

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Beginning of Neoorthodoxy Theology: Theology of Karl Barth

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Survey of Theology

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Introduction

“I learned, as others before me have, that we study Barth not to become Barthians, but to learn new ways to maintain the old faith”.¹ Studying Karl Barth has given me a respect for Orthodoxy. Orthodox doctrine is teaching that line up with apostolic tradition, with what the apostles themselves taught and modeled.² Considering that because centuries changes one should change orthodox teaching is what one may deliberate at length. Transportation has changed. We do not drive T-models anymore nor do we depend on horse and buggy. We don’t live in tents anymore unless we are going camping. We have brick homes and condominium to abide in. Women wear their hair uncovered now. Men cut their hair low now they no longer style the nazarite hair do. Paul said, and he was an apostle, so what he teaches is orthodox, that it is a shame for a man to have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14). Some may ask: “How do we know something is God’s breathed and something is not God’s breathed?” God gives us intellect and a body that is designed for industry. Nehemiah a cup bearer could build a city because God favored him to do so. All our intellect comes from God. We are made in his image. We cannot help but to plan, design (remember Babel), create, and construct inventions to better one’s environment. One cannot, however, be overwhelmed with our plans that we leave God out. Wise Solomon says, “In all thy way acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path.” Barth does not teach revelation with experience without a serious study of the Bible. Those who deny that Barth teaches propositional revelation have not consistently followed Barth’s understanding of

¹ Bernard Ramm. *After Fundamentalism* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983), 28.

² Christopher A. Hall. *Learning Theology with The Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 20.

Holy Scripture.³ Barth expresses the actual, objective revelation in the text of scripture in the following three concepts:

1. The concept of the Bild. The German word Bild means “picture”. The word of God is in the text as a Bild...When Barth had to leave Germany under the ban of Hitler, he left as his advice to the Christians in the words “Exegesis! Exegesis! Exegesis!” He meant that only by the exegesis of the biblical text could the Christians in Germany discover the word of God and so understand Hitler and his program and have the will to fight it.
2. The concept of Sache. The German word Sache means “thing” ...referring to the meaning of a piece of Literature. Barth believes that the word of God is in scripture as the Sache of scripture.
3. The concept of wort in the words. This concept says the same thing about scripture as is said by the concepts of Bild and Sache...this concept is expressed by saying that the Word is in the words, and good biblical interpretation will bring that word to clarity.⁴

If one would consider Barth’s teaching one would know that he is strictly for Orthodox teachings and not liberalism. This study will disprove that Karl Barth did not agree with liberalism theology, he did not believe in an experiential experience with God without a biblical orthodox doctrine, and I will disprove that religious groups were not hostile about his teachings. In my study, systematic theology sources will be used for deliberating Karl Barth’s doctrine. Also, this study will disprove that Karl Barth doctrines were neoorthodoxy by using scholarly sources to show that he was truly Orthodox.

Part 1. Karl Barth’s Disagreement with Liberalism

Chapter 1

Reason for Break with Liberal Protestantism

The reasons Karl Barth rejected liberal Protestantism are for the following reasons:

- Liberal Protestantism has moved away from revelation while Catholics has pursued revelation.

³ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p.93.

⁴ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 93-94.

- Barth claims that Protestants has moved so far from authentic Christianity that all that remains is the name itself.
- God's revelation in the Protestants church has been replaced with subjectivity.
- Revelation is now history and Jesus's interpretation of "awareness of God" is new human religiosity.⁵

What Barth is rejecting is a religion based on racial election, as in the case of Germany's belief that they are the pure blood. Because they are the pure subjects than all other subjects are outmoded. Barth was not seduced by Utopian or totalitarian politics.⁶ He was a person who believed in authentic Christianity based on biblical witness which I will discuss in Chapter 5. Karl Barth also believed in revelation according to the context of the Bible (Christian faith) not for its formal claims to revelation and inspiration as in the Muslim faith.⁷ Not wanting to get in what Islam teaches, I will say this and thus conclude Chapter 1, any revelation that is not in accord with Orthodox traditions is false. God is not going to give you a revelation apart from the apostolic tradition, with what the apostles themselves taught and modeled.

Chapter 2

Barth and Neoorthodoxy Theology

Could it be that people rejects neo-orthodox because of human reasoning and not God's sovereignty? What is antinomy to human is not antinomy to angels and God. Angels and God has greater reasonings than humans.⁸ A shift in Old Testament theology occurred following World War I, this led to Christian theology in the war which was reviewed as Neoorthodoxy by

⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar. *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 34.

⁶ Ruby Koshar. "Where Is Karl Barth In Modern European History?" *Modern Intellectual History*, 5, 2 (2008), pp. 333-362.

⁷ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 131.

⁸ Paul Enns. *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 219.

Barth.⁹ From the article “Church and War in the theology of Karl Barth” Barth gives the following views:

- Barth does not think that ethics can either disallow or allow war. We should not as a general principle defend pacifism or conscientious objection, but neither should ethics be used for giving spiritual support for militarism.
- God commands respect for life, but we cannot control the concrete content of the command. We have to be open to the possibility of being commanded to go to war.
- Barth however, also points to the opposite possibility. In his words... “it may also be that as we listen more closely to what (God’s command) demands of us, reason will be taken out of the ultimate reason and the resultant slogan will be: “Down with armaments”.”
- Barth believes that nuclear weapons, the use of which would mean the mutual annihilation of warring as well as of innocent neighboring nations, had created a new situation in which the church could not be neutral. Not only the use, but also the preparation for nuclear warfare was a sin and no Christian could participate in either of those activities.
- In the cross God meets the enemy with suffering love. “The politics of God thus reveals itself as the politics of non-violent love.” Christians are called to participate in God’s life, which makes the cross the norm for Christ life.¹⁰

The above are views of Barth after World War I, he gives neoorthodoxy views according to Enns, which needs to be considered. Here in this article on the church and war are the only neoorthodoxy teachings one may find concerning Barth.

Part 2. Barth’s Beliefs

⁹ Enns. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. p. 33.

¹⁰ Arne Rasmusson. “Church and War in the Theology of Karl Barth” NGTT Deel 54, Nommers 3 and 4 September en December 2013.

Chapter 3

View of Enlightenment

Barth's view of the Enlightenment is that he is for its progress in true learning and genuine progress in knowledge, but he criticized its pretensions to final truth, to its perfect harmony with reason and its criticism of Orthodox Christianity.¹¹ Daniel Griswold in *Triune Eternity: God's Relationship to Time in the Theology of Karl Barth*, compares Barth's interpretation on eternity and time in relation to the Triune apart from scientific question and connection. Barth had this to say in discussing the nature of time:

It is obvious that the problem of time, too, is a problem of all anthropology. We cannot, therefore, ignore the attempts and conclusion of other non-theological understandings of being. But this should not debar us from approaching the problem from our own particular stand point, the theological; and therefore from noting what is revealed to us in this respect by the word of God.¹²

The Enlightenment thinker Schleiermacher views concerning God's eternity are the following:

- Eternity is "the absolutely timeless causality of God, which conditions not only all that is temporal, but time itself as well.
- Scripture may speak poetically about God's eternity being "an existence before time", but such poetic expressions are inadequate for the didactic task of dogmatics.
- Since divine causality is conditioned by time itself; therefore, divine causality can be thought of as utterly timeless.
- God's eternity is not affected by the possibility that time might be infinite.¹³

¹¹ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 14.

¹² Daniel M. Griswold. *Triune Eternity: God's Relationship to Time in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015) ebook.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

Barth accepted Schleiermacher point of view insofar as it goes, in other words he agreed with Schleiermacher, but he also thought his views were insufficient.¹⁴ The Enlightenment thinker Hegel views concerning God's eternity is the following:

- Time is an attribute of existence, that which characterizes finite, changing beings.
- Things are in time because they are finite; they do not pass away because they are in time, but are themselves that which is temporal.
- Temporality is therefore the process of actual things which constitutes time, and if it can be said that time is omnipotent, it must be added that it is completely impotent.
- Eternity is not to be found in the present, which is evanescent, but in the abidingness of all of them taken as a whole in their "universality", abstracted from their individuality... Absolute timelessness is eternity.¹⁵

Barth does not agree with Hegel's views. For Barth understood eternity to be a perfection of God being not a principle of reality; furthermore, Barth insists that eternity is not perceivable by the unaided human intellect.¹⁶ These enlightenment thinkers influenced Karl Barth's own understanding of eternity. Their views provided a background for any adequate theological account of God's relationship to time; therefore, their views should be taken seriously, as it is unwise to rashly dismiss them.¹⁷

¹⁴ Griswold, *Triune Eternity: God's Relationship to Time in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 76.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Uses Systematic Theology

In this chapter Barth's views concerning Systematic theology and Biblical theology will be discussed in the form of what science views are and what the biblical views are. Barth concept on evolution and creation is that the source of one is divine revelation, and the source of the other is human, scientific speculation. But one must never be forced to choose between them, because they are two different kinds of account. If we are forced to choose between them, then we lose what the other one has to tell us.¹⁸ To be sure, Barth gets at the concept of "science" through a consideration of the question of that which makes theology to be one. He writes, rather famously, "If theology allows itself to be called a science, and calls itself a "science", in so doing it declares:

1. That like all other so-called science it is a human concern with a definite object of knowledge.
2. That like all others it treads a definite and self-consistent path of knowledge.
3. That like all others it must give an account of this path to itself and to all others who are capable of concern for this object and therefore of treading this path.¹⁹

That Barth thought that this definition might well apply to more than theology alone is made clear when he refers to the sciences in point 1 as "so called" ----- thereby indicating that he is conceding nothing to them in the way of primacy when it comes to defining that which is truly "scientific".²⁰ The object in question here is of course God and his revelation in Biblical theology.

¹⁸ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 86.

¹⁹ Bruce L. McCormack. *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 286.

²⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 5

Against History that Replaces the Biblical Witness

Barth does not counter scientific history... nor does he try to spare the historical aspect of scripture from historical, scientific scrutiny. He objects, however, to historicism where the historical explanation claims to replace the biblical witness.²¹ A question proposed concerning Karl Barth: If no one have an experiential contact with God and believe what was written by those who have had an experiential contact, isn't that enough for one to become a believer? Everyone who held the Office of Apostle had an encounter with Christ. If one never has an encounter like their, and one believe what they say about him, that is what make one a believer. Another's belief supports the biblical witness words. Barth proposed to move against and beyond both biblical criticism and misdirecting contemporary attempts to capture the "essence" of Christianity by paring away its "backward" elements. His goal was to rediscover the unmediated urgency of St. Paul's language by listening to the text as apostolic witnessing to the word of God.²² Barth regarded the results of his historical research on early Christianity as ultimately "trivial" when placed next to the word of God in the Pauline text; therefore, it is important to see that despite his sharp criticism, he did not reject historical research, as such, but rather recognized its limit for biblical exegesis and Christian proclamation.²³ Other views of Barth about biblical witness are below:

1. Barth insisted that although theological study must begin and end with theological concerns, historical analysis was still irreplaceable to understand how the church's witnessing evolved over time.

²¹ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 86.

²² Kosher. "Where Is Karl Barth In Modern European History", p. 343.

²³ Ibid.

2. To fail to see the value of historical research, Barth argued, was to close a door on potentially instructive theological voices from the church's earlier history.
3. Barth is not an "antihistorist", as so many interpreters have (and so many contemporaries did) without such qualification is inaccurate with respect to both his understanding of theology and his general intellectual interests.²⁴

Barth believes that God's revelation was found only in the Christ of the Bible and any other revelation claim would add something to the one true revelation and thus both usurp and corrupt it; therefore, humans must receive revelation as stipulated by God and not try to fathom God apart from scripture.²⁵ Barth's writings reflect not a rejection of history, but a concern with the relation between God's reality and human being in time; thus, Barth believes that we do not have the pure word of God in scripture, because it is already in the Hebrew or Greek language, but the word of God that the prophets and apostle did hear, they did write down as witnessing records, which form the book we call Holy Scripture, the theological content in the original word of God is, however carried over into the written witness.²⁶ Because Barth believed in the biblical witness he was suspicious of using human logic to demonstrate God's existence and nature.²⁷ Human logic and human history was not accepted with Barth, only biblical revelation and biblical history.

Part 3. Barth's Approval by Others

²⁴ Koshar. "Where Is Karl Barth In Modern European History", p. 343-344.

²⁵ Douglas Groothuis. *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 180.

²⁶ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 119.

²⁷ James K. Beilby. *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 90.

Chapter 6

Roman Catholicism

From research, the Catholics think that Barth's theology is lovely because he shows passion and impartiality in writing.²⁸ The Catholics think that although Barth's theology in his writing accepts Catholicism it also distance Catholicism; the Catholics do agree that Barth's dogma is practical.²⁹ Although some of Barth's dogma accepted Roman Catholicism, some of his views rejected it too. This is what he says according to Hans Urs Von Balthasar from *The Theology of Karl Barth*:

Barth's principles according to Balthasar is systematic (as philosophy understand that concept). His principles reject formal Catholicism, earlier Orthodox, post-Reformers and exegesis (a positivism of "original intent"). He objects Catholicism because he says it is an overarching systematic, by not giving a frank assertion that Christ is the Lord.³⁰

Although himself a Protestant, Barth appropriated Catholic tradition and dogma so that Protestantism might once more become true to itself, truer perhaps than it had ever been before in history. For this reason, Balthasar who is Catholic praises Karl Barth.³¹

Chapter 7

²⁸ Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 25.

²⁹ Ibid., 45.

³⁰ Ibid., 36.

³¹ Ibid., 30.

Expressionists

The expressionist movement was centered in Germany, but it had a strong following in Switzerland, where during WWI many German dissenters ----- Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Hugo Ball ----- found exile.³² Barth's early work was rooted in Germany expressionism's anxious, antibourgeois hope for spiritual transformation; scholars who uncritically depict Barth as a "neoorthodoxy" thinker create a misleading impression both with regard to the content of his theology and with regard to the implication this term had for his response to cultural trends.³³ Because of criticism, Barth initiated changes that resulted in studying one of the church's father, Anselm, who showed him he needed to express himself more correctly, therefore he did. Geoffrey W. Bromiley has written a book called *An Introduction to the theology of Karl Barth*, that gives a fresh account of Barth's essential theological concern and understanding. Below Bromiley discusses the following theology of Barth:

- The Doctrine of The Word of God: 1. The Word of God and Dogmatics. 2. The Revelation of God: a. The Triune God b. The Incarnation c. The Outpouring of the Spirit 3. Holy Scripture 4. The Proclamation of the Church
- The Doctrine of God: 1. The knowledge of God 2. The Reality of God 3. The Election of God 4. The Command of God.
- The Doctrine of Creation: 1. Creation 2. The Creature 3. The Creator and the Creature 4. The Ethics of Creation
- The Doctrine of Reconciliation: 1. The Problems of the Doctrine of Reconciliation 2. The Son of God 3. The Son of Man 4. The God-man³⁴

Chapter 8

³² Koshar. "Where Is Karl Barth in Modern European History?", p. 351.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley. *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), viii.

Protestants

German Protestant theologians of the Wilhelmine era were more concerned with the existing world as the venue of Almighty God's self-revelation than with the Bible as the source of revelation.³⁵ Bruce L. McCormack believed that for the Protestant churches to survive there must be a vital Protestant theology that is like the Catholic and Orthodox doctrinal "systems" for rigor, breadth, and beauty, and it must be able to make a good case that it has not simply cut itself off from the Christian past ----- from antiquity to the present; therefore seen in this light it is my own personal opinion that Karl Barth's theology may be the best hope for a rebirth of a genuinely Protestant theology in America.³⁶ Barth has always appealed to Luther's great doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and especially to Calvin's famous doctrine of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, and would remind his Orthodox and evangelical critics that he is just reviving Reformation doctrine.³⁷ Below is an argument between Karl Barth and Eberhard Jungel, two Protestants discussing deification and participation of God in the nature of Jesus Christ.

- Barth believes that Jesus Christ ... does not exist as the Son of God without also participating as such in human essence. And he does not exist as the Son of Man, without participating as such in the essence of the Son of God and therefore in divine essence.
- Barth believes, on both sides, there is a genuine and real being-in-participation... In His divine essence, He shares in human essence. So radically and totally does he share in it that He causes His existence to become and to be the existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth as well.
- Barth, thereby believes that the human essence of Jesus of Nazareth shares in the divine essence of the eternal Son who is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

³⁵ Koshar. "Where Is Karl Barth in Modern European History?", p. 339.

³⁶ McCormack. *Orthodox and Modern*, p. 281-282.

³⁷ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 119.

- Jungel holds that a more responsible appropriation of (then) recent research into the life of the earthly Jesus would see him as the Proclaimer of the lordship of God.
- Jungel's understanding of the being of the earthly Jesus as a being in the act of the word of divine lordship leads directly to his recasting of the anhypostasia. This means that without the lordship of God which he proclaims, he would not only be who he was; he would in fact be nothing at all.
- Participation in God is, for Jungel, participation in the relation of the Son to the Father. It is not a participation in the relation of the Father to the Son which constitutes the life of God. Such a delimitation means that the "union" of God with the human and the human with God never abolishes the ontological difference between the two ----- a difference which, like the early Barth, Jungel can call "qualitatively infinite".³⁸

In Jungel, as in Barth, a concept of participation in God is elaborated whose meaninglessness is made to rest on a relational and historical ontology.³⁹ This concept can be believable for one must develop a relationship with God and filled with the Spirit to understand this concept and accept the written history of the biblical witness of the Son of God. 1 John 1:1 states, "That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life."

Conclusion

In the process of writing the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth maintains the decisions of the Church expressed in the creeds of Nicea, Chalcedon, and Athanasius; he also maintained the full, supreme, material, and final authority of Holy Scripture.⁴⁰ Thus the above statement by Ramm disprove that Barth did not agree with liberalism theology and he did believe in an experiential experience with God without biblical Orthodox doctrine. Roman Catholicism accepted Barth's

³⁸ McCormack. *Orthodox and Modern*, p. 235-258.

³⁹ Ibid., 258.

⁴⁰ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 48.

views because they believed he showed impartiality in his writing. The expressionist like Barth dissented from Germany to Switzerland, but Barth with these words to the church in Germany, “Exegesis, Exegesis, Exegesis”. Protestants agreed with Barth’s doctrine as can be seen in the arguments of Barth and Jungel concerning Christ’s deification, with Jungel stating that Christ’s deity is “qualitatively” infinite. Let me give the following analyses of Barth which I think are relevant in this study:

- Barth has tried to put together in a meaningful pattern the unrelieved, undeniable humanity of preaching, the necessity of preaching as an authentic form of the Word of God, and how the human words of the preacher transfer a divine word to the believing listener.
- Barth has tried to determine that method or manner in which Holy Scripture expects its message to be received as truth. In doing so, he has depended much on Luther and Calvin, whom he felt caught the pulse best of scripture on this matter.
- In his Anselmic program, he gives both the proper ordering of faith and reason and the proper function of reason. He escapes the rationalism that would test the revelation of God, and he escapes the subjectivism that rests solely on religious experience. His notion of the Christianizing of reason is a most timely one for evangelical theology.⁴¹

This concludes my study of Karl Barth and Neoorthodoxy. There was nothing that was perceived new as the prefix neo means. Barth was an expressionist and because of that he was banned from Germany. Barth’s teaching is Orthodox as can be seen in his beliefs in this study. Even in Systematic theology Barth shared nothing new but believed that a person should not be forced to believe the bible or science, but consider instead which one is theology (God breathed). As we encounter new doctrines let us remember that the if any man’s foundation will endure it must be founded on a rock and Jesus Christ is the “Rock of Ages”. Psalm 28:1 states, “Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be not silent to me...

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⁴¹ Ramm. *After Fundamentalism*, p. 56; 70.

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