

BARTH - A TRULY BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN?

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I

In what sense, if any, may Karl Barth be described as a truly biblical theologian? An answer to this question will not only require detailed examination of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, but also some consideration of what it means to be a biblical theologian.

If a biblical theologian is a person who is well acquainted with the whole of Scripture, Barth might be expected to pass the test with flying colours. A casual glance at the index of any volume of the *Church Dogmatics* shows a good spread of Old Testament and New Testament references: indeed, in the work as a whole every canonical book is cited except Esther. There are 4,648 separate references to the Old Testament and 12,270 to the New: an impressive score! However since these refer to only 46% of the Old Testament and 75% of the New Testament text, Barth obviously returns frequently to some passages, leaving a quarter of the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament unmentioned. Only Genesis, Song of Solomon, Jonah and Galatians are treated in their entirety, whereas over 80% of some books - Joshua, Ruth, 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai and 3 John are ignored.

Two questions arise from these statistics. Does Barth pass over biblical passages which are inimical to his views, or are they omitted for good reasons? When Barth *does* use material, does he quote it to agree with it or are there places where its inclusion really masks his refusal to take it seriously?

We begin with the first question. What does Barth omit and why? A few representative examples must suffice. Of the synoptic gospels, about a quarter is uncited, but often these are passages giving 'stage directions'. For example, Barth does not refer to Matthew 8:18: 'Now when Jesus saw the great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side'.<sup>1</sup> Other

verses are ignored because Barth uses one of the parallel accounts.<sup>2</sup> In epistles such as 2 Corinthians it is chiefly the passages where Paul is making detailed personal address to the Corinthians which are ignored<sup>3</sup> whereas the more overtly theological sections, such as chapter 3, are employed.<sup>4</sup> In the Old Testament, Barth does not make reference to tables of descent,<sup>5</sup> or to much of the case law<sup>6</sup> or even to the details about making the tabernacle.<sup>7</sup> Many proverbs are uncited<sup>8</sup> and much prophecy unheeded.<sup>9</sup> But such observations are not in themselves significant, unless it could be shown that these passages represented features of biblical theology with which Barth not only did not, but could not deal. At this point, such a case could not be made.

Often there is simply too much biblical material to be handled on a particular theme, even by Barth. For example, there are many references to angels in Scripture which he does not cite in his section 'The Ambassadors of God and their Opponents'.<sup>10</sup> Barth admits as much himself:

There are many interesting and pregnant passages upon which we have only touched in passing if at all. But I know of none which would really lead us any further in the subject. Our present purpose is not a complete angelology. We have simply taken the most important examples to illustrate the decisive matters which claim our attention in dogmatics.<sup>11</sup>

There is much evidence to suggest that Barth's method was to collect all the biblical passages pertaining to the subject he was treating, so that he could examine them together.<sup>12</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt. 9:26; 11:1; Mk. 6:1; 8:1; Lk. 4:14f.; 8:1-3 which are equally uncited.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Lk. 6:1-5 is not cited; but Mk. 2:28-38 and Mt. 12: 1-18 are both cited (the disciples plucking ears of corn).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 2 Cor. 1:13-17; 2:1-7; 7:11-16 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Also 2 Cor. 1:18-22; 2:14-17 etc.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Ex. 6:14-19, 21-25.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Lev. 2-8.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Ex. 25: 10-27; 21:35-40.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Prov. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Jer. 2:2-12, 14-37; 5:1-19; 6:1-15 etc.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ET; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1936-74 [hereinafter C.D.]) III/3 477-531. E.g. Num. 20:16; 2 Chron. 32:21; Eccles. 5:6; Dan. 6:22; Hos. 12:4; Acts 7:35; 10:7, 22; etc.

<sup>11</sup> C.D. III/3 511.

implies that he never knowingly overlooks material relevant to the topic with which he is dealing.<sup>13</sup> So there is a kind of ambivalence in Barth's method; his purpose is inclusive, his practice at times selective, and his claim that such selection has been made on dogmatic grounds. Most of the biblical material which Barth ignores falls into three sharply defined categories. Some, such as geographical notes are theologically insignificant; others, such as many of the proverbs, are irrelevant to the doctrinal themes to which Barth gave his chief attention; yet others duplicate passages which *are* considered.<sup>14</sup>

However, there is some evidence to suggest that Barth did on occasion refuse to consider material which he recognized might have changed his theological stance. He admits that his developed angelology, for instance, precludes a doctrine of 'fallen angels'.<sup>15</sup> He acknowledges 'all the insights we have gained concerning the being and ministry of angels, and developed at least concerning the character and activity of demons, are necessarily false if this doctrine [of the fallen angels] is correct'.<sup>16</sup> He deliberately refused therefore, to give detailed consideration to the angels of darkness on the grounds that it would be unhealthy.<sup>17</sup> Consequently it is not surprising to find that he does not consider the biblical material about this: for example Paul's assertion that 'Satan disguises himself as an angel of light'.<sup>18</sup> In this section on angels, it is clear that the omissions are not consistent with Barth's inclusive intentions avowed elsewhere. Rather, his theological schema has already driven him to devote a whole section to 'God and Nothingness'<sup>19</sup> for which he offers no biblical substantiation. The whole of this section, §50 makes reference only to Romans 11:36,<sup>20</sup> Genesis 1:2f.,<sup>21</sup> and Genesis

<sup>12</sup> E.g. C.D. I/2 16. The excursus surveys N.T. evidence, and notes that 'in St. Paul, if I am right, the two types are equally represented'.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. C.D. III/2 137, 'It is impossible to overlook the clear and conclusive statements of . . .' Cf. C.D. I/1 228. Barth's discussion of the spectrum of meaning of the N.T. term implies careful research.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. many passages in the prophets contain essentially the same ideas as other prophecies, even if they are not linguistically similar like the synoptic parallels.

<sup>15</sup> C.D. III/3 530f.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> C.D. III/3 519 gives reasons for this.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Cor. 11:14.

<sup>19</sup> C.D. III/3 289-368.

3.<sup>22</sup> Romans 11:36 is not treated by Barth as substantiation for his case, thus three sub-sections are devoid of biblical reference and the fourth offers an interpretation of Genesis in the light of what has already been asserted. One is forced to the conclusion that Barth has abandoned his usual principle of taking all of Scripture seriously, in favour of an exposition of the nature and status of evil which he found philosophically more acceptable than the *prima facie* biblical view of demons. This must be because he has already decided that their 'origin and nature lie in nothingness'.<sup>23</sup> Hence although there appears to be sufficient biblical material to treat this as a genuine theme, Barth's previous thematic investigations and doctrinal considerations make this unthinkable for him.

Thus the answer to our first question must be that while Barth generally seems to have good reasons for not considering some biblical passages, there is one example at least where his deliberate refusal so to do arises because that material is inimical to his position. However, such refusal is the exception rather than the rule.

## II

If it is not the case that Barth is a truly biblical theologian in the sense that he uses all of Scripture, perhaps he could be termed 'biblical theologian' in another sense - that all his theology is developed in close dependence on Scripture. But the example we have been considering illustrates that it is not only the case that Barth's *Dogmatics* does not handle all of Scripture, but also that his many references are not distributed evenly throughout his theology. A scatter graph of Barth's references to Scripture in the *Church Dogmatics* shows that the early volumes have relatively fewer references than most of the later ones.<sup>24</sup> Substantially this

<sup>20</sup> C.D. III/3 291.

<sup>21</sup> C.D. III/3 352.

<sup>22</sup> C.D. III/3 352 and 355f.

<sup>23</sup> C.D. III/3 522.

<sup>24</sup> See C. A. Baxter, *The Movement from Exegesis to Dogmatics in the Theology of Karl Barth* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Durham 1981) 445-65. The frequency per 10 pages in the *Church Dogmatics* is:

I/1	14.79	II/2	26.26	III/3	14.33	IV/2	29.32
I/2	13.98	III/1	30.85	III/4	15.52	IV/3	21.75
II/1	17.47	III/2	24.69	IV/1	22.44	IV/4	37.65

means that in the whole section §20 'Authority in the Church', there are only twenty-five references to Scripture. This represents approximately 2.1 references in every ten pages, whereas there are 21.5 references in every ten pages over the complete work. That this section, which examines 'The Authority of the Word' and 'Authority under the Word' has so little Scriptural reference is undoubtedly influenced by two factors. First there is very little biblical material about the Bible and its authority. Secondly, Barth had not developed his mature theological style at this stage, with its pluriform handling of Scripture. A similar explanation may be given for section §22, 23 and 24, which between them only include twenty three references in one hundred and forty one pages.<sup>25</sup> While it is easy to imagine why 'Dogmatics as a Function of the Hearing Church' and 'Dogmatics as a Function of the Teaching Church' have little biblical warrant, it is hard to understand why 'The Mission of the Church' makes so little reference to Scripture, until one sees that Barth has chosen under this heading to talk about 'The Word of God and the Word of Man in Christian Preaching'; 'Pure Doctrine as the Problem of Dogmatics' and 'Dogmatics as Ethics'.<sup>26</sup>

Not all sections, however, which have infrequent reference to Scripture come in the early part of the *Church Dogmatics*. One example is section §52, 'Ethics as a Task of the Doctrine of Creation', which includes only one biblical reference in forty three pages. While it is true that the first sub-section 'Ethics as a Task of the Doctrine of Creation' is a technical discussion in which one might not expect much reference to Scripture, nevertheless both this and the second sub-section 'God the Creator as Commander' are clearly structured in the light of all the detailed doctrinal conclusions which Barth has drawn in the first three parts of volume III. That has included a great deal of biblical material, not least in the continuous exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. Consequently we must beware of assuming that absence of biblical reference or discussion must be taken to imply that Barth is developing some unbiblical dogmatics. The reverse may be and usually is the case.

C.D. III/3 and III/4 are the exceptions. III/3 has the long section without any biblical references; III/4 has an ethical treatise which has relatively little continuous exegesis.

<sup>25</sup> C.D. I/2 743-884. This represents a frequency of 1.6 per 10 pages.

<sup>26</sup> These are the titles of the sub-sections found at C.D. I/2 743-58, 758-82 and 782-884 respectively.

Thus, if a biblical theologian must use the whole of Scripture and build his theology directly and evenly upon it, Barth is not a *truly* biblical theologian. But if a biblical theologian may construct his dogmatics indirectly as well as directly upon the basis of Scripture, he may qualify for the title.

### III

We turn therefore, to the major part of this paper which seeks to answer our second question: 'When Barth does use biblical material, does he quote it to agree with it, or are there places where its inclusion really masks his refusal to take it seriously?' This question is so immense that it will be necessary to break it down into manageable proportions. It will not be sufficient to list a dozen places where Barth quotes Scripture and to make it clear that he agrees with it, for this would be to beg all the hermeneutical questions raised this century. So we begin again with a simple proposition: a truly biblical theologian must be concerned to deal with the original autograph text of the Bible in so far as it may be ascertained. There are two reasons why one might argue this. The first is because decisions in this area delimit the canon and are concerned with what exactly this Bible is, by which we measure whether a theologian is biblical. The second is because the original text carries us back closest to the original intention of the author or redactor; and to the events and words which lie behind the text. So how far is Barth concerned with textual criticism in the *Church Dogmatics*? Is there any evidence that canonical or historical considerations motivate him?

Wherever Barth quotes the Greek New Testament, which he does not always do, he uses Nestlé's text.<sup>27</sup> On the rarer occasions when he cites the Hebrew Old Testament, he refers to the Masoretic text, to which he occasionally compares the Septuagint or other translations.<sup>28</sup> Barth includes very little textual criticism of the Old Testament, suggesting emendations chiefly for stylistic or theological reasons, rather than because the

<sup>27</sup> Wherever the Greek quotations have been checked in the *Church Dogmatics* this is the case, but obviously not all have been checked. However, this assertion was confirmed in conversation with the keeper of the Barth archive in Basle, Dr. H. Stoevesandt, on the basis of his own research.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. C.D. II/2 220, Exod. 9:15f.; cf. C.D. III/1 135, Gen. 1:6-8; C.D. III/1 172, Gen. 1:20f.; C.D. III/1 220, Gen. 2:1f.

evidence suggests it.<sup>29</sup> It is extremely rare for Barth to make incidental reference to textual variants in the *Church Dogmatics* where there is nothing theologically at stake for him, although such examples may be found.<sup>30</sup> It is equally rare for him to discuss manuscripts and their comparative value, although he does occasionally name them,<sup>31</sup> and is quick to point out that Bultmann's omission of ἐξ ὕδατος at John 3:5 has no manuscript support.<sup>32</sup>

There are some outstanding examples of variants which are omissions of fairly significant parts of the New Testament, whose inclusion Barth assumes. We will look at two which implicitly raise the canonicity question. The first, Luke 22:19b-20, is cited throughout the *Church Dogmatics* as though there were no manuscripts which omitted these words.<sup>33</sup> Since there is a 'wide diversity of opinion among textual critics'<sup>34</sup> it is remarkable that Barth never discusses the matter.<sup>35</sup> On one occasion Barth's citation is simply to illustrate the way that the New Testament refers both to the body and soul of Jesus, so that his silence here over the omission in some manuscripts is of little importance.<sup>36</sup> Of more significance is the quotation εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν which Barth notes as occurring both in 1 Corinthians 11:24f. and Luke 22:19, in order to make the point that Jesus is to be remembered.<sup>37</sup> Neither here, nor in a very similar passage elsewhere,<sup>38</sup> would Barth's point be lost, because the same ideas occur in Paul, but it must be noted that our author has passed over weighty textual evidence in silence. His preoccupation with what the text means leaves little or no time for consideration of what the text is.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 179, Gen. 1:25 (blessing).

<sup>30</sup> E.g. C.D. III/3 158, Mt. 18:10.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. C.D. IV/3 791, Codex D.

<sup>32</sup> C.D. IV/4 120; cf. C.D. IV/4 125, John 19:34.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. C.D. III/2 328; cf. C.D. III/2 469; C.D. IV/2 163.

<sup>34</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Text of the New Testament* (London, Macmillan 1961) 91.

<sup>35</sup> Barth used the 15th edition of Nestlé, published in 1932, in which the disputed words are bracketed. Dr. H. Stoevesandt was kind enough to show me Barth's Greek New Testament.

<sup>36</sup> C.D. III/2 328. There are other places to which Barth could have referred for his illustration.

<sup>37</sup> C.D. III/2 469.

<sup>38</sup> C.D. IV/2 163.

The second case, John 7:53-8:11, is probably the most outstanding example of Barth's disregard for textual criticism. Barth's silence on the textual difficulties is significant since the witnesses for this passage are 'late and of an inferior standing'.<sup>39</sup>

These problems do not preclude Barth from making reference to the passage in the ordinary way: 'all women have not committed the offence of the woman cited in Jn 8:2-11'<sup>40</sup> he comments, quoting two verses from the passage later in the same excursus.<sup>41</sup> Barth draws theological lessons from an exposition of the whole story, with only a slight hint that the narrative may not originally have been in the gospel: he writes, 'Der Berichterstatter kommentiert. . .'<sup>42</sup> By referring to 'the narrator' rather than to the evangelist, Barth certainly cannot be thought to have made plain the nature of the textual problem. Because this 'variant' is so long, it raises the canonicity question. Barth appears to regard as canonical a story which most would exclude on textual grounds,<sup>43</sup> and without commenting on the manuscript evidence, employs it as basic material for his dogmatics. Although Vincent Taylor comments 'it is probably a fragment of authentic tradition'<sup>44</sup> its use by Barth should be seen as the practical outworking of his ideas about canonical material being authenticated in so far as God makes it his Word, rather than in so far as it is attested by reliable manuscripts.<sup>45</sup>

A final examination of an occasion when Barth does discuss textual matters will make clear his attitude to the relation of textual critical matters to questions of history. Writing about the Virgin Birth, Barth admits that 'both in extent and form the grounds for the dogma in the statements of Holy Scripture are not at first sight so strong or so clear as one might wish for such a

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Text of the New Testament* 98. Taylor concludes, 'the objections to the genuineness of the section in Jn are conclusive.'

<sup>40</sup> C.D. III/4 232.

<sup>41</sup> C.D. III/4 233.

<sup>42</sup> K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zollikon - Zürich, Evangelischer Verlag 1951) III/4 S.263 (= C.D. III/4 234).

<sup>43</sup> Many commentators would, however, regard it as an early and perhaps reliable story about Jesus; cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London, SPCK 1967) 490f.; B. F. Westcott *John* (London, John Murray 1882) 125.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *Text of the New Testament* 98. (It might even be part of Luke's Gospel; cf. Barrett *John* 491.)

<sup>45</sup> See further Baxter, *Theology of Karl Barth* 250ff.

dogma in the strict sense of the term.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Barth refers to the variants of Matthew 1:16 explaining

that Syr. Sin., confirmed by some other traditions, offer the following text for Mt 1:16: 'Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary was betrothed, begat Jesus, who is called Christ': for Mt 1:21: 'She will bear thee a son'; and for Mt 1:25: 'She bore him a son'.<sup>47</sup>

The variants are not ruled out by Barth's discussion, nor are his conclusions about the best text made known. Rather, his comment is that besides these variants which suggest that Jesus was the son of Joseph, there also 'stand the passages 1:18, 20, 23, in which it too, indicates the Virgin Birth'.<sup>48</sup> Barth's conclusion in the main text is most revealing: 'Decision as to the necessity of the dogma cannot ultimately be made on the ground where such questions are to be raised and answered' because 'the questions to be raised and answered are literary questions; they are concerned with the tradition, the age and source-value of this testimony'.<sup>49</sup> Although Barth admits the appropriateness of assessing the literary evidence, he believes that 'no-one can dispute the existence of a biblical testimony to a Virgin Birth',<sup>50</sup> and that the final question is whether such testimony should be regarded as binding or 'only to be heard as a sub-statement of the New Testament message which is not binding'.<sup>51</sup>

It is now possible to see the reason why Barth 'sat lightly' to textual questions, for he makes it very clear in this passage. He argues that 'the decision can be supported by answering the literary questions in one sense or the other. But it does not stand or fall with the answer to these questions'.<sup>52</sup> The reason for this lies deep within Barth's theological framework. Behind literary, as behind dogmatic investigation there arises the *quaestio facti*, which cannot be answered either by literary or dogmatic investigation. It is fitting however, that in the realm of theology, literary and dogmatic investigation should both be undertaken in

<sup>46</sup> C.D. I/2 174.

<sup>47</sup> C.D. I/2 175 (NB Barth quotes in translation, not in Greek).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> C.D. I/2 176.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. 176.

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. 176.

the first instance (i.e. until the utter impossibility of this procedure is demonstrated) sub *conditione facti*.<sup>53</sup> This is closely linked to Barth's rejection of any search for the historical Jesus as the basis for his theology. For Barth, literary questions cannot settle anything theological, for even if one knew that the first gospel wrote a certain set of words, one would not thereby know either whether those words represented what happened, nor what the significance of the event was. Consequently, textual questions are not of ultimate importance, even though they cannot be ignored. For Barth, it is not the events which are important, nor the accuracy of the texts which record them, but the faith-awakening testimony to God's revelation, which can be the means of fresh revelation to the reader.

Barth concludes, after discussing these textual problems:

It certainly cannot be denied that the outward, explicit evidence for the dogma in the statements of Holy Scripture is hedged about by questions. But still less can it be asserted that the questions raised are so hard to answer that one is forced by exegesis to contest the dogma.<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting that instead of debating the variants, Barth preferred to rely on what is undisputed in the other verses of the chapter, so that one cannot begin to analyze the grounds for his textual conclusions. This is characteristic of Barth's theology: the Divine Sonship of Jesus does not depend on the Virgin Birth and the texts which attest it; rather the reverse: the texts depend on the Virgin Birth which depends on Jesus being the Son of God. Hence he can conclude Chapter 15 by writing that the mystery of the Incarnation does not depend on the miracle of the Virgin Birth, 'The miracle rests on the mystery.'<sup>55</sup>

Our conclusion to this first part of the second question must therefore be that Barth is not overly concerned with textual criticism even where it touches canonical questions, or questions as to the facticity of the narrative. Consequently, if he is to be considered a truly biblical theologian, it is not because he is primarily concerned to discover the original autograph text of the Bible.

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<sup>53</sup> Op. cit. 177.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. 176.

<sup>55</sup> Op. cit. 202.

## IV

One might conjecture that the reason for Barth's attitude is the same as that found in what J. L. Houlden terms the American Albright school.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps Barth does not regard the text in itself as significant, but merely as a convenient vehicle which could carry us back to the original events. He might therefore be a truly biblical theologian because he is prepared to take Scripture seriously as the means whereby, to put it crudely, one can get back to the events 'as God did them'.

However, the *Church Dogmatics* is devoid of any such attempt. Barth is prepared to use source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism, indeed any part of historical criticism, but always discriminately, always in order to help him understand not the event, but the witness to the event in the text. If Barth is a biblical theologian, it is certainly not in the sense that he takes the Scriptures seriously in order to discover the events behind them. The reason for this lies in Barth's conviction that the event *in itself* is not revelation, but the event witnessed to by the text may be revelation. His comments about Jesus make this point sharply: 'Jesus Christ is also in fact the Rabbi of Nazareth who is hard to know historically and whose work, when he is known, might seem to be a little commonplace compared to more than one of the other founders of religions and even compared to some of the later representatives of His own religion'.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Barth points out that 'Thousands may have seen and heard the Rabbi of Nazareth. But this "historical" element was not revelation. . . This "historical" element, like all else that is "historical" on this level, is admittedly open to very trivial interpretation too'.<sup>58</sup> Barth also points out that 'as regards the question of the historical certainty of revelation attested in the Bible we can only say that it is ignored in the Bible itself in a way that one can understand only on the premise that this question is completely alien to it, i.e. obviously and utterly inappropriate to the object of its witness'.<sup>59</sup> Hence the believer 'has to realise that what can be established here

<sup>56</sup> J. L. Houlden, *The New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London, SCM 1983) 69.

<sup>57</sup> C.D. I/1 165.

<sup>58</sup> *Op.cit.* 325.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

"historically" (*historisch*) is very little or nothing at all or something quite different which is of no importance for the event of revelation'.<sup>60</sup>

For Barth, the historicity of the Bible lies in the particularity of God's revelation to men:

It is rather the record of an event which has taken place once for all, i.e., in a more or less exact and specific time and place. If the time and place are largely obscure for us 'historically', if the individual data the Bible offers concerning them are subject to 'historical' criticism, this is not surprising in the documents of a time and culture that had no knowledge at all of a 'historical' question in our sense . . . Thus, even if . . . it does . . . commit 'errors' . . . the important thing is not the more or less 'correct' content, but the very fact of these statements. This fact that the Bible . . . does continually . . . make chronological and topographical statements signifies . . . that when the Bible gives an account of revelation it means to narrate history . . .<sup>61</sup>

Barth recognizes that parts of Scripture are such that 'according to the standards by which "historical" truth is usually measured elsewhere or generally, this story is one that to some degree eludes any sure declaration that it happened as the narrative says', but the Scriptures can witness to revelation even in 'this fundamental uncertainty in general historicity'.<sup>62</sup> Because this is Barth's theological position, it becomes obvious that for him to use historical critical methods in order to establish historical events in which God had revealed himself would be wasted energy.

This is made very clear in an excursus on the futility of the search for the historical Jesus:

The so-called historical critical method of handling Holy Scripture ceases to be theologically possible or worth considering, the moment it conceives it as its task to work out from the testimonies of Holy Scripture . . . a reality which lacks this character [of miracle] . . . This must be said particularly of the gigantic attempt . . . of the 'life of Jesus research' i.e. the attempt . . . to uncover . . . the figure . . . of the mere man Jesus, the so-called "historical Jesus", as he might have lived in the years 1 - 30.<sup>63</sup>

Barth considers this a wrong way. Commending Kähler's attack

<sup>60</sup> Ibid; cf. Barth to Thurneysen, 'How frightfully indifferent I have become about the purely historical questions', cited in J. D. Smart, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making* (London, Epworth 1964) 36.

<sup>61</sup> C.D. I/1 326.

<sup>62</sup> Op. cit. 327.

<sup>63</sup> C.D. I/2 64.

on it which is based on the belief that 'the Gospels are testimonies not sources', Barth argues: 'There is no reason why historico-critical Bible research should not contribute to the investigation and exposition of this historical *Christ* of the New Testament, instead of - a proceeding every whit as arbitrary, whether the science is history or theology - chasing the ghost of an historical *Jesus* in the vacuum behind the New Testament'.<sup>64</sup> Our quotes have made it clear that in making this decision *not* to concern himself with history, Barth believes that he has followed the biblical documents themselves because he considers that they are not primarily concerned with history but with witness. Thus his method at this point picks up the hints and clues that *he* finds in Scripture.

Thus Barth is clearly not a truly biblical theologian if the term refers to one who is chiefly concerned with the events behind the text. However Barth would contend that this cannot be an accurate definition of a biblical theologian, since the Bible itself is not so concerned. Another definition must therefore be considered.

## V

Perhaps a truly biblical theologian is one who is chiefly concerned to discover what the original authors or redactors intended the original readers to understand by their document. If this is the appropriate definition, it could be argued that although Barth does not use the whole of Scripture, nor distribute his use of it evenly throughout his dogmatics, nor concern himself overly with textual criticism, nor with establishing history, nevertheless he is a biblical theologian in the sense that he struggles to discover the original meaning of the biblical texts. There is a good deal of evidence to show that this is the case.

This original sense of the biblical documents is the place where Barth begins his exegesis in the *Church Dogmatics*, searching for the author's intention, using grammatical tools, and making reference to background details which elucidate the text. There can be no doubt at all that the author's intention plays an important part in Barth's thinking. An examination of Barth's use of redaction criticism only serves to emphasize that even where

<sup>64</sup> Op. cit. 64f.

there was composite responsibility, it was the final compiler's intention with which Barth concerned himself.<sup>65</sup> He examines redaction theories not because they were interesting in themselves, but because he wants to hear the message or the theological lesson of the redactor. Similarly he notes the authorship of a book not because it is of itself interesting, but because he wants to ascertain what the author had to say.

We will look in detail at just one way in which Barth manifests this concern in the *Church Dogmatics*. There are a good many occasions when Barth considers the grammar and syntax of a passage in the course of his exegesis.<sup>66</sup> For example, in discussing the meaning of verbs, Barth notes the voice, and interprets them accordingly. Thus, there is theological significance in the middle voice βαπτίσει at Acts 22:16 which precludes him from taking baptism as causatively linked to cleansing from sin;<sup>67</sup> similarly he notes that *yiqqawu* in Genesis 1:9 is passive.<sup>68</sup> The mood of the verb may equally be significant, thus μετανοείτε in Matthew 3:2 is noted as imperative,<sup>69</sup> and βαπτίσει is middle at Acts 22:16.<sup>70</sup> The exact shade of a verb used transitively or intransitively may be discussed,<sup>71</sup> a missing verb may be supplied,<sup>72</sup> perhaps on theological grounds,<sup>73</sup> or its omission may be deemed deliberate.<sup>74</sup>

Although the tense may be noted,<sup>75</sup> theological considerations may over-ride the simple explanation, as for example the aorists in John 15:9; 17:23 and 26, which do 'not carry

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Theology of Karl Barth* 53ff.

<sup>66</sup> In the following examples, Barth's practice in his commentaries is noted to assist comparison with the *Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>67</sup> C.D. IV/4 112.

<sup>68</sup> C.D. III/1 145; cf. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (ET; London, SCM 1962) [hereinafter *Philippians*] 35

<sup>69</sup> C.D. IV/4 57; cf. C.D. III/4 107; C.D. IV/4 81.

<sup>70</sup> C.D. IV/4 112.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. C.D. II/4 243.

<sup>72</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 59; cf. op. cit. 70; 112 8ei.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 95, 'It is assuredly "could" that must be supplied to the ἐγὼ μᾶλλον'.

<sup>74</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 56.

<sup>75</sup> K. Barth *The Epistle to the Romans* (ET; London, Oxford University Press 1933 [hereinafter *Romans*] 64 (Ro. 2:6).

a historical reference to what was but to what is as it was.<sup>76</sup> Similarly indicatives may have imperative force.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere, the tense is sufficient ground to refute traditional Roman Catholic exegesis of Matthew 16:18f.<sup>78</sup> The person of the verb,<sup>79</sup> or its number<sup>80</sup> may on occasion allow Barth to elucidate the exact meaning of the text. Barth does not always draw attention to these kind of detailed points. It is chiefly found where the verb is open to alternative exegesis; where he wishes to diverge from the simple *prima facie* understanding; or where the matter is of theological significance.<sup>81</sup>

A comparable pattern is found in Barth's treatment of nouns.<sup>82</sup> The exact meaning of a word is ascertained by reference to 'Kittel' or other dictionaries,<sup>83</sup> or by reference to other commentators,<sup>84</sup> or contemporary use.<sup>85</sup> Where the meaning is uncertain,<sup>86</sup> other uses may be noted.<sup>87</sup> Sometimes the spectrum of a word's meaning is discussed,<sup>88</sup> or groups of related words noted.<sup>89</sup> The immediate context may be the deciding factor.<sup>90</sup> Occasionally a singular or plural is taken to be significant; thus of 2 Corinthians 4:6 he writes 'The express reference here to "our hearts" indicates much more than the apostolic plural and therefore a general application of what is said to all Christians'.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>76</sup> C.D. III/2 221; cf. C.D. II/2 437.

<sup>77</sup> E.g. C.D. III/4 390.

<sup>78</sup> C.D. II/2 437.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 9.

<sup>80</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 192f., Genesis 1:26.

<sup>81</sup> There are exceptions, e.g. C.D. I/2 373 where the aorist of 1 John 4:10 is noted without comment.

<sup>82</sup> Detailed discussion is not offered here because Barth more often employs this method not in exegesis but in elucidating concepts; cf. Baxter, *Theology of Karl Barth* 131ff.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. C.D. I/1 317; cf. C.D. I/2 384f.; C.D. III/1 201f.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 104, A. Jeremias; cf. op.cit. 205, B. Jacob.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 11, ἐπίσκοποι; cf. op. cit. 34 ἀποκαταδοκία cf. op. cit. 45 Koine synonyms.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. C.D. II/1 124 (*ἡκία*); cf. C.D. IV/3 423 (*goel*).

<sup>87</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 88, ἀπόστολος, λειτουργός; cf. 85, ἰσώψυχοι (LXX).

<sup>88</sup> E.g. C.D. IV/2 196, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι; cf. 636, συναρμολογῆν.

<sup>89</sup> E.g. C.D. III/2 415.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. *Philippians* 35; cf. 55, ἐριθεῖα.

<sup>91</sup> C.D. III/1 33, 2 Cor. 4:6; cf. *Philippians* 11 'as the plural at once shows'.

Sometimes a gender<sup>92</sup> or a case<sup>93</sup> may be significant.

Barth's exegesis takes account not only of individual words but also of their relation to one another. Sometimes a sentence is hard to construe, and the matter may not be decided if Barth's theological point can be maintained in any case. Thus Ephesians 1.17 is left open because 'what is beyond question is that the κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός is separate from and subordinate to θεὸς πατὴρ'<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Barth often fails to select the subjective or objective genitive, if both meanings fit the context.<sup>95</sup>

However, the construction may be made plain so that the meaning is clear.<sup>96</sup> A detailed exposition of Philippians 3:9f. is clearly grounded in a firm grasp of the relation of the various clauses to one another,<sup>97</sup> and theological lessons are drawn out of the way that the relative clause of 1 Corinthians 1:30 depends on Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup> The right way to understand a verse may be suggested by small stylistic pointers, so that Luke's failure to repeat the verb ἀγαπήσεις means that there is a single command to love God and neighbour.<sup>99</sup> The emphasis may be made known from the word order in the sentence, as in John 1:1f.,<sup>100</sup> or from the natural structural connections.<sup>101</sup> Barth notes several features of Johannine style, including his frequent use of ἐγώ.<sup>102</sup> Paul frequently uses the stadium as an illustration,<sup>103</sup> and has a consistent use of καί.<sup>104</sup> Barth's sensitivity to such details demonstrate that his exegesis is no mechanical operation; nor indeed is he so pre-occupied with theology or doctrine that he has no time to notice such things. But Barth does not always offer

<sup>92</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 51, 1 Jn. 2:13f. 'an indisputable masculine'.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. C.D. IV/3 11, 1 Tim. 2:6 threefold accusative.

<sup>94</sup> C.D. I/1 385 f. C.D. IV/2 749, Gal. 3:9.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. C.D. III/4 283, Eph. 6:4; cf. C.D. IV/2 196ff., Rom. 1:1, Mk. 1:1.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. C.D. II/2 225, Rom. 9:19-21 cf. C.D. II/1 486, Col. 2:9.

<sup>97</sup> *Philippians* 99ff.

<sup>98</sup> C.D. I/2 10.

<sup>99</sup> C.D. I/2 381. cf. C.D. II/1 353, 'recurrent formula of Paul'.

<sup>100</sup> C.D. II/2 95; cf. 271 ἐμναυτῶ.

<sup>101</sup> E.g. C.D. I/1 323, 2 Cor. 5:19.

<sup>102</sup> C.D. IV/2 139.

<sup>103</sup> *Philippians* 106.

<sup>104</sup> C.D. II/2 60.

grammatical reasons for his interpretations. For example, he states baldly: 'We should translate Ex 3.14 "I will be that I will be"'.<sup>105</sup>

It will be noted that most of the detailed exegetical points in this section have been taken from the New Testament. This is because Barth does not usually discuss the Old Testament with the same attention to detail. The exception to this is his treatment of Genesis in *Church Dogmatics* volume III part 1. Even there, Hebrew citations are usually words,<sup>106</sup> and only occasionally phrases.<sup>107</sup> Generally Barth's discussion of the Old Testament does not deal with the intricate textual details so much as the stories or major ideas found therein. However, it has been made abundantly clear that Barth does make detailed grammatical notes in the excursions of the *Church Dogmatics*. This first step in the exegetical exercise is not abandoned by Barth. Although he only includes notes of it occasionally, one is forced to the conclusion that he is well able to deal with these technical points and undoubtedly grappled with them as part of his preparation for dogmatics. Barth is in this sense a biblical theologian; he is extremely concerned to discover the original meaning of the biblical texts. However this alone would only constitute him as an exegete, and would hardly qualify him for the title 'biblical theologian', though were he not so concerned he might not qualify for the title either! This short discussion has only been able to hint at Barth's genuine concern to discover the original meaning of the text. There are seventy two occasions in the *Church Dogmatics* where Barth undertakes extended exegesis of a single biblical passage. This represents approximately one quarter of Barth's use of Scripture. Whilst some of these discussions are relatively brief, the longest covers thirty eight pages of small print.<sup>108</sup> This example illustrates his practice well. It is the fourth passage of continuous exegesis of Romans 9-11 upon which §34 *The Election of the Community* is built. There is no other kind of use of Scripture in this section of *Church Dogmatics*, and Barth offers us seventy eight pages of small printed exegesis to substantiate his thirty two pages of doctrinal formulation.

<sup>105</sup> C.D. II/2 188; however he is not so definite at C.D. II/1 60f. or C.D. II/2 273.

<sup>106</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 16.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. C.D. III/1 20, Gen. 2:7; cf. 135.

<sup>108</sup> C.D. II/2 267-305.

It would be wrong to suggest however, that Barth's concern with the original meaning is always simply exegetical. His explanation of a verse is always done for dogmatic purposes, and soon passes into the realm of dogmatic theology. A simple example will illustrate this. Barth notes that Paul draws attention to 'a twofold indirectness of vision' in 1 Corinthians 13.12.<sup>109</sup> This is taken as a 'springboard' to discuss the distinction between the form and content of God's word, which is the dogmatic position with which Barth is concerned here. There is no sense in which this can be called exegesis of Paul's meaning in writing to the Corinthians.

There is, therefore, a sense in which there is no 'pure' exegesis in the *Church Dogmatics* because Barth is never just concerned to know what the original readers were intended to understand. Certainly there is no disinterested exegesis, because it is always done in the context of doctrinal investigation, so that Barth is continually drawing out the implications of his exegesis for doctrine. Such a process need not cause distorted exegesis, but it obviously runs high risks of so doing, especially where the biblical author's intention was not primarily or formally doctrinal. Barth's justification for his procedure would be that all Scripture is theological if not doctrinal.

## VI

It is becoming clear why Barth was so concerned to understand the biblical text. It was because he regarded it as an essential starting point for biblical theology. Early in the *Church Dogmatics* he affirms that 'biblical exegesis is the decisive presupposition and source of dogmatics'.<sup>110</sup> At this point it will be helpful to note a distinction drawn by Gerhard Ebeling in his article 'The Meaning of Biblical Theology'.<sup>111</sup> He suggests that when this phrase is used technically, it has a double meaning. It can refer either to 'theology contained in the Bible' or to 'theology in accordance with the Bible'.<sup>112</sup> So if we are to establish if Barth is technically a biblical theologian, it will be necessary to consider

<sup>109</sup> C.D. I/1 166.

<sup>110</sup> C.D. I/2 821.

<sup>111</sup> G. Ebeling, 'The Meaning of Biblical Theology' *JTS* (n.s.) 6 (1955) 210-25.

<sup>112</sup> Ebeling, 'Meaning' 210.

whether he is concerned either with the theology of the Bible, or with doing theology in accordance with the Bible. We begin with the first.

That there is such a thing as biblical theology; one single theology contained in the Bible, has been as much contended this century as has been the correct method of describing it. H. Schlier comments sceptically: 'A single biblical theology, springing from one root and pursued in unbroken continuity is wishful thinking and an illusion'.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, some theologians have tried to construct a single biblical theology, and D. L. Baker offers a classification of eight different models of such scriptural unity.<sup>114</sup>

Thus when we ask if Barth is concerned with the theology contained in the Bible, we need to discover whether he thinks there is such unity, and if so how he construes it. The answer to the first question is simply given. Barth affirms 'to the best of my knowledge there is not any single trace of the notion of a plurality of divine revelations'<sup>115</sup> in either testament. There is one God, whose single revelation gives rise to both testaments, which have as their distinctive feature to attest in the one case the Messiah who is to come, and in the other case the Messiah who has already come'.<sup>116</sup> For Barth, biblical theology, not biblical theologies is the correct term.

These comments of Barth are particularly significant. Positively, he finds that all the biblical material presents Christ to him; clearly as in the gospels; typologically in the figures of Old Testament history; prophetically in the history and oracles of Israel; theologically as in the epistles, and in many other ways. Whether the biblical material refers directly or indirectly to Christ, he is its focal point of unity. Moreover Barth's affirmation of biblical unity which springs from his experience is confirmed by the fact that Scripture presupposes it, and gives no hint of plurality.

Granted that there is unity, Barth is prepared to construe it in a plurality of ways. That is, he is prepared to consider it on several of the models discussed by David Baker. He is prepared

<sup>113</sup> H. Schlier, *The Relevance of the New Testament* (New York, Herder and Herder 1968) 29.

<sup>114</sup> D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Leicester, Inter Varsity Press 1976).

<sup>115</sup> C.D. IV/3 93.

<sup>116</sup> C.D. I/2 481.

to embark on a descriptive exercise occasionally; he often works with a confessional model, when the faith of the reader and writer form a link; he uses several cross-sectional methods, examining themes, concepts, typology, and analogies. However, not all the models discussed by Baker are used. Barth is little inclined to use the diachronic method, which gives attention to the chronological sequence of traditions in the various books, and the developmental idea characteristic of the 'Religionsgeschichte' school is quite foreign to Barth's thinking. I can find only one example of it in the *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>117</sup> He is more inclined to the salvation-history approach, since there is undoubtedly for Barth one story of God's grace unfolding.<sup>118</sup> He affirms: 'the content of the Bible is not a corpus of laws. It is the story of the covenant and the message of its fulfilment in the kingdom which has come in Jesus Christ'.<sup>119</sup>

This real unity which Barth recognizes may be handled by several different models, is never regarded as a strait-jacket uniformity. Barth is not blind to the contrasts between Old and New Testaments, between the law and the prophets, between the gospels and the epistles.<sup>120</sup> Such contrasts occasionally are considered to be contradictory as in the Old and New Testament views of divorce,<sup>121</sup> although they are more usually taken dialectically by Barth.

We are in a position now to measure Barth against the technical distinction Ebeling offered us. While Barth clearly is concerned with the theology in the Bible, accepting that there is real unity and construing it in ways parallel to those who are biblical theologians in this first sense, nevertheless he is never *only* concerned to undertake a descriptive exercise. In the same way that his exegesis is always done with a dogmatic purpose in view, so too is his biblical theology in this first sense.

The theology which the Bible contains is of interest to Barth so that he can address himself to questions raised by the biblical material, but which may require him to use terms like the

<sup>117</sup> C.D. III/2 61.

<sup>118</sup> CD. III/1 44, 'Creation sets the stage for the story of the covenant of grace.'

<sup>119</sup> C.D. III/4 199.

<sup>120</sup> C.D. I/2 208.

<sup>121</sup> C.D. IV/1 355.

Trinity, the Incarnation, or Supralapsarianism for which there is no biblical warrant. Despite this, Barth attempts 'to adopt [the Bible's] mode of thought as that which is normative for the Christian community';<sup>122</sup> recognizing that he needs to pass beyond biblical concepts, thinking and terminology to build his dogmatics.

Consequently we are forced to conclude that if there is any sense in which Barth is a biblical theologian, it is in the second sense of Ebeling's distinction; he is concerned to do 'theology in accordance with the Bible'. He is concerned that his dogmatic theology shall be in accordance with Scripture.

Precisely what this means for Barth must now be made clear. In the middle of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth claims that he has worked 'out his own proof from Scripture'.<sup>123</sup> There is good reason to suppose that Barth's theological method, that is, his selection of material, his exegesis, his argument and his conclusions have all been worked out on the basis of Scripture.

Barth's theological method was worked out following his reading of Anselm's *Proslogion*. There he considered that he had found a theologian who started with a *Credo*, and by rational argument, explained the reasons why what he believed must be the case. Barth followed the same pattern. For him, not only was it the case that the One in whom he believed was the One whom he encountered in Scripture, but also that the rest of the content of his *Credo* was also derived from Scripture. Barth's creed included tenets about the nature of revelation and the inability of humanity to appreciate God without revelation, both of which he considered that he had derived from Scripture.

But his method was based in Scripture in many other ways. First, his determination to make Jesus Christ central not only in his understanding of Scripture but also in his theology was a determination which sprang from his understanding that Scripture offered Jesus Christ centrally; that it all pointed to him. Secondly, his decision to read Scripture as a unity, in which any part could be illuminated by any other, and could only be fully understood in the light of the rest, equally depended on the fact that the church found the same Christ encountering them through all these texts which therefore belonged together. Thirdly, his selection of material takes careful note of the precise nature of the

<sup>122</sup> C.D. IV/3 92.

<sup>123</sup> C.D. III/2 ix.

biblical material. He groups biblical material together according to its form; he reads story, history, poetry, letters in different but appropriate ways, and employs them differently in building his theology. We have already seen how his exegesis gives careful attention to the meaning of the text, and he is careful to note any indication of the author which would help him to construct the right kind of argument on which to build his conclusions. Finally, Barth measures his doctrinal conclusions by the standard of Scripture, so that his whole method may be seen as proceeding like a spiral - bounded by a scriptural starting point, scriptural indications as to how to proceed, and scriptural tests of success. Add to this Barth's equal determination that his dogmatics would be written in the light of the Reformation principle *Sola Scriptura* (which lead him to reject his first attempt at a *Christian Dogmatics* because it was too influenced by philosophy) and his rejection of many other theologies for the same reason (that they admitted evidence which was not drawn from and consistent with Scripture) and one might expect to find here *the* truly biblical theologian.

And indeed one could find a myriad of examples to show that this is the case. For example, it is not only in the detail of his dogmatics but in its very structure that he follows what he believes he finds in Scripture. Thus the sections of *Church Dogmatics* III/4 which deal with man as he relates to God (on the holy day, in confession, in prayer); to his fellows (the man/woman relationship, parents and children, near and distant neighbours); as he is in himself (respect and protection for life, an active life); as he is in his limitation (that is death), all grow directly out of the doctrinal conclusions of *Church Dogmatics* III/2 which is based firmly on Genesis. The architecture of Barth's Dogmatics is in all parts overtly biblical.

However, even here we need to sound a note of caution. Barth's whole method is not scriptural; his selection and presentation depend as much upon his imagination and insight as they do upon biblical hints about priorities. His exegesis never escaped from the existentialism he learnt so well from Kierkegaard. His argument, as we have already seen in his discussion of the problem of evil, is influenced by neo-platonic philosophy. His whole attitude to Scripture is influenced by a philosophy of history which is arguably not found in Scripture.

And to return to our original question, there are places where Barth's exegesis masks his refusal to take parts of Scripture seriously. This is certainly the case in his treatment of Romans 1. Whilst it is true that where Barth discusses this in the *Church Dogmatics* he gives attention to the context of the epistle,<sup>124</sup> the Greek text<sup>125</sup>, to Paul's intention<sup>126</sup> and to the contemporary situation, nevertheless it is equally noticeable that for all the apparent attention to exegetical detail, Barth's style and intention are polemical.

His excursuses come in sub-sections entitled 'Religion as Unbelief',<sup>127</sup> 'The Readiness of God',<sup>128</sup> and 'The Man of Sin in the light of the Obedience of the Son of God'<sup>129</sup> which all intend to show the impossibility of understanding these verses in any way that admits of natural theology. In these excursuses, Barth heaps up reasons for his position, but there is no cool scholarly look at the different interpretative alternatives such as one finds in contemporary commentaries,<sup>130</sup> nor any reasoned defence offered for his position. Rather, rhetorical questions about Paul's status are flung down,<sup>131</sup> and the whole argument is backed by appeal to passages outside of Paul, especially Acts 17, which is similarly expounded without careful reasoned arguments.

Consequently, one must conclude that there is no impartial exegesis in any of these places. Barth came to doubt the validity of all that was associated with natural theology early in his career:<sup>132</sup> he read Romans, and believed he had found there the

<sup>124</sup> E.g. C.D. II/1 104; cf. 107, 119.

<sup>125</sup> E.g. C.D. IV/1 393, 'The threefold γὰρ'.

<sup>126</sup> E.g. C.D. IV/1 392ff., where Paul is mentioned at least thirteen times; cf. C.D. II/1 102, 'he certainly did not intend'.

<sup>127</sup> C.D. I/2 297-325.

<sup>128</sup> C.D. II/1 63-128.

<sup>129</sup> C.D. IV/1 358-458.

<sup>130</sup> E.g. V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London, Macmillan 1952) 310, 'This is a formidable case; but much of it falls away when it is submitted to a cool appraisal.' Cf. Barrett, *John* 127f. who offers five areas which may be seen as the background to ὁ Λόγος. Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans II* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1979) 521ff. Romans 10:5 has two interpretations, which are outlined before one is chosen.

<sup>131</sup> E.g. C.D. II/1 104, 'Is there a place...?' 'Is there a remote possibility?'

<sup>132</sup> Cf. E. Busch, *Karl Barth* (ET; London, SCM 1976) 81ff., especially 97, 'It was

alternative base which he required;<sup>133</sup> he wrote his dogmatics from that conclusion, and consequently sought to interpret in another way anything that might offer a *biblical* foundation to the contrary view.<sup>134</sup>

So, is Barth therefore not a truly biblical theologian even in Ebeling's sense of being concerned to do 'theology in accordance with the Bible'? The thrust of this paper has seemed to be negative; is there no positive conclusion to this question? What must be asserted is that Barth's *intention* is to be as truly a biblical theologian as is humanly possible. And therein lies the rub! Human beings, even theologians such as Barth, are prone to errancy and fallibility. Thus he does not use all of Scripture in his doctrine, on occasion deliberately ignoring it. He does not use it evenly through his dogmatics, nor does he pay careful attention to textual criticism. He is not overly concerned to establish the historical facts which lie behind Scripture, so is not a truly biblical theologian in any of those respects. Even in his intention to listen carefully to what the text means to say he is fallible, and despite his theological method he does not always give Scripture precedence over everything.

But these negatives are in reality the exceptions which prove the rule. For they must be set against the massive engagement with Scripture which is to be found in the *Church Dogmatics*. This engagement is to be found at every level, even though it is not always successful. But Barth himself recognized that in dogmatics 'we are in a relative movement away from exegesis. And even a relative movement away from exegesis is dangerous. . . [But] it must have the courage to incur this danger. It must cherish the hope not to stumble'.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless it has to be said that Barth could not have been more concerned to be biblical, and is certainly outstanding in his own generation and perhaps in every generation in this concern that not only the

Thurneysen who whispered the key phrase to me, half aloud, while we were alone together: "what we need for preaching, instruction and pastoral care is a 'wholly other' theological foundation". (Quoted from 'Nachwort' in *Schleiermacher-Auswahl* 294.)

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Busch, *Karl Barth* 101.

<sup>134</sup> This does not mean to imply that Barth was unjustly biased. He had changed his mind before, and if he had found reason enough, one might have expected him to do so again; cf. K. Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (ET; Edinburgh, The Saint Andrew Press 1969).

<sup>135</sup> C.D. I/2 883f.

**content of his dogmatics but also his method should be in accordance with Scripture.**

**A truly biblical theologian? Yes, insofar as it was humanly possible!**