy. Six years later, Brunner publicly calls Barth's theology into question in a 1929 article, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie'. But the famous exchange takes place in 1934, Barth having severed his connections with *Zwischen den Zeiten* in 1933. What is significant, with respect to Barth's desire to pursue his own course, is Brunner's comment near the beginning of his contribution to the debate, 'Nature and Grace': 'If I reproach Barth with anything at all it is with this, that he would like it best to carry out this guardian's duty [for the Church against heresy] alone, and that if anyone wishes to call his attention to a mistake he is not ready to believe that he, Barth, could be in error.'<sup>63</sup> In his reply Barth denies this desire to be the sole defender of the Church's truth, but it is the very danger that he sees in Brunner's work above all that he feels he must denounce: 'I am not wantonly branding him as a heretic, but that really is how the matter stands.'<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, twice in the reply Barth speaks of Brunner's success among other theologians.<sup>65</sup> Schildmann examines the 'komplexe Psychodrama zwischen Barth und Brunner' as a playing out by Barth of his own difficult relationships with his younger brothers Peter and Heinrich: 'Barth macht den Herrschaftsanspruch des Ältesten gegenüber Brunner.'<sup>66</sup> Brunner was more than three years younger than Barth and academically far more qualified. 'Für Barth als den Ältesten ist es . . . eine das ganze Leben bestimmende Erfahrung, vom Nachgeborenen "entthront" worden zu sein. Die Furcht vor dem Verlust von Macht and Würdestellung macht ihm misstrauisch und sensible für mögliche Rivalen.'<sup>67</sup>

So, enmeshed within the practices of a *habitus* that is cultural, theological, political, ecclesiastical and psychological, by 1930 Barth does stand

<sup>62</sup> Karl Barth—Eduard Thurneysen *Briefwechsel*, Band I, p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace' by Emil Brunner and the Reply 'No!' by Karl Barth*, tr. Peter Fränkel (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, particularly p. 72.

<sup>66</sup> *Was Sind das für Zeichen?*, p. 147.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

alone and as a 'champion of a new trend in theology'. He commands a distinctive position in the theological field of cultural production. As he writes to Bultmann in February of that year: 'What I heard from you ties in . . . with the basically uncongenial article on anthropology by Gogarten, and finally Brunner's eristics, to form a pattern which I might have spotted earlier . . . From my standpoint all of you . . . represent a large scale return to the fleshpots of Egypt.'<sup>68</sup> And it is from this point that work begins on the massive *Church Dogmatics* that preoccupies him for the rest of his life. The position he now occupies is theologian to the Church – not the Protestant or the Reformed Church, but Church in its most catholic sense. Writing from a room in Rome, looking out over the Vatican City, Barth declares he is now the spokesperson for 'the ultimate truth that must be guarded and defended in the Evangelical Church'.<sup>69</sup>

It is at this point (*circa* 1930) that around Barth there develops a geography of Barthianism outside Germany and Switzerland. Certain countries become prominent in the reception of Barth: Scotland, the east coast of the United States, Hungary and Holland, most particularly.<sup>70</sup> The establishment, and further enhancement, of a position, once it is gained, is marked by the awards his work wins, the honorary doctorates and *Festschriften* he receives, the prestigious lecture series he is asked to deliver, the number of translations made of his work, and the invitations to lecture internationally. These are fruits of the practices of evaluation that he himself employed in the production of his own work. Now they are being employed with respect to that work. A Barth industry is created. The production processes are part of the institutional practices, themselves situated with respect to other institutional practices, that produce Karl Barth, the theologian; or rather produce what Bourdieu would term the 'capital' of his work and his name.

By the term 'capital' Bourdieu identifies the character of social and cultural power, its distribution and its employment. There are four forms of such capital. There is economic capital – property, money in the bank, and various other forms of valued collateral. There is cultural capital – education, for example, with certain forms and levels of education being more valuable than others. There is social capital – influential connections

<sup>68</sup> *Karl Barth – Rudolph Bultmann: Letters 1922–1966*, p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> *Natural Theology*, p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> On the reception of Barth among the French see Bernard Reymond, *Théologien ou prophète? les francophones et Karl Barth avant 1945* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1985) and Pierre Gisel, 'Receptions protestantes et questions ouvertes' in *Karl Barth: genèse et réception de sa théologie*.

you have with others who may be more powerful in any related or relevant field. There is symbolic capital – the accumulation of prestige, celebrity and honour that is produced through the dialectic between knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*). These forms of capital are not reducible to economic terms. In fact they operate in, and are to some extent legacies of, pre-economic sociality. But Bourdieu does see a correlation between material wealth and these other forms of capital. The cultural field is composed, then, of any number of competitions for these forms of capital. Bourdieu writes that ‘the principle of competition’ in the social field is ‘the principle of all truly social energy’ and is ‘productive of the agents who act’.<sup>71</sup> It is evident from the biographical details I have sketched that Barth’s cultural power operated in, through and with social, cultural and symbolic capital so that eventually he is not the only person generating and using that capital – others do it for him.

For, having established that authority among and beyond his peers, through his peers, Tom Torrance can answer the question, ‘Who is this theologian?’, posed hypothetically by an English-speaking audience, with: ‘Karl Barth is the greatest theological genius that has appeared on the scene for centuries. He cannot be appreciated except in the context of the greatest theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, nor can his thinking be adequately measured except in the context of the history of theology and philosophy.’<sup>72</sup> Outstripping his twentieth-century context, Barth is now vying for a position in the diachronic, rather than just the synchronic, operations of the theological field. But what is important is a shift from self-production to the production of a culture and historical position by other people (who traffic in his name and share then some of his back-reflected kudos). Torrance, well placed as Professor of Christian Dogmatics in the University of Edinburgh, was marketing this man for British theology in the early 1960s.<sup>73</sup> He has become what Bourdieu termed a “symbolic banker” who offers as security all the symbolic capital he [himself] has

<sup>71</sup> ‘The Philosophical Establishment’ in Alan Montefiore (ed.), *Philosophy in France Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Introduction’ to Karl Barth, *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928*, tr. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM, 1962), p. 7. Of course Torrance had written the important and influential book *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology*, in 1962 and concluded this cultural dissemination of Barth’s work in his 1990 volume, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*.

<sup>73</sup> Barth first visited Edinburgh in the summer of 1930, having come to Scotland to receive an honorary doctorate from Glasgow University. He made a second visit in 1937. In 1956 he was given an honorary doctorate from Edinburgh University.

accumulated (which he is liable to forfeit if he backs a “loser”).<sup>74</sup> The marketing continues, as the institutions produce exegetes and critics who will position themselves with respect to each other, warring between them for who has the right to speak for Barth. The cultural politics, for example, of contemporary Barthian studies is complex and career-making (or damaging). Axes of academic power exist – Princeton, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, King’s London, for example – that seek to maintain a Barthian orthodoxy and an idealist approach to dogmatics over against other ‘softer-bellied’ appropriations and applications: those of some Yale School post-Liberals, Barthian deconstructionists or Barthian contextualists, for example. There are various organisations, journals, seminars, book series, web-pages and conferences through which this power is exercised, and its capital maintained and invested for the future. There now attaches to the very name Karl Barth a public meaning that need not necessarily be supported by any reading of his work. Carl Zuckmayer testifies to this when, having been sent a letter by a now retired Karl Barth in 1967, he replies: ‘It would be a scandal for a writer like myself not to know and respect you. For a long time your work and activity and position have been of particular significance to me so far as I have read about them or had experience of them. To be sure, I have not read your *Church Dogmatics* and I am theologically unsophisticated.’<sup>75</sup> Barth is read about rather than read. It is a ‘scandal’ for a literary figure of Zuckmayer’s own status not to ‘know and respect’ the man. The name Karl Barth has become public property. It is attached to a figure who has surpassed the field in which he worked, and the institutions that structure that field, to become a cultural icon in the post-War Swiss and German intellectual scenes.

It is at this point that another transformation in the reception of Barth’s work and the production of an international theologian takes place. As Barth becomes commodified and traded as an icon of Protestant orthodoxy so his life becomes edited in accord with the imagined *persona*. We can see this taking place in an early publication by Thurneysen of the correspondence throughout their years in the parish. In the Introduction Thurneysen describes how Barth drew strong lines of distinction between his theology and that of the religious socialists Leon Ragaz and Hermann Kutter. He then adds: ‘Traces of these [lines of distinction] are to be found in the letters, but because of the sharpness in them that belonged to that time they

<sup>74</sup> *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 77.

<sup>75</sup> *A Late Friendship: The Letters of Karl Barth and Carl Zuckmayer*, tr. Geoffrey Bromiley (Michigan: Erdmans, 1982), p. 5.

are not suitable for publication.<sup>76</sup> Of course they are all published now and the ‘sharpness’ is very evident, but it is the cultural politics of the censorship and forgetting that is significant. The most obvious form this takes is with respect to Barth’s relationship with Charlotte von Kirschbaum – as both Renata Köbler and Susan Selinger point out. Although Busch in private conversations spoke about Barth and von Kirschbaum, in his own biography of Barth nothing of the scandal of the relationship, Barth’s struggles with his wife Nelly or her refusal to grant him a divorce surfaces. The same censorship continues in Bruce McCormack’s in-depth study of Barth’s theological formation up to 1930 – where there is no mention of Charlotte, though a rhapsodic account of Barth’s meeting with Nelly Hoffmann. Once the reputation of ‘Barth’ is created, it generates its own protective mechanisms. Or, more accurately, Barth’s ‘symbolic bankers’ reproduce the competitiveness, the pugnacious polemics and protective mechanisms that set Barth apart from others.

### *The work*

From the start his writing set out to shock and be polemical,<sup>77</sup> but what, of course, launched Barth on the trajectory of a glowing academic career was that inaugural famous/infamous book, *Der Römerbrief*. This book first made his name public within certain German, Protestant theological circles. Had he not written the book he would not have been invited to leave his pastoral role in Safenwil. But why did he write it? And to whom was it addressed? And was it bought by those to whom it was addressed? The answers to all these questions are complex. Barth himself – and this returns us to the importance of those inherited and nurtured dispositions – spoke of writing the book as a perverse act of revenge for the intellectual neglect suffered by his father (who had lectured on Paul’s writings and, though ignored by [the historico-critical exegetes] ‘had been just as learned as they (only from a different point of view)’).<sup>78</sup> Were the addressees therefore not the very exegetes he had studied under at Berne and Berlin? On the other hand, in a letter to Martin Nil in 1930, Barth himself suspected ‘dass der Schrofte Gerichston seines “Römerbriefes” auch einfach

<sup>76</sup> *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth–Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914–1925*, tr. James D. Smart (London: Epworth Press, 1964), p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> See McCormack’s comments on his first published essay of 1907, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 70.

<sup>78</sup> *Karl Barth, Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green, p. 72.



in “Zusammenhang” mit einer persönlichen, schuldhaft empfundenen Lebenskrise stand, mit dem durch ein väterliches Verbot erzwungenen Abbruch einer intensiven Liebesgeschichte.<sup>79</sup> Whatever the answers to the questions, the dissemination of that book was categorical for Barth’s future. It was published in Switzerland, having been turned down by a number of other publishing houses, by what we would call a vanity press. Without the financial backing of Barth’s friend, the industrialist Rudolf Pestalozzi – a Christian socialist connection of Barth’s friend Thurneysen – *Der Römerbrief* might never have been published at all but remained the private commentary notes of a Reformed pastor (which is how it began). It sold only 300 copies. The breakthrough came when, after Barth’s famous lecture at Tambach – having been invited only because a more famous Christian socialist, Ragaz, was unable to accept the invitation – he was introduced to Georg Metz, the Lutheran pastor and theological adviser to the publishing house Christian Kaiser Verlag owned by to Albert Lempp. These became Barth’s main publishers until their closure in 1943. Metz took up the remaining 700 unsold volumes and promoted the work in Germany. These sold quickly. It was the cultural conditions prevailing in Germany (but not in Switzerland) that facilitated a theological ‘best-seller’. The sales figures called forth the more famous *Second Edition*. With these successes, Metz went on to set up the journal *Zwischen und Zeiten*.

What is significant here is that the meeting between Barth and Metz was not simply personal. It was the meeting of two institutions, the academy (related closely to the ecclesial because of Barth’s insistence that all theology was Christian preaching) and commercial media; two different fields of work and production. The meeting fashioned the pastor into the theologian, giving him a public voice on a far wider stage by publishing, promoting and disseminating his theological ideas.<sup>80</sup> But the association of theologian and publisher is even more complex – for the publishing house mediates relations between ideas and other fields of cultural operation: the university and church, for example. It forges the association between the writer and the public – and the stronger the association the better the sales and the more well known the author. This public was forming and changing throughout Barth’s career. In these earliest stages the

<sup>79</sup> Quoted by Busch in ‘Gelebte theologische Existenz bei Karl Barth’, p. 170.

<sup>80</sup> It was Metz who later introduced Barth to Charlotte von Kirschbaum, who without doubt made possible the *Church Dogmatics* as we have them. Metz regretted this introduction for the rest of his life, because of the scandal it caused among evangelical theologians. See Köbler, *Schattenarbeit: Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, pp. 38–9 and Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth*, p. 14.

public had to be found, identified and constituted. Books are published all the time, and more drop beneath cultural attention than are given it. Publication is no guarantee of wide reception, and so the question arises why this book became so famous/infamous that Barth earned a name for himself as a theologian. Why were people persuaded? Torrance falls back on the Romantic account of the genius, but this too easily skates over the process of the production of belief. At any given time in any given field there is what Bourdieu calls a 'space of possibles'. This space orients research, defines the problems, the methods for tackling them, the references, intellectual benchmarks, and important concepts. It is the 'space of possibles' that situates and dates any cultural producer both socially and economically with respect to those who will receive or consume the work produced.<sup>81</sup> In order for a work to gain attention it has to be situated with respect to interests that are being served and others that are being thwarted: it negotiates 'belief' in its theses, rendering them credible. If this negotiation fails then the work cannot fulfil its function as an event of communication. The polemical tone of Barth's two editions of *Der Römerbrief* court controversy, but do not in themselves explain why they provoked controversy. Important in the early reception of his work are the kinds of people who review it, even if they are critical about it. Jülicher and Harnack both condemned the book's apparent flouting or rejection of accepted academic standards. But to be reviewed by Jülicher, Harnack, Bultmann and the Berlin New Testament scholar Karl Ludwig Schmidt set the author among a certain group of thinkers. Others were also drawn into conversation and even a public exchange, notably the Tübingen theologian Gerhard Kittel.<sup>82</sup> The author is situated among those who consider themselves to be the author's peers and although still a pastor he is now being placed in an academic context. The offer of an academic post was the next step in this cultural logic.

From *habitus*, institutional training, to commercial promotion and dissemination we have now to turn to the multilayered relationship between various symbolic fields of cultural production. The object produced has to be consumed by those who are competent to understand either its significance or insignificance. To a large extent the skills acquired for this competence demonstrate communities of shared knowledge and

<sup>81</sup> *Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 176–7.

<sup>82</sup> Throughout Barth also maintained contact, through a long exchange of letters, with Martin Rade. See *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel* (Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1981) and the 'Einleitung' by Christoph Schwöbel.

experience. That is, those competent have been trained in situations analogous to Barth's own, and are aware, as Barth is, of current scholarship on Paul's *Der Römerbrief*, for example, so that they can recognise the importance of exegesis and know something about the tools honed for such exegesis. The work has to enter fields contending for public authority and legitimacy. As Bourdieu notes:

The public meaning of a work in relation to which the author must define himself originates in the process of circulation and consumption dominated by the objective relations between the institutions and the agents implicated in the process. The social relations which produce this public meaning are determined by the relative position these agents occupy in the structure of the field of restricted production. These relations, e.g. between author and publisher, publisher and critic, author and critic, are revealed as the ensemble of relations attendant on the 'publication' of the work, that is, its becoming a public object.<sup>83</sup>

Within this field the work as a public object has to become representative of cultural trends that move it beyond any single field into relations with other fields. Barth recognised that other Protestant theologians were saying similar things, but he and his work were becoming 'representative of a new theological trend'.<sup>84</sup> Busch notes that by 1923 'this "theology of the Word" was also felt to be a new school. As such it attracted many lively minds from that lively time – even including Martin Buber'.<sup>85</sup> Barth's thinking now begins to transgress the boundaries of its field of production and begins to compete or ally itself with other cultural products and forces; it either resonates or clashes with the greater cultural *Zeitgeist*.

Several scholars have commented upon the strong resonance between *Der Römerbrief*, Expressionism and Weimar culture generally, comparing the work to paintings by Max Beckmann, the manifestos of the Dadaists and futurists, and the iconoclasm of Brecht's early work.<sup>86</sup> Barth's writing is attuned to the violent reaction against a bourgeois cultural optimism. His prophetic and apocalyptic voice is attuned to a wider cultural iconoclasm. Kurt Nowak has argued persuasively that Barth's return to a concept of revelation that was transhistorical has to be placed in the context of the collapse, following the First World War, of German idealism, with

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>84</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life*, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> See Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991); Richard H. Roberts, *A Theology on its Way: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), pp. 164–200; McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*; Gorrings, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, pp. 74–82, 116–18.

its conception of a historical process moving towards a totality.<sup>87</sup> Later, when the Protestant Church was still reeling from the events of Nazi Germany, and its own collusion with them, Barth's strong 'authoritarian' voice<sup>88</sup> offered a confidence in the continuing relevance of both the Church and theology. One wonders to what extent still this trading on his name is an attempt to be convinced that theology can continue to speak with a big voice in a world that deems it marginal. Whether this is so or not, with the recognition that any form of cultural production establishes itself (or fails to establish itself) within a wider matrix of forces, knowledges and productions, we are returned to *habitus* – not the effects thereof, but its production. As Althusser has taught us, social relations (as pastor, as father, as son, as husband, as teacher, as professor, as writer, etc.) are lived out through complex ideologies that, in part, constitute a cultural imaginary.

We will have more to say about the nature of this cultural imaginary in the third section of this essay. For the moment, having established the density of operations that produce the 'theologian' and make it impossible – without radical reduction – to view the agency of the theologian as above or outside culture, let us proceed to examine the nature of theology itself and analyse again the relationship of the text to the world, theological discourse to public truth.

#### APOLOGETICS AND THE PRODUCTION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

One of Michel de Certeau's most important contributions to historiography lies in the analysis of what he termed 'The Historiographical Operation' – in an essay with that title. The aim of his analysis is 'to show that the historical operation refers to a combination of a social place, a "scientific" practice, and writing. Such an analysis of its preconditions that its discourse does not take up will allow us to specify the silent laws which organize the space produced as text.'<sup>89</sup> History, he insists, is a

<sup>87</sup> 'Die antihistorische Revolution: Symptome und Folgen der Krise historischen Weltorientierung nach dem ersten Weltkrieg in Deutschland' in H. Renz and F.W. Graft (eds), *Umstrittene Moderne: Die Zukunft der Neuzeit im Urteil der Epoche Ernst Troeltsch* (Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1987), p. 133.

<sup>88</sup> This is the adjective Dietrich Ritschl used in describing Barth's seminars at Basle. See his 'How to Be Most Grateful to Karl Barth Without Remaining a Barthian' in Kim (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed my Mind*, pp. 86–93. In the same volume T.H.L. Parker speaks of how he 'was drawn by a theology that was expressed in strong, clear, masculine language' early in 1939 (p. 80).

<sup>89</sup> *The Writing of History*, tr. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 57.

production. It is a practice of writing from a particular place,<sup>90</sup> a practice extended through time: hence his use of the word 'operation'. In this section I wish to examine the theological operation in a similar manner: that is, examine in order to specify some of the 'silent laws' that are operative in the very production of a theological text.

Barth's theological writing is particularly good for such an examination, because he explicitly wished to isolate the discursive practices of theology from contamination by any other secular discourses. A theology that negotiated its place with respect to the discursive practices of its cultural context was apologetic. And there was as much room for apologetics as for natural theology in Barth's thinking. Like his teacher Wilhelm Hermann, he demanded a radical separation between theology and any other science, particularly metaphysics.<sup>91</sup> Barth dramatically opposes dogmatics as the study of God's self-revelation in the service of the Church to the *Kulturprotestantismus* of apologetics, and alerts the Christian theologian to the dangers of such a project. But his dialectical method performs his own wrestling with the relation between the Word of God and the words and works of the world, as we will see.<sup>92</sup> And the wrestling raises a question about the idealism of dogmatic theology; a question, furthermore, that suggests the lines drawn between dogmatic, practical, moral and pastoral theology is *in practice* always compromised. What emerges from an examination of Barth's polemics against apologetics is how profoundly reliant he is upon those other discursive practices he wishes to erase the traces of in theology. The 'silent laws' that produce the space from which theology speaks announce an inevitable and productive syncretism. Theology can no more refine itself of such syncretism than chemists can arrive at pure substances.

'[A]s long as he [*sic*] is an apologist the theologian must renounce his theological function,' Barth writes in one of his perceptive analyses of

<sup>90</sup> I am aware that de Certeau distinguished between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*). 'Place' was definable, limited and enclosed, whereas 'space' is what is continually being produced by the practices of everyday life. One's own spacing then may transgress the boundaries marked out in cities and on maps. I am working between de Certeau's understanding of these two words. The place from which theology speaks is specific in some respects (an institutional position, for example), but the possibilities for the discourse are socially and culturally organised by a matrix of operational factors whose boundaries are imprecise and permeable.

<sup>91</sup> See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 49–68.

<sup>92</sup> I am aware in giving emphasis to the Church as the body of Christ and the role of the sacraments in creating, sustaining and fostering the growth of that body that these are more Catholic elements than Barth would have espoused. But I am not trying to reproduce Barth's theology in this essay; rather, I wish to engage it in developing a theological project with respect to the Christian faith today. The Church is not today where Barth once stood.

Schleiermacher.<sup>93</sup> He believed Schleiermacher had failed as a theologian to the extent that he compromised theology on exactly this score. As his own twofold introduction to the *Church Dogmatics* – ‘The Task of Dogmatics’ and ‘The Task of Prolegomena to Dogmatics’ – makes plain, theology may be exegetical, dogmatic or practical, but since its task is to examine ‘the agreement of the Church’s distinctive talk about God with the being of the Church’ it has no role to play *vis-à-vis* the ‘secular or pagan’.<sup>94</sup> Theology so conceived speaks from faith to faith. Where it involves itself with unbelief, it is not ‘pure unbelief’,<sup>95</sup> but those forms of unbelief within the Church itself, within interpretations of the faith, among heresies. But the seriousness within which unbelief has to be taken when it lies outside the Church or interpretations of the faith means that, first, it cannot take the theological task itself ‘with full seriousness’,<sup>96</sup> and, second, it can only proceed on the assumption that the dogmatic task of faith coming to an understanding of itself is completed. The theologian, therefore, compromises himself or herself when ‘He [*sic*] must present himself to [the educated among the despisers of religion] in a part which is provided for in their categories.’<sup>97</sup> Where the task of theology accomplishes a genuine apologetics, it does so only as a by-product of its exegetical, dogmatic and practical tasks. This genuine apologetics is recognised by its effectiveness. That is, it produces an event of faith that is otherwise beyond all human polemical endeavours; the work of theology is ‘empowered and blessed by God as the witness of faith’.<sup>98</sup> This effect cannot be prescribed or planned for in advance. The unbeliever overhears an intra-faith conversation through which occurs the speaking of God’s Word, a revelation that ‘itself creates of itself the necessary point of contact’.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trs. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (London: SCM, 2001), p. 428. It needs to be pointed out that, on the basis of his exposure to and researches in nineteenth-century German theology and his in-depth analysis of Schleiermacher’s work during his Göttingen employment, Barth conflates ‘apologetics’ with *Kulturprotestantismus*. For an understanding of theologically driven apologetics see Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman and Simon Price (eds), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>94</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I.1, pp. 4–5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> *Protestant Theology*, p. 428.

<sup>98</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I.1, p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. The reference to a ‘point of contact’ returns us to the rivalry with Brunner, who spoke of the necessity for there to be some formal *Anknüpfungspunktes* for there to be theological discourse at all.

As Gorrings observes, ‘“dialectical theology” was from the start a way of dynamiting the concordat between culture and theology’.<sup>100</sup> But the kind of polemic Barth was engaged in against *Kulturprotestantismus* has to be understood against the background of the German understanding of *Kultur*. This is important because Barth is not polemical against theology’s relationship to its social context, as the work done on his radical politics, referred to above, demonstrates. Barth’s daily routine included working through the newspaper and his appreciation of Schiller, Dostoievsky and Mozart would militate against any reduction of Barth’s thinking to a bald, asocial, ahistorical reading of his ideas. A more complex process of cultural negotiation is both suggested and serviced through his intellectual labours. Barth himself, when discussing a theologian like Schleiermacher, deemed it significant to relate that theologian’s thinking to biographical details concerning his upbringing, his involvement with Eleanor Grunau and the context of nascent Romanticism.<sup>101</sup> But the word *Kultur* has a much more specific resonance than the English ‘culture’. It is related to *Bildung* (which, in turn, is related to the Ancient Greek notion of *paideia*). As words like *Kulturvoll* indicate, *Kultur* is a self-education of the spirit in which the very best of what is human is cultivated. And such cultivation is to be approved.<sup>102</sup> To be cultured was not only to be trained in taste and able to appreciate the highest achievements of human creativity; to be cultured was to have been formed by those achievements such that their ideals were internalised. Much of Barth’s polemic then against *Kulturprotestantismus* has to be understood in the context of the trenchant German and Austrian critique of bourgeois mores that had various religious veneers – Jewish, Catholic and Lutheran. This critique can be found in Nietzsche, as much as in Franz Overbeck, Arthur Schnitzler, Thomas Mann and Bertoldt Brecht.

Barth’s theological polemic against culture, and the task of Christian apologetics, are, then, produced in the context of the idealism, aestheticism and pedagogy of *Kultur* – according to whose ideology ‘religion’ was one of its finest fruits. Nevertheless, the polemic, uncontrolled, slides easily

<sup>100</sup> Karl Barth: *Against Hegemony*, p. 57. Barth’s polemic has to be viewed alongside theologians like Paul Tillich who were beginning to champion the correlation of theology and culture by turning to existential philosophy (particularly Heidegger) to provide a metaphysical depth to *Kulturprotestantismus*.

<sup>101</sup> See his early essay ‘Schleiermacher’s Celebration of Christmas’ in *Theology and Church*, pp. 136–58.

<sup>102</sup> I am indebted to Michael Hölzl for drawing my attention to these persistent resonances of *Kultur* in contemporary Germany. See here George Steiner’s attack upon such an understanding of *Kultur* in his essay, ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’ in *Language and Silence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 75–89.

towards a more radical condemnation of social fallenness. Annexed to Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative difference' between God's Word and human words, even in his edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1919) Barth exhorted, 'That you as Christians are to have nothing to do [*nichts zu tun habt*] with monarchism, capitalism, militarism, patriotism and liberalism is so obvious that I need not say anything.'<sup>103</sup> Proclaiming the new world in Christ, and God's counter-cultural NO, Barth's eschatological fervour was reactive, and addressed explicitly to the Protestant theologians he felt had betrayed the *evangelium* through their accommodation of the gospel to *Kultur*. But it is exactly at the point of what Christians are to do or not do that a theological analysis aware of its own cultural embeddedness has to begin. For Barth's sentiment in the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* is naïve, but the grounds upon which it is naïve need to be made explicit. It is the very fact that Christians *do* act (*zu tun*) in the world, even if their actions are graced and therefore eschatologically informed, that means they cannot be inoculated against an involvement in 'monarchism, capitalism, militarism, patriotism and liberalism'. Barth's radical separatism, at this point in his work, betrays, in fact, an inadequate mode of dialectical thinking.<sup>104</sup> Inadequate because it is unable to think through the relationship of this God of cultural judgement to Barth's equal insistence, against Harnack among others, that Christians are not neutral subjects in the events of the world; they cannot remain indifferent to the social, political and economic circumstances in which they live. We have observed above how encultured Barth's theological thinking is. Marquardt might have over-stretched the radicalism of Barth's early work by suggesting its affinities with the writings of Lenin, but nevertheless he, and more recently Tim Gorringer (who has compared Barth's thinking to Gramsci's), have shown how contextual Barth's theology is.<sup>105</sup> This early dialectical thinking, then, does not adequately account for what Christians *do* do (*zu tun*), while too quickly prescribing what they should not do.

The relationship between Barth's dialectical theology and the negotiations in his work, explicit and implicit, with his cultural context will be the key to recognising the wrestling to keep out and police what theology needs in order to proceed: the words and works of the world. Barth's approach to dialectics in that first edition of *Der Römerbrief*— whilst emphasising *Krisis*

<sup>103</sup> *Der Römerbrief*, 1st edn (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963), p. 381.

<sup>104</sup> I am saying nothing here that Barth did not admit, almost forty years later, in his 1956 address 'The Humanity of God'. See *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 37–65.

<sup>105</sup> See Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus* and Tim Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*.



and *Diakrisis* – is much more Hegelian. Michael Beintker observes Barth's concern with dynamics, growth, movement and process in the earlier text and his emphasis on thinking as always in flight. He concludes: 'Damit ist die Dialektik von Romer I als bewegungsmassiges Denken derjenigen Hegelscher Philosophie sehr nahe.'<sup>106</sup> The clearer statement of the 'infinite qualitative difference' appears in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*. Here, the deepening emphasis upon what Michael Beintker calls the 'widerspruchsvollen Komplexität profaner Weltlichkeit' means that 'Der Theologie kann allerdings die Komplexität profaner Weltlichkeit nicht von der Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch isolieren.'<sup>107</sup> Dialectical theology (Barth's *Realdialektik*) as 'total contradiction' (*widerspruchsvollen*) baptises incommensurability as theological mystery, and weds theological mystery to a highly voluntarist notion of God. The inadequacy of the earlier dialectics, then, arises because Barth needs to give more nuanced accounts of history, agency and power such that he can reflect more upon the method of his own discourse. He needs to think through the relationship between dialectic as *Denkform* and the noetic and 'ontological connexion between Christ and creation'<sup>108</sup> – the dialectics of salvation. He needs to negotiate dialectic as *widerspruchsvollen Komplexität* with dialectic as process. He needs to wrestle not only with Kierkegaard, but with Hegel – and simultaneously.<sup>109</sup> Beintker, with respect to examining Barth's dialectic in the second edition

<sup>106</sup> *Die Dialektik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barths* (Munich: Ch. Kaiser Verlag, 1987), p. 113.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9. Beintker distinguishes this form of dialectic from the form in the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* by differentiating between the employment of 'complementary' and 'supplementary' paradoxes. In the complementary *Paradoxdialektik* an asymmetrical relationship holds between the thesis and the antithesis, but (to use the Hegelian term) the thesis can sublimate the antithesis and hence move forward. With the supplementary employment of paradox no movement is possible because the two terms are radically antithetical to each other.

<sup>108</sup> *Church Dogmatics* III.1, p. 51.

<sup>109</sup> As several commentators have pointed out (including Barth himself), beyond appreciating the theological importance of concepts such as paradox, either/or, the moment, difference, and fear and trembling Barth never really undertook a thorough study and analysis of dialectic. See Beintker, *Dialektik*, pp. 230–8. It is surprising that, to my knowledge, only in the chapter on Hegel in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* does Barth really engage with Hegel's thinking. The early distinction he makes between Hegel's *Dialektik* and Kierkegaard's *Realdialektik* in *The Göttingen Dogmatics* goes unelaborated (*The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, I, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 77). Later, in the *Church Dogmatics*, considering Hegel's dominance in German thinking with respect to construals of history, reconciliation and community, he appears mainly as a name in a list of other names. There is neither refutation nor quotation of Hegel in the section almost screaming for comparative and penetrating analysis – III.1, 'Creation, History and Creation History'. We will come to the reference in IV.3, 'The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community', later.

of *Der Römerbrief* and noting the ‘not uncomplicated relationship between Barth and Hegel’, points to ‘eine Strukturverwandtschaft zwischen Hegel und Barth im Blick auf das Synthetische als Ur- and Zieldatum’.<sup>110</sup> But this ‘structural resemblance’ cannot be developed until Barth reconsiders the time and eternity paradox in terms of a lesson Overbeck taught him concerning the operation of *Urgeschichte*. For as Robert E. Hood observed, for Overbeck the ‘*Urgeschichte* is the *telos* toward which all history is moving; yet, it is not an abstraction from history’.<sup>111</sup> Barth will only be able to begin this reconsideration when he develops his doctrines of the Trinitarian God, creation and reconciliation. As we will see, this will lead to a critical interplay between the dialectical strategy in the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* and the dialectical strategy in the second.

By the time we come to the Introduction to the *Church Dogmatics*, a more adequate dialectic is evident. Here Barth’s sharp certainties and clear-cut distinctions are always intentionally compromised by his recognition of the impossibility and yet necessity of the theological task itself. He proceeds by identifying clear loci – the Church, on the one hand, unbelief, paganism, heathenism, on the other. But then he qualifies the Church by speaking of the Roman Catholic, Evangelical and Protestant Modernist struggles *to be* the Church: ‘the Church must wrestle with heresy in such a way that it may be itself the Church. And heresy must attack the Church because it is not sufficiently or truly Church.’<sup>112</sup> Faith and the Church are located within this paradoxical struggle that constitutes Barth’s dialectical method. They are not then objects as such, nor can they therefore be identified as such. They are positions under constant negotiation; positions articulated only having embarked on the way of the theological enquiry, and, even then, ‘We have to state quite definitely that our own understanding of the being of the Church is in no sense the only one.’<sup>113</sup> Those little words ‘quite definitely’ betray much: a polemic conducted with respect to both Roman Catholicism and Protestant Modernism in which Barth is ‘quite definite’ with respect to both his dogmatic certainties (about apologetics) and his uncertainties (the ‘intractability of faith’ whereby ‘divine certainty cannot become human security’<sup>114</sup>).

<sup>110</sup> Beintker, *Dialektik*, p. 72.

<sup>111</sup> *Contemporary Political Order and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and Political Praxis* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1985), p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I.1, p. 33.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

The same dual strategy is evident with respect to his other, determinative, locus – unbelief. His claim that Christian dogmatics ‘speak in the antithesis of faith to unbelief’<sup>115</sup> marks a precise border between belief in God and godlessness. It is a border separating theology as a science from the other secular sciences; a border maintained through the lack of any ‘ground of common presuppositions’<sup>116</sup> – hence the impossibility of apologetics. But then there are degrees of this unbelief, since there are other accounts of the faith ‘in which we hear unbelief express itself,’<sup>117</sup> and Barth ends the opening section on ‘The Task of Dogmatics’ by claiming any success for this work is only possible ‘on the basis of divine correspondence to this human attitude: “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.”’<sup>118</sup> So when does unbelief become ‘pure unbelief’? And since the negotiations to understand the faith constitute an ongoing *agon*, then when is faith ever without unbelief?

So what then of Barth’s understanding of apologetics if the criteria governing that understanding are both identified and qualified, and stated quite definitely with respect to both their identification and qualification? Who identifies the presuppositions that radically distinguish the grounds of difference between the task of theology and the tasks of other sciences? Who judges when the event of faith has taken place? Does this event of faith proffer a ‘pure faith’ unmixed with unbelief? How are the degrees of faith and unbelief calibrated? Who discerns when theological discourse has been ‘empowered and blessed by God’? The Church? Which Church? The contested and contestable Church?

We can confront the problem here from another direction. We can ask why it is that though theology is human words answering to and working within the operation of the Word of God, in attaining the knowledge of God, there is no ‘human security’. Why must theology therefore always be procedural, or ‘on this way’? Why is it that ‘We always seem to be handling this intractable object with inadequate means?’<sup>119</sup> For Barth, there are four aspects implicated in any answer to these questions. The first two are theological aspects, and the second two are anthropological aspects. First, there is the nature of the difference and the divide between the gracious addresses of God in Jesus Christ and human beings. Second, there is the

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

operation of 'the free grace of God which may at any time be given or refused';<sup>120</sup> a freedom whose logic lies in the depth of God's self. Third, there is, from the human perspective, the need to speak in and from faith: 'the presupposition of an anthropological *prius* of faith'.<sup>121</sup> The reception and operation of this faith are manifestly associated with the two theological aspects treated above. But, even so, this mimetic activity of human beings, the 'Christian utterance', the 'humanly speaking' which constitutes 'the work of human knowledge',<sup>122</sup> is an 'act of human appropriation'. And this appropriation of the Word in human words is constantly in question because it 'is by nature fallible and therefore stands in need of criticism, or correction, of critical amendment and repetition'.<sup>123</sup> This fallibility in appropriation and representation – for there do seem two acts for Barth, human speaking and the act of appropriation – is related to the fallen, sinful nature of being human. This fallenness is the fourth of the aspects implicated in any answer to questions concerning theology's self-reflexive process on, inadequate access to, and partial delivery of, truth.

What these aspects assume about dogmatic theology is threefold. First, that there is a pure, transhistorical truth – associated with the Word – that is being pursued through the contingencies and vicissitudes of historical Christian living and thinking. Secondly, that there are better (and therefore worse) appropriations of this truth, the measurement of which is again transhistorical: Anselm is a high point, also Calvin; Aquinas is a lower point, also Schleiermacher. Thirdly, that obedience to the Word, if followed through by all Christians, would lead to a consensus and agreement on all matters of doctrine – would lead, that is, to a Church dogmatics that all Christians could subscribe to whatever their time, place, race or gender.

Putting to one side the voluntarist account of God as the agent of grace, which renders all events of grace arbitrary interruptions into creaturely existence;<sup>124</sup> and putting aside the way in which this characterisation of

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>124</sup> There is a question here as to whether the events of God's grace are arbitrary and interruptive only from the human perspective. That is, is there a continuum of activity as far as God is concerned with respect to creation such that the veiling and unveiling of God's self is what human beings in their darkened and unredeemed state discern? Or is creation so wholly other from God, not only in its fallenness – which can only be contingent with respect to the determination of divine salvation – but in its essence, such that any divine activity with respect to creation enters it from an ontologically distinct and prior exteriority? When Barth is developing his doctrine of creation, based upon his *analogia relationis*, he is emphatic that time and creation are not in contradiction to the eternal Godhead, but 'in Him'.

both God and God's agency constructs another clear-cut and categorical distinction between God and godlessness, God's self-presence and God's utter absence in creation; putting aside, then, two major theological reservations about this account of God *vis-à-vis* the world, Barth is emphatic that the realm in which theological enquiry is either blessed or idle speculation is discursive. It boils down to 'Christian speech [that] must be tested by its conformity to Christ. This conformity is never clear and unambiguous.'<sup>125</sup> So that which dogmatics investigates is nothing other than 'Christian utterance'.<sup>126</sup>

Barth points out that this attention paid to Christian utterance by dogmatics renders theological enquiry a 'self-enclosed circle' of concern,<sup>127</sup> and it is the self-enclosed nature of this concern which means that theology takes itself, rather than *extra ecclesia* concerns, seriously. Dogmatics cannot be other than unintentionally apologetic because of the self-enclosure of Christian utterance. The moment it steps out of this enclosure to speak to those without faith it adopts alien categories. 'Apologetics is an attempt to show by means of thought and speech that the determining principles of philosophy and of historical and natural research at some given point in time certainly do not preclude, even if they do not directly require, the tenets of theology.'<sup>128</sup> But it is at this point that a critical intervention can be made. Discourse is fundamental. It defines the faithfulness of dogmatics and the unfaithfulness of apologetics, while betraying the incomplete and fallible nature of all dogmatic enquiry. But who can police the boundaries of any discourse, Christian or otherwise? Put more precisely, who can ensure the self-enclosure when the constitution of that enclosure is a question of language and representation? Does the belief in the self-

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12. Of course this idea of the dogmatic task as investigating what Christians say and do developed into post-liberalism's distinction between first- and second-order discourses. The assumed role of the dogmatician is then both diagnostic (with respect to its investigation into Christian utterance) and regulative (with respect to bringing that utterance into a better understanding of its relation to the Word). It is not only doubtful that such a distinction can be made between practice and theory, it is not only questionable whether the distinction should be made (which privileges academic theologians, or at least sets them as a class apart from others by reinforcing a dualism between practical and dogmatic theology), it is manifest from Barth's own writings how little actual Christian utterances (apart from those of other academic theologians) are taken into consideration. We gain little insight into the actual everyday living of this church with respect to whom and for whom Barth is writing his dogmatics. The question of authority – for whom is this task being undertaken, with what jurisdiction and to whom is it addressed? – hollows Barth's text. We have to turn to Bonhoeffer to correct this theological idealism.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>128</sup> *Protestant Theology*, pp. 425–6.

enclosure of certain linguistic practices not presuppose the distinct separation of different discourses and forms of reason? Barth points to as much when he declares: 'There has never been a *philosophia christiana*, for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*.'<sup>129</sup> The theological discourse or Christian thinking is rendered utterly distinct from philosophical discourse, or historical discourse or scientific discourses of various kinds. But who defines and maintains the autonomy of discourses? Doesn't Barth's description of research conducted on the basis of 'determining principles' sound like the academic rationale for distinct and jealously guarded faculty boundaries in a post-Berlin university? For, and this is the main point I wish to make here, if discourses are not bounded, if discourses exceed institutional, contested and contestable framings, then an apologetics can proceed without the theologian necessarily renouncing his or her 'theological function'. Theological discourse can be understood as already participating in wider cultural negotiations and politics. Recently, Kathryn Tanner, in a critical discussion of post-liberalism's Barthian account of the autonomy of discrete language-games (of which Christianity would be one), has observed that contemporary cultural anthropology argues strongly against the corollary of this thesis which suggests 'Christians have a self-sustaining society and culture of their own, which can be marked off rather sharply from others.'<sup>130</sup> Christian utterance then is constructed out of the cultural materials at hand. It is not homogenous but always hybrid, improvised, syncretistic and implicated in networks of association that exceed various forms of institutional, individual or sectarian policing. Furthermore, since Christians are also members of other associations, networks and institutions, what is both internal and external to Christian identity (and its continuing formation) is fluid.

What is significant for my thesis is that *in the very performance of his dialectic*, the very process of the realisation of his thoughts, Barth rethinks and qualifies his dogmatically asserted ideas in a manner that suggests there is a negotiation with the other discourses he has already banned. And this complex form of dialectic is neither Hegelian or Kierkegaardian, but both. For, while Barth suggests Christianity is self-defining and must be so in order to protect itself from the

<sup>129</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I.1, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 96. Interestingly, while the critique of post-liberalism is unabated, all Tanner's references to Barth – the theological spinal chord of post-liberalism – are affirmative.

corrupting external influences of secular society, he himself reveals how interdependent Christian utterance is upon the discourses of other disciplines. His own writing demonstrates how vocabularies and categories are not discrete and how Christianity always defines itself in terms of that which it allies itself to or distinguishes itself from. In defining the dogmatic task he employs categories like 'knowledge', 'consciousness', 'conception', 'understanding', 'formal' and 'ontological-ontic'; he refers continually (though admittedly not depending upon their investigations) to Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant and Heidegger; he situates his task with respect to the older Protestant orthodoxy, to 'historical development of at least the last two or three hundred years'<sup>131</sup> and to the Mediaeval writings of Anselm, Bonaventura and Aquinas; he speaks of 'other sciences' social and natural. Barth's discourse can only proceed to define his particular form of Protestant sectarianism, then, upon the basis of shared vocabularies, categories and reference points that stand 'outside' and other. The very German he writes, while translating these other discourses into his own Christian thesis, is working across other languages like Greek and Latin. His is not a 'self-enclosed' discursive reflection; and neither *can* Christian theology or Christian living be self-enclosed. As the dialectic issues from an understanding of the ongoing and yet to be perfected Word and work of God in the act of reconciling the world to Himself, so Christian theology can neither be completely systematised nor, *a priori*, stake out the limits of what is in and what is outside Christ. Theology *is* a cultural activity; the dialectic it is implicated in is, simultaneously, transhistorical, historical, and material. And here Barth reengages the Hegel in the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* with respect to the Kierkegaard of the second edition.

For it is, I suggest, Hegel more than Schleiermacher who lies behind Barth's categorical assertion that 'There has never been a *philosophia christiana*, for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*.' For it is Hegel who poses the challenge of the relationship between philosophy and theology, by conflating the dialectic of reason with Trinitarian procession, and rendering all discourse subject to the master discourse of the Absolute Spirit. Thus it followed that 'everything that seems to give theology its particular splendour and special dignity appears to be looked after and honoured by this philosophy in a way comparably better than that achieved by the theologians

<sup>131</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I, p. 9.

themselves'.<sup>132</sup> The language of appearance is telling here – Barth (and a number of Hegel scholars before and after him) is not quite certain where Hegel the orthodox Lutheran falls into heterodoxy. But Barth wishes nevertheless to point out that Hegel's work consummates the Prometheanism of human confidence in the act of thinking, in the Enlightenment categories of mind, idea, concept and reason, which he, Barth, views as inimical to both dogmatics and the dialectical encounter with the Word of God which is the contents of dogmatics. It is Hegel then who proclaims the possibility of a *philosophia christiana* – and Aquinas, whom Barth consistently brackets with Hegel. His reading of Aquinas is wrong and his persistent reading of Hegel's dialectical method as 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis', with an emphasis upon consummation of the absolute, owes more to left-wing Hegelians after Hegel (Strauss and Marx, in particular) than to Hegel himself.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, his observation that for Hegel 'God is only God in his divine action, revelation, creation, reconciliation, redemption; as an absolute act, *actus purus*'<sup>134</sup> demonstrates how close Hegel (and Aquinas) is to Barth. And, characteristically, in Barth's short but excellent analysis of Hegel in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, the condemnation of the univocity of *Geist* and reason, which reveals Hegel's inability to take seriously either sin or God's freedom with respect to confronting human beings in their sin, is offset by a recognition of unfulfilled and 'great promise'<sup>135</sup> in Hegel's work. 'Doubtless, theology could and can learn something from Hegel as well. It looks as if theology had neglected something here, and certainly it has no

<sup>132</sup> *Protestant Theology*, p. 382. This repeats his conclusion about Hegel's speculative trinity in *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, where he observes Hegel's 'replacement of the Christian Trinity by a logical and metaphysical Trinity and by the relegation of the Christian Trinity to the sphere of naïve, symbolical, and inadequate conceptions' (p. 105). But nothing positive about Hegel's thinking is said in this earlier work. By the time the last form of the lectures on the history of nineteenth-century Protestant theology was given (winter 1932–3), Barth is much more appreciative of Hegel's potential.

<sup>133</sup> Elsewhere Barth makes evident that he interpreted the relationship in Hegel's thought between *Sittlichkeit* and *Staat* as the deification of German nationalism that courted the hubris leading to the betrayals by the theological establishment in the First World War. This too is a wrong reading of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. See Allen Wood, 'Introduction' to H.B. Nisbet's translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Paul Lakeland, *The Politics of Salvation: The Hegelian Idea of the State* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982); Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and my *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 137–46. Hegel would in fact concur with Barth's own judgement (albeit with a different doctrine of the Trinity): 'the State as such belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ' ('Church and State' in *Community, State and Church*, trs. A.M. Hall et al. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 118).

<sup>134</sup> *Protestant Theology*, p. 385.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.



occasion to assume an attitude of alarm and hostility to any renaissance of Hegel that might come about.<sup>136</sup>

When we examine what it is that remains promising for Barth in Hegel it is in fact the Trinitarian-informed reflexivity of his dialectic. Though Barth chides him for his unsatisfactory doctrine of the Trinity, he applauds Hegel's reminder 'of the possibility that the truth might be history' and that theology's knowledge 'was only possible in the form of a strict obedience to the self-movement of truth, and therefore as a knowledge which was itself moved'.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, in Hegel's commitment to theology as a material practice participating in the unfolding of a history of God's own self-unveiling, theology is reminded 'of the contradictory nature of its own knowledge'. For 'Hegel, with his concept of mind, must wittingly or unwittingly have been thinking of the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord over nature and spirit, precisely by virtue of the unity and opposition of *dictum* and *contradictum*, in which Hegel had the spirit conceiving itself and being real.'<sup>138</sup>

There are three things, then, that Barth recognises of theological value in Hegel: history as a material process informed by God; theology as a discursive practice participating in what he will elsewhere conceive as '[t]he covenant of grace [a]s *the* theme of history';<sup>139</sup> and the need for theology to be reflexive about that practice because the words and works of human beings can never be identical to the unveiling of God.

The question remains concerning the extent to which Barth integrated these insights into his own theological thinking – certainly not when the lecture on Hegel was given in the early 1930s. But there is a hint of what Barth will develop as he and the Christian Church stood watching the world turn dark on the eve of the Second World War. For in what appears almost to be an aside in the Introduction to the *Church Dogmatics*, he observes: 'The separate existence of theology signifies the emergency measure on which the Church has had to resolve in view of the actual refusal of the other sciences in this respect.'<sup>140</sup> The observation points not to a pragmatism, but to the temporal specificity about theology. Its 'separate existence' is a response to a culture and a historical moment when the

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 401–2.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>139</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, p. 60.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1, p. 7.

theological is despised.<sup>141</sup> As with his view of discrete discourses for discrete disciplines, what this implies is that the dogmatic in opposition to the apologetic task of theology becomes a cultural production (and a cultural producer in its own right); one that *necessarily*, on Barth's own axioms, 'stands in need of criticism, or correction, of critical amendment and repetition'. The necessity comes about when Christian theology and therefore the task of the Christian theologian is elsewhere 'implicated in what the Church has had to resolve in view of the actual refusal of the other sciences in this respect'.<sup>142</sup> The necessity comes about when Christian theology and therefore the task of the Christian theologian are implicated in a different kind of cultural productivity. This theology was already being written elsewhere, had Barth been able to transcend his own German and evangelical mind-set.<sup>143</sup> Other people were already writing Christian theology within cultural contexts not dominated by a perceived hostility to Christian utterance. The necessity to interrupt also comes about because, for all his dogmatic tone and categorical assertions, Barth's Christian utterance is also, as we have seen, human, fallible and fallen.

By the end of the Second World War – when Barth was completing the opening volume of his doctrine of creation – we find him commenting on 'history, the theological practice of participating in that history and the need to consider more carefully that biblical witnesses speak as men, and not as angels or gods'.<sup>144</sup> This sentiment articulates a different reflection and a new kind of dialectic.

Thus we have to reckon on their part with all kinds of human factors, with their individual and general capacities of perception and expression, with their personal views and style, as determined by age and environment, and of course with the limitations and deficiencies of these conditioning factors – in this case the limitations of their imagination.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>141</sup> In his study *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr points out the association between the Christian response to the cultural and the cultural response to Christianity. He does not develop this insight in any depth, but, significantly, the first of his five models for the 'enduring problem' of Christian theology with respect to its cultural context, Christ against culture, first arises because of the persecution of the Church. This defines the Church as a new creation in Christ totally separate from what Barth called 'world-occurrences', and a Christology emphasising Christ as King, Lord, and Lawgiver. See *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), pp. 45–115.

<sup>142</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> In his own cultural context we have already witnessed how the debates between Barth, Bultmann, Przywara, Ritschl, Tillich and Brunner made his own theology possible. If we go further afield we find the development of *nouvelle théologie* among certain French Jesuits and Dominicans. Von Balthasar bridges the two theological worlds.

<sup>144</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, p. 93.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

Barth is specifically examining the creation stories as the Word of God, but in his development of the category of 'saga' and his recognition of the different genres of Biblical writing, he speaks more generally of Biblical witness. The commitment to a God who does not transcend history but informs it at every point, to an account of eternity as the origin and telos of the history, not its erasure, leads to an understanding of Biblical discourse as culturally and psychologically 'determined'. I am not going to follow the psychological trajectory of Barth's thinking as such, only comment that 'personal views', expression and style – and, some would even say, individual levels and direction of perception – cannot be divorced from the 'conditioning factors' of 'age and environment'. But in my concern to assess the possibility for apologetics that begin from a Christian theological standpoint, this recognition of the cultural embeddedness of Biblical discourse is an important move towards seeing that theological discourse cannot be simply self-referring and 'overheard' by other publics. Biblical witness borrows materials and forms of representation, and refigures them for its own purposes. The accounts it furnishes of things prehistorical or historical involve cultural negotiations, 'textual relationships'<sup>146</sup> and human knowing that 'is not exhausted by the ability to perceive and comprehend'.<sup>147</sup> Barth even employs Schleiermacher's hermeneutical category of 'divination' to speak of the way the writer has to discern the vision of the true historical emergence (the operation of God in creation) that preceded the 'historical' events so cherished by professional historians and historicism. The questions of 'depiction and narration' issue not from discussing the abstractions of time and eternity, but the covenant of grace that *is* the theme of God's history. Time is in God, and so though the truth of God's Word is eternal, it is also highly specific. 'Creation is not a timeless truth . . . there are no timeless truths; truth has a concretely temporal character.'<sup>148</sup>

Of course, Barth's attention here is to Biblical witness and Biblical writing. But since this witness and writing must be the source and prototype for all Christian witness and writing, then, although Barth says little about the cultural and historical embeddedness of his own discourse, this must follow. In fact, again almost as an aside, he writes: '[C]oncerning the ground and being of man and his world, we are referred to our own metaphysical and scientific genius, or to our own powers in the

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

construction of myth or saga.<sup>149</sup> Christian theology tells God's story in the place where any theologian finds himself or herself situated. Such storytelling cannot but rehearse and refigure the language, ideologies, cultural assumptions, fears, guilts and dreams of its times. These are de Certeau's 'silent laws' that organise the space for its production. The theologian attempts to read the signs of those times in terms of the continuing covenant of grace, but in reading those signs cultural negotiations are set in operation such that the theologian's discourse is itself a sign of the times. Theological discourse is necessarily involved in the wider cultural dissemination and exchange of signs. Other people will be telling the story of what is from where they are and possibly using some of the same materials and reference points. And while Christian theology (like the Biblical witnesses) speaks of the 'genuinely historical'<sup>150</sup> relationship between God and human beings – such that cultural relativism is not a question raised – Christian theology cannot transcend the historical and cultural determination and conditions. If it cannot transcend them then it equally cannot distil for itself some pure dogmatic discourse.

Christian theology is, then, implicated in cultural negotiations, and to that extent is always already engaged in an ongoing apologetics. Barth, it seems, moves towards an integration of what Beintker (after Henning Schroer) termed the 'complementary' and 'supplementary' of paradox. Barth forges a theological method that brings together, in a creative tension, the synchronic dialectic of Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative difference' with the diachronic dialectic of Hegel's 'possibility that the truth might be history' and that theology's knowledge 'was only possible in the form of a strict obedience to the self-movement of truth, and therefore as a knowledge which was itself moved'. The synchronic and the diachronic can supplement each other in the work of the theologian with respect to the world.

Allow me now to pursue this further by referring back to the third of Barth's affirmations about Hegel's project: the need for theology to be reflexive about that practice because the words and works of human beings can never be identical to the unveiling of God. Beintker characterises the 'complementary' use of paradox as involving an asymmetrical relationship between thesis and antithesis, such that the reconciliation or sublation proceeds through the absorption of the latter by the former. This parallels the asymmetrical relation in Hegel's thinking between the in-itself and the

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

for-itself such that, in the dialectical process of being with oneself in an other, then the other is integrated into one's own projects. In this way the other fulfils and perfects the same; it becomes part of the free activity of the subject. Barth's description of the dialectic of sexual difference bears something of this Hegelian model.<sup>151</sup> But since theology moves between Christ's Word and a cultural situation in which '[t]here are no forms, events or relationships . . . unmistakably confused by man in which the goodness of what God has created is not also effective and visible, the only question being how this is so'<sup>152</sup> – then it has no unqualified access to that asymmetrical relationship. And, if this is so, it may not so easily take up the 'complementary' use of paradox that judges the other only to have value with respect to the same. It cannot judge and subjugate the world to its own discourse. For theology cannot leave out the possibility that in this cultural other God is at work, and engagement with this other may mean it is not subordinated but allowed to challenge radically the theological project. Cultural negotiation must run such a risk – the risk of being disrupted. The 'supplementary' use of paradox allows for what George Hunsinger has recently termed 'disruptive grace'.<sup>153</sup> But the 'supplementary' use of paradox is also asymmetrical, and it is at this point that the theologian needs to cultivate a healthy agnosticism with respect to what he or she knows. Space must be allowed, on the basis of what theology understands about itself and the God with whom it has to do, for the other to speak. This enables the cultural engagement of Christian apologetics to be a negotiated engagement. But the product of this negotiated engagement will inevitably be syncretistic.

The last reference to Hegel, whose dialectic I am suggesting opens Barth's theology to the possibility of apologetics as Christian cultural negotiation, comes in *Church Dogmatics* IV.3/2 and the development of his doctrine of reconciliation. Here Barth's dialectical structure is firmly in place in a discussion of the interface between *Hominum confusione et Dei providentia* in the call of Christ to all humanity. But he seeks a third way beyond the antithesis, and this is where he introduces Hegel. Again it is the Hegel of the thesis–antithesis–synthesis – Hegel reduced to a formula that can then be haughtily dismissed. What Barth wishes to avoid is a *tertium quid*. So what he offers 'the Christian community as *it is required* to go

<sup>151</sup> See my *Cities of God*, pp. 183–202.

<sup>152</sup> *Church Dogmatics* VI.3, p. 698.

<sup>153</sup> *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

beyond that twofold view' (emphasis mine) is the 'reality and truth of the grace of God addressed to the world in Jesus Christ'.<sup>154</sup> What this amounts to is that the Christian community is enjoined to speak to the world about Jesus Christ while recognising that, on the one hand, Jesus Christ 'is not a concept which man can think out for himself, which he can define with more or less precision, and with the help of which he can then display his mastery over . . . the problem of this antithesis',<sup>155</sup> and, on the other, that '[w]e think and speak like poor heathen, no matter how earnestly we may imagine that we think and speak of it [the grace of God addressed to the world in Jesus Christ]'.<sup>156</sup> Which leaves us where exactly? With the knowledge of the *diastasis*, concerning which there is no 'real synthesis', and yet . . . the fallible Christian community as the bearer of and the witness to a better hope testifies to the work and Work of God as a 'new thing in relation to that contradiction'.<sup>157</sup> It not only testifies, but in testifying seeks to participate in the unfolding of that new world; and so it attempts to perform and produce that 'new thing'.

To take this idea further, the Christian community's practices of transformative hope, executed in the name of Christ, are disseminated through the world because the living community of the Church is implicated in other 'communities' and practices. Those characterised as the community of the Church participate in the operations of other desires that are not *prima facie* theological, only *de jure* theological because Jesus Christ is both the 'loftiest, most luminous transcendence' and 'heard in the deepest, darkest immanence'.<sup>158</sup> These members of the community of the Church are also members of other forms of fellowship, other bodies – industrial, commercial, agricultural, political, sporting, domestic. We recall that Barth too was a member of a political party. To return to a moment mentioned earlier in the first edition of *Die Römerbrief*, it is because Christians *are* involved in 'monarchism, capitalism, militarism, patriotism and liberalism', among other things (things working against the hegemony of such ideologies), that the work and words of the living community extend out into the 'deepest, darkest immanence' in their testimony to and performance of a 'new thing'. This movement in, through and beyond the Church, in through and beyond the Church's endless cultural negotiations,

<sup>154</sup> *Church Dogmatics* IV.3/2, p. 706.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 707.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708.

<sup>158</sup> 'The Humanity of God', p. 46.

is not a dialectic of progress or growth, because it moves between mysteries and confusion, but it is nevertheless teleologically driven. It is, then, a positive dialectic tracing and performing what Hegel called ‘the march of God in the world’.<sup>159</sup> We may not like Hegel’s metaphor, but I suggest upon this basis an apologetics, no longer saddled with defining itself against *Kulturprotestantismus*, can proceed: reading and producing the signs of the times, and negotiating a role in defining public truth; taking its own historical and cultural embeddedness with all theological seriousness. Theology, like de Certeau’s account of history, is something ‘made’; it is a cultural operation, where both the ‘cultural’ and the ‘operation’ are understood as transits of grace.

But just on the edge of finding Barth and the development and reception of his theological project all disappearing into the cultural politics of his time and ours, we need to reintroduce that transcultural and transhistorical position from where theology proceeds. For the Christian theologian, who we can now take not simply as the professional dogmatician, but anyone living in Christ, is first a follower, a disciple, and in being a disciple acts and speaks from both a commission and a command: ‘Go forth [*poreuthentes*] therefore and make [*matheteusate*] all nations my disciples; baptise [*baptizontes*] them everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach [*didaskontes*] them to observe all that I have commanded [*eneteilamen*] you. And behold I am [*ego . . . eimi*] with you always’ (Matthew 28.19–20). These are imperatives issued in the name of God the I AM. They are not only stirring and challenging words, they are dangerous words – as a continuing history of colonialism, zealotry, hatred, prejudice and violence, in various forms from various faiths (sacred and secular), testifies. And yet we cannot explain away either this imperatival commission or the Christian theological vision that informs it. By that I mean, and with this return to an early essay by Barth on the relationship between theology and culture, ‘culture is the promise originally given to man [*sic*] of what he is to become’.<sup>160</sup> In this essay, from 1926, there is a recognition that ‘[n]o Christian theologian (alas!) with his preaching and scholarship will ever visibly walk this earth as “Angelic Doctor” (*doctor angelicus*) free, for example, of *all* human philosophy. There is no Christian love which cannot be justly labelled as sublimated, highly refined eroticism. No Christian temporal prophecy

<sup>159</sup> *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 279.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Church and Culture’ in *Theology and the Church*, p. 341.

can keep itself from measuring by the actual political and economic standards of its own age. Throughout its whole course, the Church swims along in the stream of culture.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, there is also a twofold understanding of theology's relationship to culture. On the one hand, it is critical because the cultural is an expression and a development of the fallen, the foundry in which so many idols and fetishes are cast to keep human beings from coming to terms with the violence, anger and alienation being perpetrated. On the other, it is the only place in which the human creature can come to a recognition of a more glorious possibility. 'The term *culture* connotes exactly that promise to man: fulfilment, unity, wholeness within his sphere as creature, as man, exactly as God in his sphere in fullness, wholeness, Lord over nature and spirit, Creator of heaven *and* earth.'<sup>162</sup> As that eschatologically informed sphere, theology speaks to and in and through the cultural of a promised and operative reconciliation; a resurrection life not just beyond this world in some *post-mortem* realm but in this world as this world's concealed [*mysterion*] reality. The speaking of such a transfiguring hope, which issues from an equally fundamental judgement, is a speaking in the name of, a working in and out of faith to faith. It is this working that locks the theologian into the operation of the eternal in the temporal, which is at the eschatological heart of participation in Christ.

#### CONCLUSION

From our analysis of the discursive practices of Karl Barth what then can we say about the place from which theology speaks? Four theological points are foundational for our further investigation:

(1) Christians can speak theologically at all only on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. If there is more to our folly than a Romantic façade it can only have to do with that which has been revealed through Christ to the Church. Our human words, as testimony to that which we have received, are coming to understand, and hold to be true, must issue from a relationship to the Word of God. If they do not issue from such a relationship, if they are not, in the testimony they give, both doxological and obedient to the call to speak, then they are vain, dangerous and seductive simulacra. But as all our knowledge is culturally mediated,

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 343.



then the question will always remain as to how we ever know the extent of our words' affinity to the Logos incarnate.

(2) The Scriptures, in witnessing to the revelation of Jesus Christ, participate in that relationship which is both doxological and vocational. Their witness presents the revelation as founding the Church, but it also presents the scope of God's desire as exceeding that foundation. God became incarnate that the world might be saved, not that the Church might be founded. The Church is a means for the dissemination of the revelation and the ongoing cultivation of those who will be the disseminators. But the question always remains open, as Augustine knew, concerning who are the citizens of the city of God, how they are identified and thus who constitutes the Church.

(3) The incarnation testifies to a subsumption of the human by the divine; a subsumption that could only come about because of an affinity between the uncreated creator and human creatures. There must be that in God which makes the incarnation of the Son possible, rather than arbitrary. For to be made in the image of God is to exist as that image in the mind of God. Creation itself, while not God, is an expression of the creative power, goodness and imagination of the Godhead. But, within the created orders, the affinity between human beings and God is only known analogically by faith, and the extent of that knowledge is in proportion to a certain analogical disciplining of the soul. There is an ascent toward, or an intensification with respect to, wisdom; though each person so analogically disciplined loses (proportionally) the knowledge of such ascent or intensification. It is simply a matter of becoming smaller.

(4) 'Speaking in the name of' is related to being made 'in the image of' God. That is, our speaking is only possible at all insofar as we are made in the image of God. I will develop this more in the next section of the essay when I discuss the hermeneutical nature of being human. Here it is important to emphasise the theological and anthropological bases for that hermeneutical activity: we are, as human creatures, made to be mediators and made to be reflectors upon not only that which we mediate (knowledge of God), but that which constitutes our mediations.

So conceived, the answer to the question 'From where does theology speak?' is: from Christ. From Christ and of Christ and in Christ theology speaks *to* the cultural of that which the cultural displaces for the most part, even while simultaneously haunted by the absence it engenders and maintains. The Freudian term for this cultural activity is *Verdrängung*<sup>163</sup> or

<sup>163</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*. Studienausgabe. Band II (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2001).

'denial' – it expressively denies that about which the soul dreams: redemption. In a sense what theology then aspires to facilitate (though not on the basis of its own powers and integrities, but only on the basis of prayer and obedience<sup>164</sup>), is an interpretation by Christ of culture's own dreaming. Theology's task with respect to culture is to allow for that searching by Christ, in Christ, of the cultural imaginary. This is a reading of the signs of the times not just for the Church (that it might position itself better in its imperatival commission to preach, make, baptise and teach) but for the times themselves, so that the culture itself might begin to understand its own aspirations and limitations, the hope for which it longs and the depths of fallenness into which it continually commits itself.

In the work in and out and towards faith theology must be rooted in the Church, but at its open western door – on the threshold between the world and the east-facing altar; as ready to serve in one direction as in the other. The Christian theologian stands at that place between the breaking of the bread and its distribution throughout the world. As the Christian theologian looks back into the church, the order of life is presented there – the baptism font, the chancel steps where confirmation, marriage and burial rites are spoken, the altar where the mass is celebrated and shared. As the Christian theologian looks out into the world, the serried ranks of city life are presented there – so many high points and squalid allies, neon-lights, plasma-screens, crowded tenements, seductions, excitements and destitutions. This place is 'between' and as such we would have to challenge two alternative understandings of the Christian theologian currently conceived. The first is that of Jean-Luc Marion, in his book *God Without Being*, where the theologian *par excellence* is the bishop.<sup>165</sup> The second is that model presented by certain post-liberals and Protestant neo-orthodox where the theologian is a figure in the church who provides a second-order examination of the grammar of the faith with respect to that church. I have dealt with the latter in footnote 126. We can recognise from the 'between' that theology cannot speak simply from within the church (as Marion suggests). This place 'between' is the place of prayer; prayer as simultaneously worship and intercession, confession and petition, doxology and yearning for the coming of the Kingdom. This yearning has depth – of experience, of knowledge, of passion – only in so far as it engages with the possibility of

<sup>164</sup> That is, on a certain *Gelassenheit* or 'letting-go' such that an education (*ex-ducere*) can proceed from a reception actively desired and earnestly sought.

<sup>165</sup> *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, tr. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 139–58.

the impossible. The relational activity experienced in the 'between' is prayer. The place of prayer is the place where the material and the spiritual inform each other, the place where the universal cannot be separated from the particular, where the eternal economics of divine givenness operate within history – as providence, as grace. Prayer is the realisation of a place in Christ. Only in Christ is it prayer. And prayer is not a safe place, in the sense that it is not a stable place. Prayer requires a surrender of control. This is not necessarily a surrender of reason, as it is not a surrender of consciousness. It is a surrender, perhaps more precisely a releasing of the body, to the jurisdiction of the soul. Not that the soul is separate from the body, it is the body's inner form as Aristotle and Aquinas both understood. But prayer is where the labour(ing) begins. This is the kitchen, the work-place, for the theologian's cultural negotiation. For prayer is the place where relation is known. And relation, as we will see in the next section of this essay, is key to the question which now offers itself: if theology speaks from a place that is profoundly encultured, if the practice of theology is always then apologetic, then what are the processes by which cultures and, thereby, the public perceptions of reality change such that the discursive and encultured practices of theology effect these transformations?