

CHRIST AND CULTURE

Graham Ward



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Challenges in Contemporary Theology

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to Rowan

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Part One</i> THE ECONOMY OF RESPONSE	27
1 Christology and Mimesis	29
2 The Schizoid Christ	60
3 The Body of the Church and its Erotic Politics	92
<i>Part Two</i> ENGENDERING CHRIST	111
4 Redemption: Between Reception and Response	113
5 Divinity and Sexual Difference	129
6 The Politics of Christ's Circumcision (and the Mystery of all Flesh)	159
<i>Part Three</i> THE LIVING CHRIST: ECONOMIES OF REDEMPTION	181
7 <i>Allegoria Amoris</i> : A Christian Ethics	183
8 Spiritual Exercises: A Christian Pedagogy	219
9 Suffering and Incarnation: A Christian Politics	248
Index	267

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INTRODUCTION

God is not known to us in His nature, but is made known to us from His operations. (*Summa Theologiae*, I.Q13.8)

Taking our cue from this statement by Aquinas, the Christological question begins not with *who* is the Christ or *what* is the Christ; it begins with *where* is the Christ. The Christological enquiry therefore does not begin with the identity of the Christ, what in dogmatics is the nature as distinct from the work of Christ; it begins with an analysis of the operations whereby Christ is made known to us. And in being made known we participate in him. The Christological work then in these essays is orientated towards questions concerning soteriology, rather than personhood – and as such they are trying to correct a tendency in Christological thinking since at least Schleiermacher. Christ, as second person of the Trinity, is the archetype of all relation. All relations, that is, participate in and aspire to their perfection in the Christological relation. Not only in him is all relation perfected, but the work and economy he is implicated in is relation: that is, the reconciliation of the world to God, summed up in the consummation of the covenant. Christology is concerned, then, with solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity; aspects of relationality. Several corollaries follow from this.

First, Christological enquiry is a profoundly hermeneutical one – no appeal can be made to immediate knowledge of God. This means, *pace* Barth, Christ cannot be an ‘epistemological principle [*Erkenntnisprinzip*]¹ for we have no access to how Christ views and knows things. We only have access to interpretations of the way Christ views and knows things; interpretations which may participate in God’s grace, but which we cannot claim to be so inspired without scandal (*skandolon*). Secondly, the focus of this hermeneutical enquiry is the nexus of relations in which the historical, social and cultural engage with the divine. Every statement about Christ

¹ *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1 (Zürich/Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), p. 21; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, tr. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 21.

cannot be reduced to, but is, nevertheless, a statement about ourselves and the times and cultures we inhabit. Thirdly, the enquiry itself is governed by the time and circumstances within which it takes place. For to speak of operations is to speak of what has been observed in the past but always in the present. Operations are conducted grammatically in present continuous action. Hence we arrive at the principle of the studies presented here: that the engagement of Christ with culture and the enquiry into that engagement are inseparable. To do Christology is to engage in a Christological operation; to enquire is to engender Christ; to enter the engagement is to foster the economy whereby God is made known to us. To do Christology is to inscribe Christ into the times and cultures we inhabit. It is therefore an operation of redemption undertaken in obedience to witness by faith, in grace. But, in the wake of corollaries 1–3, what is needed is a methodology that can facilitate the examination of the relations and operations that constitute this matrix – and this is where these essays situate themselves.

To some extent the nature of Christological enquiry as I have set it out has been recognised by other theologians. We can take two examples two hundred years apart. The first is from Lessing's famous essay 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power'. Lessing, writing of the time of Origen, observes:

Origen was quite right in saying that in this proof of spirit and of power the Christian religion was able to provide a proof of its own more divine than all Greek dialectic. For in his time there was still 'the power to do miraculous things still continued' among those who lived after Christ's precept ... But I am no longer in Origen's position. I live in the eighteenth century in which miracles no longer happen. If I even now hesitate to believe anything on the proof of the spirit and of power, which I can believe on other arguments more appropriately to my age.²

The second is from Wolfhart Pannenberg's study *Jesus – God and Man* and forms part of his analysis of modern Christologies that emphasise 'Revelational Presence':

That the entire problem of the concept of revelation and especially of the connection between Revealer and what is revealed in God's self-revelation has been thought through only in more modern theology – indeed, fully only in the present – is probably connected with the fact that the existence of God in general was self-evident in earlier periods and appeared to be secured by the philosophical proofs for God. One began with such a given concept of God and simply asked how this God could have come into the flesh. Thereby

² Henry Chadwick tr., *Lessing's Theological Writing* (Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 52.

one was already stuck in the middle of insoluble difficulties. Since the destruction of the old theistic picture of the world by the Enlightenment and by Kant, such a procedure is no longer possible ... For this reason, the problem of revelation has become the fundamental question in modern theology, that is, the only possible basis for speaking about God himself.³

Allow me to make three observations, pertinent to this study, with respect to these two statements.

First, in talking about Christ and culture we are concerned with *discourses* on Jesus Christ; representations that are reflective of because embedded within, and also productive of, specific sets of cultural values and assumptions. Dogmatically, we are working on doctrines that constitute Christology – incarnation, atonement, sin, sanctification, the new community – as the Church has formulated them through its historically situated meditations upon Scripture, the proclamations of the Ecumenical Councils and its liturgical practices. Lessing examines Origen's understanding of Christ and recognises Origen's beliefs are no longer believable. He prepares the stage for a presentation of his own Enlightenment Christology. Pannenberg views Barth's understanding of Christ, assessing it in terms of a credible response to the rejected rational Christology of Kant (and by extension Lessing) and 'the contemporary intellectual situation'.⁴

It follows from this, secondly, that the problem which gives rise to reassessments of Jesus Christ, for both Lessing and Pannenberg, is time: time past (the Christ event) and time present ('my age'), and the relationship between the two. With Lessing there is something of a nostalgia for a time that is lost; his sentiments express the long sigh of the labourer who sees the extent of the reconstructive work that lies ahead. If he opens the ugly ditch between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, both Pannenberg and Barth are, in their different ways, working to close it. Nevertheless, each of these theologians is embroiled with a problematic about time that is being interpreted according to agendas set by history as a human science. And though Schweitzer, while praising the achievements of historiography in the service of dogma, pointed to the enormous limitations of tracking down the historical Jesus, the tracking continues.⁵ The historical Jesus has dominated Christology because of the way systematic theologians have relied upon historico-critical investigations into the Gospels in order to

³ *Jesus – God and Man*, tr. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), p. 131.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵ Norman Perrin's work is usually associated with the 'second' quest for the historical Jesus in the 1960s, and E.P. Sanders, John P. Meier and N.T. Wright with the third and still ongoing quest.

establish the identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the faith of the first Christian Churches. We can see this even with the Roman Catholic theologian, Walter Kasper, who rightly sets about answering the question, ‘Where and how do we meet Jesus Christ today?’⁶ Kasper, nevertheless, spends most of his book going through accounts of ‘The Earthly Jesus’ and his resurrection. Of course, no Christology can avoid what the Scriptures say about Christ, but the historico-critical tools used hermeneutically are not without pre-suppositions. They are secular tools that *prima facie* offer a veneer of scientific realism. In wielding them a sense arises that somehow we have access to empirical truths (and that these kinds of truths are the very mark of truth itself). What starts to be forgotten is that acts of interpretation are taking place, and, as we have learnt from Gadamer, these acts of interpretation are governed as much by our own cultural standpoint (and its predispositions) as any past being investigated.⁷

The predispositions and assumptions that situate either historian or theologian become evident, thirdly, in the way the Christological investigation in the wake of the Enlightenment develops categories that reflect the turn to the human subject that grounded Enlightenment thinking. Christ becomes a figure to be treated in terms of personhood, modern views of what constitute human nature, and notions of identity. Theologians may no longer set themselves up as amateur psychoanalysts – as some nineteenth-century writers of kenotic Christologies did – but, nevertheless, Christology in this cultural climate, whether expounded by Lessing, Pannenberg or even Barth,⁸ focuses on defining ‘who is this Jesus, called the Christ?’ From this the dogmatic enquiry proceeds then to ask about the work done as the

⁶ *Jesus the Christ*, tr. V. Green (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), p. 24.

⁷ Barth is aware of the limitation of verification through historicism (*Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1, pp. 316–23; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, pp. 335–41). Nevertheless, he uses the positivist findings of historical criticism if not to prove his thesis then certainly to lend his exegesis professional credibility (possibly having learnt the need to do this following the debates among New Testament scholars over the two editions of *Der Römerbrief*). It is this desire to make a reading ‘credible’ by borrowing the symbolic capital from the results of form, redaction and source criticism that I am referring to – using this material as if it was beyond interpretation and dealt only with facts.

⁸ I say ‘even Barth’ because Barth was consciously challenging traditional dogmatic enquiry (*Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1, pp. 135–40; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, pp. 123–8). In particular, he questions having Christology as a section that is entirely distinct from ‘what we have to say concerning man and the Church’ (p. 135/124). He also questions the distinction between the person and work of Jesus Christ (p. 139/127). Nevertheless, he opens his Christology with an investigation into the divine nature, although the identity of the Christ lies for him in a praxis (obedience, servitude) rather than a certain kind of subjectivity. As I will detail below, his dialectical method militates against examining this praxis in terms of what it produces and for whom. The dialectical method forces Barth into treating Christ as either an absolute subject (considered in himself) or object (considered with respect to either God as Father or the Christian community).

Christ and then the consequences of that work for humanity. The founding dogmatic question concerns the nature of identity. What follows, as Barth recognised, is that Christological examinations ‘concerning Him always move in either the one direction or the other, from above downwards or from below upwards’⁹ – in Rahner’s terms, Christology from below or Christology from above. Of course, it could be argued that the identity question is an old question, already hotly debated in the Council of Chalcedon, and answered in the formulation *vere homo, vere Deus*. But I would contend that Chalcedon was following through the double knowledge of Christ found in the Gospel letters: to know Jesus Christ ‘according to the flesh’ and ‘according to the spirit’ (see Rom. 1.3; I Tim. 3.16; I Pet. 3.18). This double mode of knowing is developed into the two natures that are the objects of such knowing. Not that these modes of knowing and these natures are dualistically distinct from one another. While they cannot be conflated with one another, an analogical relation binds them in the same way as, from Origen onward, there is a spiritual sensing that is analogically related to a carnal sensing. The relation makes possible a double operation recorded in the work of other pre-Chalcedonian Fathers like Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria: ‘God lived with men as man that man might be taught to live the divine life: God lived on man’s level that man might be able to live on God’s level’;¹⁰ ‘I say, of God, who became man that you may learn from a man how it may be that man should become God.’¹¹ What Chalcedon discusses and formulates, then, is *phusis* or *substantia* itself in Jesus Christ, and by extension all creation conceived and known *en Christo*. This is quite different from the identity concerns constituting the parameters of the Christological discussions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that still hold sway over modern Christian dogmatics.

From these three observations concerning Christology’s association with discourse, time and history, and the cultural specificity of certain concepts for and methods of investigation, we can concur with Walter Kasper: ‘in Christology we are ultimately concerned with the Christian understanding of reality in the broadest sense of the word. Christology has to do at least in rudimentary terms with the relation between Christianity and culture, politics and so forth.’¹² This being the case, the Christological task is always to ask two questions: not only ‘What sense do we make of the Christ event today?’ but also ‘How are we making that sense for today and what does that

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149/136.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ii.27.

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 1.8, 4.

¹² *Jesus the Christ*, p. 20.

making itself point to?’ Not that the past is irrelevant, for the horizons of today’s questions are always configured by what has been handed down to us – including the historical Jesus himself recorded in the Scriptures. But because Jesus Christ is a confession of faith, and faith is a present operation with respect to salvation, then God is made known by us today in ways that differ from the time of Lessing, or Pannenberg, or Barth. We are no longer bound by Enlightenment rationalism, nineteenth- and twentieth-century preoccupations with subjectivism, psychologism, historical positivism, humanism, ameliorism, liberalism and the pursuit of freedom. We are no longer bound by the way such a culture conceives Christology anthropologically, employing pseudo-scientific tools to achieve the ‘effects’ of a rational demonstration. Not only is God made known by us differently, God is made known to us in new ways – for the effects of the operations of God are today’s effects, not last century’s.¹³ It is because, then, the Christ-event is always culturally inflected that our two questions arise and determine investigations into what sense this event makes in our own times, with our own ideologies and cultural agendas and what relationship holds between the sense we ‘make’ today of that event and the senses of that event that were ‘made’ in the past.¹⁴

Beyond Dogmatic Enquiry

If what I am setting out is a different agenda for Christology today, these essays are only exercises that go towards fulfilling such an agenda. Nothing here is systematic, but the essays written here over the last ten years are trying to clear a space in which a more systematic work can appear. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile indicating as clearly as possible how, specifically, does the approach to Christology in these essays differ from (and supplement) the approach found in more traditional dogmatics. I will do

¹³ The distinction between being made known by us (*a nobis*) and to us (*nobis*), I take from 1a12 of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* where he moves between both terms.

¹⁴ In a fascinating study on ‘The Face and Physique of the Historical Jesus’, the New Testament scholar Stephen D. Moore, in his book *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford University Press, 2001), examines the presentations of Jesus Christ from Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ* (1940), *The Lord Is My Shepherd* (1943), *Christ Our Pilot* (1950) and *Portrait of Jesus* (1966) to Willem Dafoe’s performance of ‘Jesus as a Zen hippie’ (p. 125) in Martin Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and the jacket illustrations of John P. Meiers, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vols. 1 (1991) and 2 (1994) and E.P. Sanders’s *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1995). Moore points to the idealised figures of male virtue and beauty, to the implicitly gay iconography of ‘the radiantly handsome hero’ (p. 129). What his essay illustrates is the ongoing production of Christology, a production inseparable from wider cultural concerns, values and agendas.

this through briefly examining the construction of Christology by Karl Barth, for Barth too was responding to the historicist method of treating Christology evident in his own teacher Wilhelm Hermann, and wished to emphasise revelation as an ongoing event or action. But by proceeding this way I can point up how my own approach differs, and why, and with what results. In what follows I am not then invalidating dogmatic enquiry but showing how it requires supplementation. For Barth, this supplementation will entail challenging the heart of his dialectical method.

Karl Barth's most detailed examination of Jesus Christ is located in *Church Dogmatics* I.2, IV.1 and IV.2 – that is, with his expositions of the doctrine of the Word of God and his elaboration of the doctrine of reconciliation (*Versöhnung* – atonement). In particular, I will treat volumes I.2 and IV.1, although Barth would be the first to remind us that since all our knowledge of God issues in and through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, his Christology actually knits together (and makes possible) the whole of the *Church Dogmatics*. In what follows, the doctrine of Jesus Christ that Barth offers is not my foremost concern. I will not be arguing, then, with whether this doctrine is Alexandrian, Antiochene, Nestorian or just downright incoherent (as some critics have argued).¹⁵ Nor am I concerned with whether the resulting dogmatics is Christocentric or Christomonistic (as other critics have argued).¹⁶ My concern is to give an account of the ways by which his doctrine of Christ emerges, the implicit philosophical assumptions or values implicit in his approach, and the limitations that accrue from it.

We can begin with a telling exegetical remark concerning John 3.16 – ‘God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Barth observes: ‘[T]he divine loving in the form of the sending of the Son is the confirmation of the will of God not to acquiesce in this [*nicht bewenden zu lassen*] [‘this’ = the lostness of human beings] but to cause [*haben zu lassen*] man to

¹⁵ Given the centrality of Christology to Barth's dogmatics, the critical literature on his Christology is legion. See John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press, 1978); Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984); Bruce Marshall, *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Jeffery C. Pugh, *The Anselmic Shift: Christology and Method in Karl Barth's Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 327–463; George Hunsinger, ‘Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character’ in John Webster ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 127–42.

¹⁶ See George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford University Press, 1991), especially his conclusion on Christ as the centre, pp. 225–33.

have the eternal life which he has forfeited.¹⁷ The revealing clause is ‘to cause man to have eternal life’. It is revealing because it states the purpose of God’s act – a purpose that because of the sovereignty of God’s will will necessarily come about – but it tells us nothing about the process of that act, namely, how God causes human beings to participate in him and have eternal life. Barth insists that there is a participation,¹⁸ but the effect of not giving an account of the process, or economy, of redemption is that relations between God and human beings appear autocratic. The qualification that human beings respond ‘by faith’ in this act of divine sovereignty is only a partial answer, especially when that faith paradoxically ‘even in its emptiness and passivity ... has [*trägt*] this character of supreme fullness and activity’.¹⁹ For faith is itself an operation; it is a relational process whereby something comes to pass. Faith is time-bound. Furthermore, it is an engagement that can take many different forms, not just passive obedience. What is missing from Barth’s account of faith is the experience and practices in which faith becomes operable and evident: the formation of the one who is being faithful. What is missing is a sociology and a phenomenology of believing. On its own, ‘by faith’ is simply a theological abstraction. Faith is a response to that which constitutes a relation with; response and engagement enable participation in an economy that is shared. We can agree with Barth that God is the initiator of this redemption, and we do not wish either to deny the ontological difference between creator and creation or to fall into some Pelagian heresy. But faith, I would argue, is an operation in response to a recognition of love, and what is missing in Barth’s account is the process whereby love is received and responded to. We might put this in another way (a way that finds repeated expression in the essays that follow): there is in Barth no account of the economy of desire and the productions of faith, discipleship, and personal formation.

There is a second consequence of this failure to account for how redemption is brought about. That is, for all Barth’s emphasis on covenant, ‘God for us’ and his ‘being present and active in the world in Christ’,²⁰ he constitutes God as an alienated acting subject, even when it is God incarnate. The heart of the matter here concerns the human nature of Jesus Christ. For while we can admit that all our conceptions of what it is to be human (and in *Church Dogmatics* III Barth labours the point that to be human is not to be a solitary individual but to be in relation) find their perfect expression in Christ,

¹⁷ *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1, p. 77; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80/74–5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 711/636.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80/75.

nevertheless equivocality cannot dictate two uses of the term human: a use for Christ and a use for other human beings. We may, in the manner of Aquinas, have to admit our ignorance of what it means to be human if Christ is the perfection of that humanity, but without an analogical relation between these two uses of 'human' how does the operation of redemption take place? How would human beings ever know it had taken place?²¹ The problem here concerns what Hegel would call 'recognition' – to recognise demands an exchange in which one *is* recognised. One can observe in descriptions by Barth of the 'yawning abyss [*ein weit aufgerissener Abgrund*]'²² between God and creation a tendency towards equivocality:

Those who believe in Jesus Christ will never forget for a single moment that the true and actual being of reconciled man [*Menschen*] has its place in that Other who is strange, and different from them, and that that is why they can participate in it [the reconciliation between human beings and God] with a fullness and clarity the knowledge of which would be broken if they were to look aside to any other place.²³

There is a double-bind here in which Christians are caught. It has two characteristics. First, radical difference *enables* participation. Second, the logic of that enablement is neither *prima facie* nor open to human investigation. Even putting aside this double-bind, Barth's language itself distinguishes between being human and being other, strange and different. In other words, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ always separates him from the world he entered into which was his own (John 1.11).

It is at this point that we have to turn to *Church Dogmatics* I.2, for Barth would justify the theo-logic of this double-bind on the basis of a unique Christological formula – *anhypostasis–enhyypostasis*.²⁴ Following Bruce McCormack's narrative of the *anhypostasis–enhyypostasis* as the turning point in

²¹ On the difficulties of Barth's notion of 'analogy' see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung: Seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1951), pp. 93–181; Horst Georg Poehlmann, *Analogia Entis oder Analogia Fidei? Die Frage der Analogie bei Karl Barth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); Henri Chavannes, *L'analogie entre Dieu et le monde selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et selon Karl Barth* (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1969); and my *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²² *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1, p. 87; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, p. 82.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 98/92.

²⁴ Barth himself does not view his formulation as innovative, but see U.M. Lang, 'Anhypostatos–Enhyypostatos: Church Fathers, Protestant Orthodoxy and Karl Barth', *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 NS, pt. 2, October (1998), pp. 630–57: 'If there is indeed anything like a "dual formula" *anhypostasis–enhyypostasis*, it is Barth's own innovation rather than that of Protestant orthodoxy', p. 632.

Barth's theology,²⁵ a debate ensued concerning the coherence of Barth's Christology with regard to Christ as both *anhypostasis* and *enhyposstasis*. The debate opened with F. LeRon Shults's essay, 'A Dubious Christological Formula: From Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth',²⁶ the main thrust of which claimed that Barth had received this doctrine through Heinrich Heppe's and Heinrich Schmidt's summaries of Protestant Scholasticism. For Shults, Barth's account is incoherent and badly misinterprets the Patristic thinking on this doctrine. Subsequently, two detailed articles appeared: the first by U.M. Lang²⁷ and the second by Matthias Gockel.²⁸ The argument of these essays – which involved extensive exegetical treatment of the doctrine by the Church Fathers – is that the Protestant Scholasticism that Barth worked through to formulate his Christological position was very much in line with the more traditional readings of this teaching. In fact, Gockel even compares the Christologies of Aquinas and Barth that rehearse the *anhypostasis–enhyposstasis* formula and declares they are entirely congruent. Significantly, neither Lang nor Gockel return to Barth's text in *Church Dogmatics* I.2 to examine Barth's examination of the teaching. Furthermore, neither Lang nor Gockel explain how, given practically identical Christologies between John Damascene, Aquinas and Barth, both Damascene and Aquinas develop highly participatory accounts of the relationship between the Creator and Creation such that they articulate a *sacramentum mundi*.

In returning to Barth, we have to recognise that his adoption of the 'dual formula' (that he alone is the innovator of²⁹) was determined by its dialectical character. Having set out, in #15 of I.2, that the theological necessity for revelation of God lay in God becoming fully human ('His complete solidarity with us'³⁰), Barth then strikes the dialectical chord: 'In becoming the same as we are, the Son of God is the same in quite a different [*ganz anders*] way from us.'³¹ It is from this point in his argument that he outlines how the Word 'assumes' true human existence (to which the commission of sin is not attributable³²). What he will finally outline as *enhyposstasis* is this 'assump-

²⁵ *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 327–463. This essay has been developed in F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 147–50.

²⁶ *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), pp. 431–46.

²⁷ 'Anhypostatos–Enhypostatos', pp. 630–57.

²⁸ 'A Dubious Christological Formula? Leontius of Byzantium and the *Anhypostasis–Enhyposstasis* Theory', *Journal of Theological Studies* NS, 51 pt. 2, October (2000), pp. 515–32.

²⁹ Lang, 'Anhypostatos–Enhypostatos', p. 632.

³⁰ *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, I.2, p. 167; *Church Dogmatics*, I.2, p. 153.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170/155.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 170/156.

tion': 'the Word of God becomes flesh, assumes [*Annahme*] or adopts [*Aufnahme*] or incorporates [*Hineinnahme*] human being into unity with His divine being'.³³ Putting to one side the range of Christological positions opened by those three different prefixes 'an-', 'auf-', and 'hinein-', to the German verb *nehmen* (translated as assumes, adopts, incorporates), *enhypostasis* defines this *unio personalis* – according to the Protestant Scholastics Quenstedt and Hollaz. And, if the arguments of Lang and Gockel are correct, then this understanding of *enhypostasis* is in accord with Patristic (and Aquinas's) teaching. But Barth goes further – and this going further results in the innovation of the 'dual formula'. He writes, with important theological consequences: 'Jesus Christ is described primarily as an *unio personalis sive hypostica* and only secondarily as an *unio naturarum*'.³⁴ This hierarchy of descriptions – primary and secondary – then allows not only for the positive teaching of the *enhypostasis* but also for the negative teaching of the *anhypostasis*: 'Apart from the divine mode of being whose existence it [Christ's human nature] acquires it has none of its own; i.e., apart from its concrete existence in God in the event of the *unio*, it has no existence of its own, it is *anhypostasis*.' *Anhypostasis* safeguards two theological axioms for Barth: first, the utter uniqueness of this unity and, second, the lack of a point of contact between God and human beings in creation. *Anhypostasis* accords emphasis to a *unio personalis sive hypostica* rather than a *unio naturarum*. *Anhypostasis* withdraws the Godhead deep into its own mystery; *enhypostasis* speaks of an indwelling human being in Christ – just as all things exist in and through Christ. The reason why this dual formula and distinction between primary and secondary description is important for Barth is that *enhypostasis* can then not suggest a *communis participatio* – which he views as the Lutheran error in Christology. For such *enhypostatic* unity, 'does not this give us a kind of reciprocal relation between Creator and creature?'³⁵ In fact, there is a wide range of distinctions to be made between 'reciprocity' and 'relation'. There can be a relation between Creator and creatures without that being reciprocal (understood as symmetrical). There can be an asymmetrical relation in which creation is sustained in its utter gratuity from God while nevertheless responding eucharistically to such grace. This is a *communio* rather than a *communis participatio*; theologically it makes possible a sacramental and participatory understanding of the relationship between Creator and creation. But Barth's inability to think through an asymmetrical relation that would bind more closely a *unio personalis sive hypostica* with a *unio naturarum* –

³³ Ibid., p. 175/160.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 176/161.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 179/164.

Barth's modern and uncritical construal of 'nature' – forestalls such an exploration.

As such the work of Christ cannot be characterised in terms of the ordinary human operations of that world – its politics, economics, social and cultural milieu, his friends, his family, his enemies, his admirers. Christ becomes the perfect expression of Cartesian subjectivity: autonomous, self-determining, self-defining, the atomised subject of a number of distinct properties or predicates;³⁶ as Barth himself puts it, the 'epistemological principle'.³⁷ Christ becomes either the absolute subject or the absolute object: he 'who is the subject and object of the basic act of God, the subject and object of the consummating act of God that reveals that basis'.³⁸ The self-authenticating nature of Christ is reflected in the self-referential nature of the dogmatic enquiry. For Barth can only characterise the work of this Jesus Christ in terms of a number of theologoumena, namely, intra-ecclesial abstractions such as grace, covenant, atonement, sin and revelation. And so, despite the matrix of relations in which the New Testament situates Jesus Christ, Barth's Jesus Christ is not a social animal; he is an other, an alien, a 'pure act[s] of [the] divine grace'³⁹ of God.⁴⁰

The question raised here is where is this figure of Christ as the 'epistemological principle' and the 'pure act' to be found? How do we have access to the principle or the pure act so that we recognise them to be such? In these terms are we not dealing with logical inferences, speculative inferences, that Barth himself has made on the basis of his exegeses of the Scriptures? Are we not dealing with a construction, a portrayal of Christ that is Barth's own? For Barth is clear, we have no immediate access to Jesus Christ. All we know

³⁶ See Bruce Marshall, *Christology in Conflict*, for an examination and analysis of Barth's Christology in terms of a particularised subject of certain unique predicates, the first and most fundamental of which is 'incarnation'. *Enhyppostasis*, as George Florovsky observes, does not occur by itself. It therefore cannot be conceived in Cartesian terms. It is constituted by an interaction of natures, so that our being in Christ is *enhyppostasis*. See *The Byzantine Fathers of the 6th to 8th Centuries*, tr. Raymond Miller et al. (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987) especially chapter four (pp. 191–203) on Leontius of Byzantium, who defined *en-* and *an-hyppostasis*. *Enhyppostasis* (which determines incarnation from the human perspective by defining a theological anthropology) is a condition of being in relation. We might then understand the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the bringing into being of a new relation. Relations, as these essays demonstrate, are not static states but continual operations.

³⁷ *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik*, IV.1, p. 21; *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, p. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 361/327. See also footnote 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53/50.

⁴⁰ In terms of the Chalcedonian Creed, it is difficult to avoid concluding that Barth's theological position approximates to that of Eutyches, who refused to accept that Christ is *homoousios* with us in all things 'sin only accepted'. See R.U. Sellar's classic study *The Council of Chalcedon: A Historical and Doctrinal Survey* (London: SPCK, 1953), p. 212.

we know as mediated. Charges of revelatory positivism cannot be levied against Barth at this point in his theological thinking. But here, with his construal of mediation, we reach the heart of the matter.

It is interesting, and significant, that in Barth's wish to argue for a description of Christ's atonement in terms of the judge judged in our place – as distinct from a priestly, sacrificial understanding of atonement that is important to Roman Catholic theologies of divine reconciliation – he writes of the need for 'a salutary reminder that in dogmatics we cannot speak down from heaven in the language of God [*Sprache Gottes*], but only on earth as strictly and exactly as we can in human language [*Menschensprache*]'.⁴¹ The old priestly and cultic metaphors in the New Testament present 'a form which is now rather remote from us'.⁴² Here are signs that Barth is conscious of the mediation of both the New Testament material and contemporary dogmatics. But his investigations into this mediation are limited. In fact, there is a sense in which mediation itself is fallenness for Barth; something we must get beyond. That there is a place where interpretation stops finds two particular locations in Barth. Not in order of importance, the first concerns those places in the Scriptures (like the resurrection narratives) where we no longer are dealing with a time, materiality and human perception as we know it. Here we are advised to 'stick to that which is told us, not trying to replace it by something that is not told us on the pretext that it needs interpreting'.⁴³ The second location is in the final *parousia* itself when the living presence of Jesus Christ is directly encountered. As such, to look towards the *eschaton* is to live 'with a burning longing [*brennenden Sehnsucht*] for the sight denied them in this time, for the liberation and redemption which are still to come, for an immediacy of contact [*Unmittelbarkeit ihrer Beziehung*] with the Lord without the help or the distraction of mediation [*Mittelbarkeit*]'.⁴⁴ Mediation, then, like the world, is something to be overcome.

The root of this response to mediation (which is so unlike Augustine, Aquinas, or any Christian theologian with a developed sense of the *sacramentum mundi*) lies in the way Barth focuses any theological attention to mediation on Jesus Christ himself – Jesus Christ as the mediator of God to humanity and humanity to God. Two consequences follow from this, both of which are further outworkings of his theological method. First, the processes of mediation are never materially delineated – they are only theologically delineated in terms of Barth's pneumatology: the Spirit's noetic

⁴¹ *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik/Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, p. 301/274.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 302/275.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 377/342.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 360/326.

working out of a new ontology wrought by Christ. Secondly, the fallenness of humankind is such that Jesus Christ can only mediate himself to himself: all human perception and modes of thinking are inadequate. The depth of the alienation of the world from Christ renders mediation impossible unless Christ himself does it (what Barth terms God's 'self-attestation') – and even then there is a question of how we would ever recognise or understand such mediation. Of course, Barth is not oblivious to this question. In fact, as so often in his work, he anticipates it:

The kernel of the question is simply the incompatibility of the existence of Jesus Christ with us and us with Him, the impossibility of the co-existence of His divine-human actuality and action and our sinfully human being and activity, the direct collision between supreme order and supreme disorder.⁴⁵

But to raise the question does not necessarily mean that it is answered decisively. And it cannot be answered decisively because any answer is pre-determined by the dialectical method that divides the subject from its opposite, and seals not only the truth of Christ within the self-attestation of Christ himself but also dogmatic thinking within the endless hermeneutical spiralling between Christ and his Church. The hermeneutical spiralling may not, as Barth claims, constitute a vicious circle, but I suggest it limits theological reflection somewhat. Most particularly, it limits operations. Because there is inadequate enquiry given to the mediation itself, there is no space open for evaluating the extent to which one's figuring of Christ is itself profoundly imbued with the values, assumptions (or the reactions to those values and assumptions) of the culture in which it was conceived.

To sum up, then, Barth's dogmatic approach to Christology (a) all too thinly defines the economies of salvation in which the gracious love of Christ finds a responding desire; (b) this finds expression in the thinness of his account of mediations (c) such that his mediating Christology remains tied to specific cultural assumptions about the subject and nature; (d) this binds Christology to the logic of dualism, itself a product of a certain cultural heritage in modernity;⁴⁶ (e) this logic and these assumptions, on the basis of which he develops his dialectical method, render him unable to reflect upon his own cultural production of Christology. The world is so lost, so secularised, so ignorant of God that both Christ and subsequently a theology of Christ operate above and beyond such a world, in contradistinction

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 385/348.

⁴⁶ For the relationship between Barth's theological thinking and modernity see my 'Barth, Modernity and Postmodernity' in John Webster ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 274–95.

to it. Dogmatics is fundamentally a countercultural activity. Hence, for him, Christian apologetics is an anathema.⁴⁷

To some extent, the problem here lies with the nature of modern dogmatics itself and the professionalisation of systematic theology such that every theologian worth his or her salt must attempt at least a three-volume enterprise. For modern dogmatics has an inherent tendency to pursue the normative, to essentialise, to seek to present a theology and therefore a religion such as Christianity as a self-contained doctrinal system. This tendency emerges from – to go back no further – Protestant Scholasticism and, later, Enlightenment rationalism. Evident in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, it is summed up in a distinction used by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* between 'dogma itself, which is the substance of religion' and 'worship [which] is only the form'.⁴⁸ This idealist tendency, fostered by Enlightenment rationalism that separates doctrine as substance from praxis as form, is amplified when theology appeals only to its own theological resources in order to define itself (as in Barth). The Patristic scholar Richard Hanson makes a valid point when he observes with respect to second- and third-century Christian theologians: 'it is impossible to interpret the Bible in the vocabulary of the Bible'.⁴⁹ If Christianity is to offer a different approach – an approach that can nevertheless acknowledge imaginative inflections and alternative possibilities while still speaking in accordance with a grammar of the faith – it has to move beyond modern dogmatics.

Christology and Apologetics

It is important for the essays in this collection that Christological discourse arose not in dogmatics but apologetics.⁵⁰ I am not wishing to state either

⁴⁷ For an examination of both his attack on apologetics and yet also the way his own theological thinking cannot seal itself off from the influences and significances of other discourses, see my *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 15–57.

⁴⁸ *Democracy in America*, tr. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 422.

⁴⁹ 'The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century AD' in Rowan Williams ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 148.

⁵⁰ Apologetics were not simply something undertaken by Christians; there are a variety of apologetic forms so there were a variety of apologetic perspectives. See Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman and Simon Price eds., *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford University Press, 1999) for a collection of critical essays demonstrating the variety of apologetic viewpoints and styles. The collection serves to remind us that apologetics was not simply a matter of missionising but also the integration of identities that cultural heterogeneity and mobility across wide geographical spaces fragmented and rendered complex.

that the second-century Apologists developed Christologies free from doctrinal errors⁵¹ or that we should return to their concerns with Middle-Platonism. The point I wish to make is that Christological reflection was not simply an intra-ecclesial discourse concerned with articulating the logic of the faith with respect to New Testament titles like the Christ, the Son of God, the Word, the Son of Man and their association with Jesus of Nazareth.⁵² It was that as well, as the commentary work of Origen makes clear, and the later work of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon are examples of the working of this intra-ecclesial purpose. Though, even here, it has to be recognised that anyone wishing to understand the forging of orthodoxy in the fourth century ‘must perforce plunge into a jungle of Greek philosophical terms ... Very often the debate seems to be remote from the vocabulary and the thought of the New Testament.’⁵³ But early Christological thinking, following that composed by the authors of the New Testament, developed extra-ecclesially and with conscious reference to the cultural situation in which and to which it spoke. This thinking drew on the Scriptures but also ‘on the commonplaces of Hellenistic rhetoric and on the language of Middle-Platonist (and Stoic) religious cosmology and theology ... [In order to] present their faith in a way that might make it appear comprehensible and tolerable, if not attractive, to hostile readers.’⁵⁴ Justin Martyr read Jesus in the light of Socrates and Hermes, and draws explicitly on Plato’s *Timaeus*; Theophilus employed terms attributed to the Stoics; Irenaeus borrowed technical terms from Greek rhetoric; Clement describes Christ as a new Orpheus and was not adverse to using material from either the Gnostics or Merkabah mysticism; and the feisty Tertullian insisted on the need to use secular culture for furthering the gospel.⁵⁵ Evidently, it is in this second kind of Christological discourse that Christ and culture are most explicitly associated. Origen, for example, draws upon his knowledge of the

⁵¹ See Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine: Volume Two, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, tr. John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), pp. 157–94 and 354–86 for a sharp discussion of some of the difficulties the Christological debates from Justin to Origen engendered.

⁵² On the whole, this is the approach in James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980).

⁵³ Hanson, ‘The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century AD’, p. 148.

⁵⁴ Richard A. Norris Jr., ‘The Apologists’, in Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 36–7. For a more detailed account of the social, philosophical and religious context being addressed by the Apologists see Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–38.

⁵⁵ See J.C. Fredouille, *Tertullien, et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1972), p. 357.

philosophical schools of the day, current modes of argument and rhetoric, literature from the classical traditions and late antiquity, and discussions with contemporary rabbis. Furthermore, Origen works on the basis of cultural assumptions shared by himself and other non-Christian readers like Celsus in order to point out to them the various errors and absences in their arguments and present them with an alternative interpretation of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Church that he inaugurated.⁵⁶ He refers to common beliefs about dreams and demons, and medical lore, for example. Christological discourse was born not simply for catechesis but for mission. This is fundamental for the work involved in the essays that follow, for apologetic borrowing is not a simple matter of assimilation. While the early Church Apologists sought to persuade, they also sought to critique and to justify – to tell the story of what is in a better, more coherent, way. In particular, their critique concerned idolatry.⁵⁷ Apologetics, then, is implicated in what I call a cultural politics. Its engagement with its cultural contexts offers a *Kulturkritik*.⁵⁸

The basis for this engagement between Christ and culture is significant, in the light of Barth's dialectical method, and the resulting Christology is significant also (even if later developments in Trinitarian theology helped to formulate more adequately a non-subordinatist doctrine of Christ).⁵⁹ The theological basis lies in a certain analogy that pertains between the uncreated God and creation, Christ and human beings. It is an analogy that can pertain because we are made in the image of God and therefore, as Jean-Louis Chrétien understands, '[i]t is the transcendence in us that knows the transcendent'.⁶⁰ Irenaeus, with his teaching on the first and second Adam and Christ as the recapitulation of all righteous human beings and prophets, states the case briefly:

[I]f the first Adam was indeed taken from the earth, and moulded by the Word of God, then it was necessary that that same Word, when he made recapitulation of Adam in himself, should have a likeness of the same manner of

⁵⁶ See Henry Chadwick's magisterial edition and translation of *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge University Press, 1953).

⁵⁷ See Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Social and Historical Setting: Christianity as Cultural Critique' in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 181–99.

⁵⁸ In my *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), I present a detailed account of Christian *Kulturkritik* that examines its similarities to and differences from that social critique developed by the Frankfurt School. I will not cover the same ground in this volume.

⁵⁹ See here Hanson, 'The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century AD' and Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology*, pp. 142–96.

⁶⁰ *The Ark of Speech*, tr. Andrew Brown (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 66.