



## Before Analogy: Recovering Barth's Ontological Development

Timothy Stanley

---

### Abstract

What is the nature of Barth's development over the 1920s? Barth himself understood this period as his "apprenticeship," and cites his 1931 book on Anselm as a significant juncture in moving beyond this stage in his thinking. Barth's emphasis upon both change and continuity lies at the heart of the discrepancy between two prominent interpreters of his theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Bruce McCormack. On the surface it appears as though their disagreement centers around Barth's employment of dialectic and analogy in his theology. However, our thesis is that this focus conceals the ontological strategies Barth's multifarious uses of analogy and dialectic always implied. Although McCormack is right to suggest that Balthasar's depiction of a shift from dialectic to analogy is inadequate, in the end McCormack's account of Barth's development over the 1920s conceals as much as it reveals. The following essay attempts to demonstrate the kinds of insights which can be made of the past accounts of Barth's development which focused on the transition from dialectic to analogy. Far from relegating these accounts to the sidelines, McCormack's work helps us see all the more clearly just what was at stake in figures like Balthasar's work. By looking past McCormack and Balthasar's respective periodizations of Barth's development, a clearer focus upon Barth's theological ontology can begin to take place.

### Keywords

Barth, Przywara, Balthasar, analogy, ontology, dialectic

### Recovering Barth's Ontological Development

Barth's break with his Marburg theology teachers in 1915 is generally accepted across the secondary literature as a defining interval in

his development.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this breakthrough, however, is hotly contested. The chief discrepancy is represented by two influential interpretations of Barth's theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Theology of Karl Barth* and Bruce McCormack's *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*. In both cases, an attempt is made to account for the development of Barth's theology over the 1920s. Barth himself understood this period as his "apprenticeship,"<sup>2</sup> and cites his 1931 book on Anselm as a significant juncture in moving beyond this stage in his thinking.<sup>3</sup> He prefaces the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* in 1932 as follows:

My experience twelve years ago in re-editing the *Römerbrief*, was repeated. I could still say what I had said. I wished to do so. But I could not do it in the same way. What option had I but to begin again at the beginning, saying the same thing, but in a very different way?"<sup>4</sup>

Barth's emphasis upon both change and continuity lies at the heart of the discrepancy between Balthasar and McCormack's theses. On the surface it appears as though their disagreement centers around Barth's employment of dialectic and analogy in his theology. However, our thesis is that this focus conceals the ontological strategies Barth's multifarious uses of analogy and dialectic always implied. Although McCormack is right to suggest that Balthasar's depiction of a shift from dialectic to analogy is inadequate, in the end McCormack's account of Barth's development over the 1920s conceals as much as it reveals. The following attempts to demonstrate the kinds of insights which can be made of the past accounts of Barth's development which focused on the transition from dialectic to analogy. Far from relegating these accounts to the sidelines, McCormack's work helps us see all the more clearly just what was at stake in figures like Balthasar's work. By looking past McCormack and Balthasar's

<sup>1</sup> For Barth's own account see, Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923–24*, trans. Dietrich Ritschl (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 263–64. See also, Hans W. Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922" (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale, 1956), 87ff, Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 25, Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910–1931* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 38, John Webster, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1976), 193.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. I.1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), xi, Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. I.1 (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1964), vi, hereafter cited as KD.

respective periodizations of Barth's development, a clearer focus upon Barth's theological ontology can begin to take place.

### Balthasar's Conversion to Analogy

Given that McCormack's work is in large part a response to Balthasar, we will begin with Balthasar and then allow McCormack's work to clarify our understanding of him. Balthasar's thesis hinges on the notion that there were two breaks in Barth's theology. The first break embodied a dialectical methodology which he later recognized as inadequate around 1930. Around the time of his move from a professorship at Münster to Bonn, it is argued that Barth adopted a doctrine of analogy which was better able to accommodate the complex ontological relationships his theology implied. Although its main locus centered around Barth's two editions of his *Römerbrief* in 1919 and 1922 respectively, Balthasar depicts Barth's early theology from 1915 up through 1930 as the "dialectical period" in his thinking.<sup>5</sup> Then, in what can best be understood as an attempt to make the change in Barth's theology stand out, he locates Barth's "conversion to analogy"<sup>6</sup> around the time Barth set out to write his book on Anselm of Canterbury. Thus, Balthasar argues, "Just as Augustine underwent two conversions . . . so too in Barth we may find two decisive turning points."<sup>7</sup>

Despite this emphasis on a conversion at 1930 however, Balthasar's interpretation of Barth's development is layered with nuance as he describes a more gradual process. For instance, he cites Barth's *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* of 1927 as a key moment in the "breakthrough" and is careful to note the necessity of reading this text alongside others of this period when attempting "to understand all the ramifications of Barth's development."<sup>8</sup> In fact, from the outset of his treatise on Barth's theology Balthasar is careful to point out that "despite the far-reaching evolution of his work, Barth has remained true to his own deepest intuitions."<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, Balthasar does in fact order his book on Barth around the chapter headings, "The Dialectical Period," and "The Conversion to Analogy" emphasizing that Barth's theology does indicate a second break [*Umbruch*] after 1915. In this latter chapter he offers his best explanation of what was happening in Barth's *christliche Dogmatik* and why he

<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Communio Books, Ignatius Press, 1992), 64ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 86ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

came to re-start and re-title it as *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. In Balthasar's terms:

Formally speaking, Barth did indeed hit upon the right starting point, but we still see him occasionally vitiating it, not out of inconsistency or distraction, but because he was still fascinated, overpowered even, with the philosophical ideology and schematism of *The Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>10</sup>

In Balthasar's view, Barth's claim that the *Christliche Dogmatik* was a "false start"<sup>11</sup> depends upon Barth's rejection of this earlier schematism. Balthasar's work attempts to apprehend the nature of the changes in Barth's theology by identifying the problems in the early work and their interrelation with the way Barth overcame them in his later work. What we must question is the adequacy of dialectic and analogy for apprehending those changes. It is precisely in relation to this question that Bruce McCormack's work will eventually prove most helpful.

One of the reasons why Balthasar adopts the dialectic-analogy scheme for interpreting Barth is due to his own Roman Catholic heritage. In particular, his interest in analogy reflects the point of contact he recognized between his own tradition and Barth's mature theology of the *Church Dogmatics*. Balthasar discerns in Barth's discussions of analogy a "hair's-length nearness"<sup>12</sup> to Roman Catholic theology. "Thus for von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* was not intended simply as an interpretation of Barth, however insightful. It served also to focus his mind on what would become a fundamental principle for theology as a whole."<sup>13</sup> In this sense we mustn't forget a shared dialogue partner between Barth and Balthasar, Erich Przywara, S.J.

Przywara was one of the more insightful reviewers of Barth's early work in *Stimmen der Zeit* and Thurneysen was quick to bring this review to Barth's attention. In a letter of September 30, 1923, Thurneysen writes, "A remarkably keen and extensive essay on us from the side of the Catholic partner . . . The writer knows what he is talking about."<sup>14</sup> That Barth favourably received Przywara's insights into his work is further evidenced by his explicit reference to

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. III.4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), xii/KDvii.

<sup>12</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 53 citing KDI.1, 252.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Wigley, "The von Balthasar Thesis: A Re-Examination of von Balthasar's Study of Barth in the Light of Bruce McCormack," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 3 (2003): 359.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1921–1930*, vol. 2 (1973), 190 translated in, Thomas F. O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 103.

Przywara in the preface to the fourth edition of Barth's *Römerbrief*. "Erich Przywara, S.J., contrasts our 'school' with that of Otto and Heiler, judging it to be a 'genuine rebirth of Protestantism,' a reappearance of the 'passionate fervour of the old 'Reformers.'"<sup>15</sup> Barth eventually invited Przywara to "a 'solemn seminar' where he could present everything he had to say about the analogy of being . . . . In February of 1929 Przywara arrived in Münster to give a lecture on the Catholic principle of church and to take part in Barth's seminar."<sup>16</sup> There is not the space here to go into Przywara's thought in detail, but a couple of points should be made. Firstly, in making the *analogia entis* the "central point"<sup>17</sup> of his metaphysics and philosophy of religion he was also deliberately developing a tool of ecumenical engagement. This was a move which Przywara gained a certain degree of criticism for. For some even the "construction of a philosophy of religion was essentially a Protestant form of activity."<sup>18</sup> Early on it looked as though Przywara's work was proving fruitful soil for ecumenical growth. "Barth described the lecture as a work of art, a masterpiece,"<sup>19</sup> and as "the first coming together of theologians of both confessions since the Reformation."<sup>20</sup> By 1932 however, Barth referred to the *analogia entis* in the "Preface" of the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* as the "invention of the antichrist."<sup>21</sup> It thus became clear to Przywara, lamentably, that far from becoming a "point of departure for fruitful discussion" his understanding of the *analogia entis* ultimately became "the point of departure for a great conflict."<sup>22</sup> This disagreement provides a vital context for Balthasar's own interpretation of Barth and remained a fruitful point of discussion for many other Catholic interpreters of Barth's thought to this day.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 21.

<sup>16</sup> O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> Erich Przywara, "Tradition," in *In und Gegen. Stellung-nahmen zur Zeit* (Nuremberg: Glock und Lutz, 1955), 177, cited in, O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 207, n47.

<sup>18</sup> This is a note in the Translators Preface regarding a comment made by Dr. Ambrosius Czako in Erich Przywara, *Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*, trans. Alan Coates Bouquet (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), v.

<sup>19</sup> O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 104.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, xiii/KDviii.

<sup>22</sup> Przywara, "Tradition," 177, cited in, O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 207, n47.

<sup>23</sup> Beyond the work of Balthasar there have been a number of other key studies which address the degree to which Barth's criticism of Przywara's *analogia entis* relate to Roman Catholic theology, or whether there is a more thoroughgoing compatibility between Barth's theology and Roman Catholic thought which could continue the ecumenical debate Przywara so hoped for. See for instance, Henry Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (New York: Vantage Press, 1992),

This context makes it all the more important to emphasize the uniqueness of Przywara's account of *analogia entis* in relation to Roman Catholic theology. Although Przywara saw his understanding of analogy as "presupposed" by all Catholic theology, he nonetheless "was certainly aware that he was using this expression in a very idiosyncratic sense"<sup>24</sup> As one commentator puts it, "Przywara insisted repeatedly in debate that the *analogia entis* is presupposed by all types of Catholic philosophy and is not limited to any one school of Catholic thought. He developed his '*analogia entis* metaphysics' as his own synthesis of classical, scholastic and modern philosophical ideas in the spirit of Aquinas."<sup>25</sup> Writing in the spirit of Aquinas does not however mean that Barth gained a truly Thomistic doctrine of *analogia entis* through Przywara. In his 1927 *Religionsphilosophie Katholischer Theologie*,<sup>26</sup> Przywara is working out a way beyond the rationalism and radical immanentism of the neo-Kantianism of Herrmann Cohen or "religion within the limits [*innerhalb*] of humanity."<sup>27</sup> For Przywara, even modern emphases upon a transcendent "experience of infinity [*Erkenntnis der Unendlichkeit*]"<sup>28</sup> inevitably reduce to a "camouflaged rationalism [*versteckter Rationalismus*]"<sup>29</sup> and a conflation of human and divine being. In the opening paragraphs of the second section of *Religionsphilosophie Katholischer Theologia*, Przywara will put forward the heart of his own way forward: "As a decisive feature in the groundwork of the Catholic religion, running through its treatment of essence and existence, we may descry the following: that the relationship between God and creation is one which is *open upwards* [*nach oben offense*]."<sup>30</sup> In this sense, Przywara sought to offer a principle which could offer an alternative solution to the understanding of religion as "the relation [*Beziehung*] between absolute God and relative man."<sup>31</sup> Relative man is now

Henri Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969). As well, most recently, a conference was held in Washington DC entitled, "The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or the Wisdom of God?" April 4–6, 2008 at the John Paul II Cultural Center where a number of papers were given in anticipation of the forthcoming English translation of Przywara's book, *Analogia Entis*.

<sup>24</sup> Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Niels C. Nielsen Jr., "Przywara's Philosophy of the Analogia Entis," *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952): 600–601. Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 150.

<sup>26</sup> Translated into English as, Przywara, *Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*, For the German original see, Erich Przywara, "Religionsphilosophie Katholischer Theologie (1927)," in *Religions-Philosophische Schriften* (London: Johannes-Verlag, 1962), Hereafter cited as RKT.

<sup>27</sup> Przywara, *Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*, 25/RKT397.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/RKT396.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/RKT398.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29/RKT400.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22/RKT395.

reconfigured in a way which opens him ever upward but never reduces that openness to being itself. Rather, human being finds itself in an openness which implies similarity to the being it opens itself to, and yet, in the very openness dissimilarity is implied regarding what human being cannot provide in and of itself. Thus, Przywara's *analogia entis* was both Thomistic in its logic, but utterly modern in its affirmation of the phenomenology of being articulated in the work of Husserl and, later, Heidegger.<sup>32</sup>

It was this framework through which Przywara understood Barth's early *christliche Dogmatics*. It is precisely because Barth conceptualized God and human being as if the two were oppositionally related in an ontologically unqualified way in his early work that Przywara will accuse Barth of pantheism. Barth could emphasize the radical transcendence of God as prominently and persistently as he wanted. Przywara's contention remained that "all the fullness of the divine life is thus reduced to the one address, and in the last resort the final pantheistic correlation-theology [*Korrelationstheologie*] of Protestant Liberalism is simply reversed."<sup>33</sup> Though Barth would not accept Przywara's own solution to the problem, it must be noted how forceful and influential Przywara in fact was upon Barth. Przywara presented Barth with the seriousness of the problem of articulating the transcendence of God in a way that did not reduce to a common human ontological condition. Przywara may not have transmitted the essence of Catholicism to Barth, but he did provide Barth with a brilliant assessment of the predicament of modern theology and offered vital criticisms which Barth took seriously. Said another way, Przywara forced Barth to reckon with the inadequacy of his own language about the being of God and its relation to human being over the course of the 1920s. It was through this encounter that Barth began to see that no degree of emphasis upon a transcendent deity could resolve the problem without more careful ontological nuance.

It is no coincidence that Barth began to question existentialist ways of articulating the relation between God and humanity in his contemporaries, Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner around the time of his engagement with Przywara. In January 1930, just one year after his seminar with Przywara, Barth travelled to Marburg and delivered a "lecture on 'Theological and Philosophical Ethics' ... This was a considerably revised extract from a chapter of his lectures

<sup>32</sup> "Przywara accepted Husserl's phenomenological analysis as conclusive proof that human knowledge has its first basis in and is directed to a comprehension of being in its richness and depth ... and insists with Heidegger on the temporal, existential givenness of all knowledge in its particularity." Nielsen Jr., "Przywara's Philosophy of the *Analogia Entis*," 602, cf, Erich Przywara, "Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie," *Stimmen der Zeit* CXV.

<sup>33</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 172/KD178. citing Przywara in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 1928, p. 105.

on ethics which he had developed the theme that 'philosophy is *not* the handmaid of theology.'<sup>34</sup> Barth met with Bultmann while there and this was the beginning of a terse disagreement between them. "Once back home, Barth wrote a letter to Bultmann in which he expressed his fear that Bultmann's existentialist and ontological basis for the *possibility* of faith and revelation was an attempt to 'deliver theology once again into the hands of philosophy.'<sup>35</sup> In like manner, Brunner also became suspect in Barth's eyes around this time. "When (roughly since 1929) Brunner suddenly began to proclaim openly 'the other task of theology,' the 'point of contact' etc., I made it known that whatever might happen I could and would not agree with this."<sup>36</sup> It is this onto-theological qualification that Barth would try to articulate in his later 1934 "No!" to Brunner's "Nature and Grace."

What we must not miss in these criticisms of Brunner and Bultmann is how Barth began to feel that his own way of articulating the relationship between God and human being was inadequate. In many ways, Barth is critiquing himself through them. As Eberhard Busch records, "Barth was self-critical enough to see that traces of the modes of thought which he now objected to among his friends were also to be found in his own earlier works."<sup>37</sup> One wonders whether Barth began to feel that he was still wrestling with the framework he set out in the opening pages of his second *Römerbrief* here: "Where the grace of God is, the very existence of the world and the very existence of God becomes a question and a hope with which and for which man must wrestle."<sup>38</sup> There is a genuine sense in which we can assume that Barth's attraction to Przywara was rooted in his own wrestling and helps us understand much more clearly just how right Balthasar was to focus on this aspect of Barth's thought. It was an interpretation of appreciation as much as clarification of a debate which Balthasar shared with Barth insofar as Balthasar himself had wrestled with Przywara's analogy of being as a fellow Roman Catholic. Balthasar as well was no stranger to Przywara's work. He "proclaimed Erich Przywara to be original, distinctive, almost unique."<sup>39</sup> Balthasar's dissertation for his licentiate in philosophy focused on analogy and Przywara's metaphysics. It was published as two articles in 1932.<sup>40</sup> As such, Balthasar's interpretation of Barth was an attempt to hold Barth and Przywara in tension if not reconciliation.

<sup>34</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 195.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Karl Barth, "No! Answer to Emil Brunner," in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, ed. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 71.

<sup>37</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 196.

<sup>38</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 134.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



Barth's brief discussions of *analogia fidei* provided a point of contact and conversation, and this point of contact is deeply felt in some of the concluding comments of Balthasar's *The Theology of Karl Barth*.<sup>41</sup> Balthasar is therefore ultimately interested in the shape of the later theology Barth was developing and this accounts for some of the particulars of his treatment of Barth's early work which echo some of Przywara's comments and critiques. Balthasar's goal is to extricate Barth from these earlier criticisms in a way which Barth himself recognized as true to his own intentions. Barth's later work is what must be understood and justified for Balthasar's Catholic audience. For instance, Balthasar offers relatively brief expenditures upon the problems in Barth's early theology – problems Barth recognized were there and sought to overcome. As Balthasar argues,

“any attempt to explain the *Church Dogmatics* (and Barth's later writings in general) solely in terms of *The Epistle to the Romans* is an outright absurdity; in fact, it is an insult to the author. For more than once Barth has distanced himself from his Romans commentary, as he had already made clear in the foreword to the fifth edition (1926).”<sup>42</sup>

Balthasar clearly wants to avoid any attempt to read the later work in terms of the earlier work, but still recognizes that any division he will make between dialectic and analogy to apprehend this difference must also note some degree of continuity. Hence, Balthasar is caught in a bind of Przywara's making. On the one hand he has to emphasize continuity to remain true to Barth's own language in his 1938 “How I Changed My Mind” about a deepened application of what he had learned before. However, on the other hand he must emphasize a genuine break [*Umbruch*] to justify a renewed interest in the unique vision which Barth had cast in his *Church Dogmatics*. In the end, Balthasar's best articulation of this tension refers to his early work as symptoms, “that is, as incipient expressions of a deeper intention.”<sup>43</sup>

Understanding Balthasar's interpretive approach in this manner explains why he explicates Barth's two *Römerbriefe* together in terms of the ontological immediacy they both implied between God and humanity. In this interpretation, Balthasar consistently implies a relation between immediacy [*Ineinanderstellung*] as a result of the

<sup>41</sup> “It is not formulas that are battling one another (*analogia fidei* against *analogia entis*) but two ways of understanding the one revelation of God, each taking the measure of the other. And if we simply have to substitute formulas for the kind of hard work set before us, then we can sum up the issue using this formula: (1) Barth's way of understanding God's revelation in Christ includes the analogy of being within the analogy of faith; and (2) the way the Catholic authors we have been citing understand the christocentricity of God's plan for the world allows the analogy of being to gain its density and concreteness only within the wider analogy of faith (understood in the widest possible sense).” Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 382.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

inadequacies of dialectic method in contrast to analogical distance [*Distanz*]. In regard to the first Romans commentary, Balthasar understands its breakthrough in terms of a dynamic eschatology which failed to apprehend adequately the true distance between humanity and God. As a result it was unable to apprehend the relation Barth sought to instantiate between God and humanity adequately. He notes the primary locus of this first Romans commentary as an emphasis upon “the ‘divine in me’ (207), ‘the original divine nature in humanity’ (61), empowers humanity to become ‘a divine race of beings’ (18) that ‘sees things as God sees them’ (94) and creates an ultimate *identity*: humanity is thus a ‘particle of God’s universal power’ (237), for ‘it is not we who are at work, but it is God who is working in and through us’ (194).”<sup>44</sup> It’s not that Barth did not intend God’s otherness at this stage. Rather, just as Przywara had also suggested, Barth’s way of articulating this distance was inadequate. This is evidenced in the way Barth argued for an organic interconnection between God and humanity as a seed growing into full reconciled humanity. This way of thinking the otherness of God in relation to concrete humanity was deemed wholly inadequate by Barth’s later theology and this explains his desire for the first Romans commentary to “disappear from the scene.”<sup>45</sup>

In many ways, Hans Frei’s similar interpretation of Barth’s first *Römerbrief* can deepen Balthasar’s on this point. The problem with the first *Römerbrief* in Frei’s view was due to Barth’s inadequate dialectics in that draft. As Frei puts it, “What we have here is the completely univocal use of concepts, a kind of literalism that has never served theology well. Sin is identified with non-being, while reality or being merges into a concept of essence or form in which God and creature also threaten to be merged into metaphysical identity.”<sup>46</sup> When it comes to Barth’s second *Römerbrief* however, Frei believes Barth has resolved some of these problems by enhancing his dialectical methods to foster greater distance, with the goal of a proper relation. Frei is careful to cite Barth’s first *Römerbrief* both positively and negatively as “the Lordship (freedom) of God in his concrete act of grace toward us,”<sup>47</sup> and “the endeavour to break completely with ‘religion,’ with the subjectivism of the *Ineinanderstellung* of revelation and experience.”<sup>48</sup> But he is also quick to point out the inadequacy and vagueness in which Barth’s first attempt took form.<sup>49</sup> Why else would Barth write the second edition if not to clarify his

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Frei, “The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922”, 138.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

intentions? In this sense Frei is much more careful than Balthasar in tracing the greater emphasis Barth places upon "revelation as 'act'" (p.176) and that the "Word of God is no 'object'" (p. 175) in Barth's theology in the 1920s. And here Frei cites Barth's engagement with Feuerbach as an important recognition of the difficulties which Barth now faced in ensuring that an anthropocentric confusion was not re-asserting itself in his thought.<sup>50</sup> What Barth draws from Feuerbach's critique of anthropocentric theological projects is the particular way in which any radical transcendence of God must simultaneously avoid becoming an abstraction from concrete humanity. Ironically, Barth finds in Feuerbach's anti-theology "an antithesis which could be grounded only theologically."<sup>51</sup> As such, Barth's 1920 essay on Feuerbach will point us specifically to the way Barth's critique of anthropocentric theology not only had to emphasize distance, but do so in a way that would instantiate concrete humanity all the more fully.

Although Balthasar does not trace the differences between the two Romans commentaries in nearly as detailed fashion as Frei, he does in fact give thorough credence to Barth's preface to the second edition where Barth responds to the charge that he has imposed a meaning upon Paul's Epistle "rather than extracting its meaning from it."<sup>52</sup> Barth's response clarifies his basic intention which will drive his theology towards continual refinement throughout the following years:

If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.' The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

Balthasar's contention that a different more Kierkegaardian form of dialectical relations are at work in the second *Römerbrief* rings true to Barth's interests here.<sup>54</sup> Barth sought to all the more carefully and forcefully delineate the proper contours of the distance between God and humanity but this is not to say that Barth had been completely successful. Balthasar will affirm Barth's own sense of responsibility for inculcating an existentialism into his theology – one he would seek to distance himself from later on in 1930. As Balthasar puts it, "*The Epistle to the Romans* is the very thing against which it itself

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 171–72.

<sup>51</sup> Karl Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach (1920)," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920–1928* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 217.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 82–83.

raged and thundered: a pinnacle of human religiosity. Its insistent cry of 'Not I! Rather God!' actually directs all eyes on *itself* instead of on God. Its cry for distance gives no room for distance."<sup>55</sup>

Both Frei and Balthasar agree that Barth eventually abandoned the framework of the second *Römerbrief*, but whereas Frei articulates these inadequacies in the 1920s through Barth's debates with Schleiermacher,<sup>56</sup> Balthasar cites the problems as already there in the second *Römerbrief*. In Balthasar's words,

Once more we read that the law of distance, the law of analogy, is sin (233–34). To be a creature is coterminous with being guilty (12f., 31, 112, 149, 150f., 169, 235). And once more redemption in Christ coincides with the return to unity... It is the mystery of the *one* predestination 'that lies hidden in the duality of Adam and Christ in order to reveal itself in their ultimate unity.'<sup>57</sup>

Here again, Balthasar equates analogy with distance [*Distanz*] in order to accentuate his own way of apprehending the ontological relations in Barth's theology. In so doing he seeks to emphasize not only the condition of Barth's understanding of ontology as it was articulated in his theology at this point, but also to invoke the reason why Barth later deemed it inadequate. The existentialism which Barth later feels responsible for, in Balthasar's interpretation, is explained as a result of an inadequate dialectical methodology which needed to be replaced by a more sound doctrine of analogy.

There is no question that Balthasar approaches Barth with his own interests and concerns, and we must therefore be careful not to distance Balthasar's interpretation from Balthasar himself, who recognizes the need to reflect deeply upon Barth's doctrine of analogy and its relation to Roman Catholic doctrine. Balthasar's reading of Barth navigates the borderline between Protestant and Catholic precisely as it provides fresh impetus for his own theological work which, as Stephen Wigley recently noted, "would begin with *The Glory of the Lord*, proceed to the *Theodrama* and conclude with the *Theologic*, and which would take as its themes the three Transcendentals of Being, the Beautiful, the Good and the True."<sup>58</sup> In like manner, other Roman Catholic theologians have been inspired to re-engage their own theology by Barth's doctrine of analogy. Henri Bouillard notes a similar positive relationship between Barth's *analogia fidei* and Roman Catholic *analogia entis*,<sup>59</sup> although he deepens Balthasar's

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922", 174.

<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 70 citing Römerbrief II.

<sup>58</sup> Wigley, "The von Balthasar Thesis: A Re-Examination of von Balthasar's Study of Barth in the Light of Bruce McCormack," 358.

<sup>59</sup> Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God*, 123.

approach by explicating more fully the various notions of analogy present in the theology of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>60</sup>

Although Balthasar's interpretation of Barth is deeply shaped by his own theological concerns, this shouldn't lead us to discount Balthasar's interpretation as irrelevant. Rather we should recognize its merits and do our best to cut to the heart of what Balthasar was trying to apprehend with analogy and dialectic – namely ontological relations. In this sense, it is possible to interpret Balthasar's interest in analogy as a way of marking Barth's own dissatisfaction with the remnants of existentialism in his dogmatic prolegomena up through the transition to *Church Dogmatics*. Balthasar's use of analogy and dialectic is a way to highlight major breakthroughs in Barth's articulation of ontology in his theology. That Barth was trying to come to terms with the basic starting point of theology is evident from his emphasis upon the need for adequate prolegomena. Barth specifically cites his second *Römerbrief* as a form of "prolegomena."<sup>61</sup> His Göttingen lectures in dogmatics also followed this pattern, and in like manner his *christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* remained an attempt at appeasing his own need for clarity about the ontology his theology always implied. Although in his second *Römerbrief* Barth claims that "there can be no completed work . . . all human achievements are no more than prolegomena," this shouldn't dissuade us from wondering, as Balthasar does, whether it is not the case that theology's relation to ontology was the driving factor in his development throughout the 1920s and then resolved itself in the *Church Dogmatics* of the 1930s.

Here again, Frei's account of Barth's *christliche Dogmatik* is incredibly insightful. Although Barth's first attempt at transitioning from his *Römerbriefe* to full fledged dogmatics was in the 1924–5 lectures at Göttingen, he was unwilling to publish them "because he wanted more time to refine his ideas and his distinctive approach."<sup>62</sup> Barth's desire to further develop these lectures led to the publication in 1927 of his *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*. Here we find Barth continuing to work with a "non-ontological"<sup>63</sup> understanding of the Word of God in the reductive terms of *Deus dixit*. As Barth will say in the opening paragraph, "There are Christian dogmatics,

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 125–26. See also Eugene F. Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth : Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God, Revisions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*.

<sup>61</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, "The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion," ed. Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), xvi.

<sup>63</sup> This is a term adopted by Frei. "Barth's much more radical realism in this volume is non-ontological. He tried, at that time, to speak of God as one who is related to his creation as absolute origin [*Ursprung*]" Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922", 189.

because there is Christian speech [*Es gibt Christliche Dogmatik, weil es Christliche Rede gibt*].”<sup>64</sup> Commenting on this version of Barth's dogmatics, Hans Frei notes how Barth “was speaking of God in terms which avoid any implication of knowledge of trans-phenomenal being, of being as that which it actually is.”<sup>65</sup> Frei's point is that Barth had not yet solidified how to speak of the existence of God without some confusion with human existence. Frei will presume that this was because Barth had not yet made the shift from dialectic to analogy<sup>66</sup> following Balthasar, but this suggestion does not necessarily follow. It could just as easily be maintained that Barth was simply thinking through ontological difference more generally and the problem of onto-theology more specifically.

Just as with Balthasar's interpretive prescription for Barth's “Prolegomena” in the *Church Dogmatics*, when interpreting his early work we “must take special care to hear exactly what Barth is really saying, as opposed to what the reader thinks he ‘has to be saying.’”<sup>67</sup> In this case, though we know Barth's later intentions and can clearly see the radical exteriority of God articulated in the opening pages of the second *Römerbrief*, - “The Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from men”<sup>68</sup> - we mustn't be too disagreeable when Barth himself judges his own writings as inadequate. Taking into account that the growth and development of Barth's thought does not follow a straight line shouldn't negate an attempt to mark significant points along that journey. But this is not to say that analogy and dialectic are adequate ways of articulating those shifts. As we shall see, this conceptual framework only goes to obscure the onto-theological development in Barth's thought throughout the 1920s and has caused tremendous confusion as well as a cottage industry of excavations of dialectic and analogy in Barth's thought. It is at this point that we must introduce an opposing interpretation of Barth's theological development which challenges Balthasar's. That critical voice will help us clarify our interest in Barth and Balthasar's theses both.

### McCormack's Critique

The critical voice we are referring to here is Bruce McCormack who begins his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* by commending the shadow Balthasar has cast over Barthian scholarship.

<sup>64</sup> Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*, ed. Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1927), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Frei, “The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922”, 190.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 86.

<sup>68</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 28.

“For over forty years now, interpretation of Karl Barth’s theological development has stood beneath the massive shadow cast by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s 1951 book.”<sup>69</sup> Overall McCormack’s book is a considerable contribution to our understanding of key themes and developments in Barth’s theology and it has encouraged new interest in Barth’s theological development.<sup>70</sup> Having said that, a large portion of his time throughout his argument is intent on refuting Balthasar’s *The Theology of Karl Barth*. Despite their differences, they both coincide in their recognition that Barth’s theology developed over time with certain crucial intervals along the way culminating in Barth’s Christology in his *Church Dogmatics* II.1. Although they agree on this arrival point, they disagree in how and why Barth arrived there. It is as we uncover McCormack’s basic approach to Barth contra Balthasar that a clear understanding of their differences can surface. In this regard, McCormack’s title itself, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, provides some clues as to what we will be concerned with in McCormack’s thesis. For what exactly is meant by critical, realist, and dialectical in relation to Barth’s theology here?

The main thrust of McCormack’s thesis is to reconfigure the way we understand Barth’s development. McCormack argues that in one sense Balthasar wants to maintain that a radical break or turn occurred at the point at which Barth came to reflect upon the significance of Anselm’s theology for his own dogmatic project around the summer seminar on *Proslogion* 2–4 in 1930. The primary way in which this shift is recognized is as an emphasis upon the role of analogy in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. McCormack however, believes that Balthasar offers a second periodization of Barth’s development that contradicts the first.<sup>71</sup> Citing Balthasar’s own words<sup>72</sup> McCormack argues,

The second model then, sees the ‘turn to analogy’ as occurring gradually from 1927 to 1938, at which point analogy emerges in its ‘fully developed form’. Decisive for von Balthasar in locating the final emergence of analogical thinking in 1938 is its Christological grounding. As he put it in another passage, ‘In the *Church Dogmatics*, there occurs imperceptibly but irresistibly the replacement of the central concept

<sup>69</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> A good example of McCormack’s influence can be felt in Terry L. Cross, *Dialectic in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 3. “With the introduction of Bruce McCormack’s study on the development of Barth’s thought, it has become a truism in Barth studies that after 1920 Karl Barth was *always* a dialectical theologian – not only in his ‘purely’ dialectical period (the 1920s) but also in his ‘purely’ analogical period (the 1930s and beyond).”

<sup>71</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 116–17, 124.

"Word of God" by the central concept "Jesus Christ, God and man." It was the emergence of this Christological concentration in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 which allowed analogy to come to its full expression.<sup>73</sup>

As we have already noted, this more gradual development is never raised as a problem or contradiction in Balthasar. Rather, at the heart of his thesis on Barth "was a gradual process, indeed a struggle, that lasted nearly ten years, ending at about 1930."<sup>74</sup> Hence, McCormack must justify an inconsistency that Balthasar is himself unaware of. In this regard, McCormack believes that "the two models could be reconciled if the 'turn to analogy' were said to begin with the Anselm book and to continue until the emergence of the 'fully developed form of analogy.'"<sup>75</sup> But this is exactly what McCormack proves is impossible precisely because Balthasar recognizes that Barth's development of analogical thinking starts to take shape in 1927. As such, McCormack concludes that "seen in the light of the second model, the significance of the Anselm book is considerably diminished."<sup>76</sup>

McCormack goes on to demonstrate that in fact, the conditions for harmonizing Balthasar's two chronologies are far more difficult than Balthasar's own work might lead us to believe. By dialoging with the work of Ingrid Spieckermann and Michael Beintker's engagement with Barth's theology throughout the 1920s, McCormack convincingly argues that analogy and dialectic can be found working in tandem as early as Barth's *christliche* and *Göttingen Dogmatik*.<sup>77</sup> In fact this is easily confirmed given the more recent publication of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* which helpfully indexes analogy precisely because of the interest generated by Balthasar's thesis. But, according to McCormack, analogy can be traced even earlier. In fact, both Spieckermann and Beintker argue that an "analogy of the cross" can be discerned in the second edition of the *Römerbrief*.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 93.

<sup>75</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis : ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1985), 140–43, Michael Beintker, "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion," in Verkündigung und Forschung: Beihefte zur 'Evangelische Theologie', ed. Gerhard Sauter (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1985), 46, McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis : ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*, 143, Michael Beintker, Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik", *Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie; Bd. 101* (München: C. Kaiser, 1987), 261–62, McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 10.



McCormack therefore sets out to distinguish his own thesis from all previous attempts to understand Barth's development in terms of analogy and dialectic.<sup>79</sup> Beintker's work is particularly important to McCormack due to his use of the term *Realdialektik* which Beintker traces through the first and second *Römerbriefe*. McCormack's interest in *Realdialektik* is in its onto-logic. If he can demonstrate that *Realdialektik* marks a consistent onto-logic at an early stage in Barth's theology then he can more forcefully undercut any need to develop another term like analogy to account for that difference in onto-logic.

McCormack cites an important passage in Beintker's work where he is discussing the paradoxical relationships at work in Barth's two *Römerbriefe*. Following the terminology of Henning Schröer, Beintker draws on the difference between "supplementary dialectic" and "complementary dialectic"<sup>80</sup> and this adds a layer of meaning to what McCormack means by *Realdialektik*. The supplementary form attempts to apprehend the paradoxical differences being held together according to a process akin to a Hegelian form of dialectic. McCormack offers the following explanation: "one member of a pair predominates in value and potency over the other. As a consequence of this 'imbalance' the predominant member is able to overcome the other. At some point, the stronger member takes up the weaker into itself with the result that the weaker member is either cancelled out altogether or is perhaps taken up into the other in a higher synthesis."<sup>81</sup> Beintker argues that the *Römerbrief* exemplifies this Hegelianism in

<sup>79</sup> In Eberhard Jüngel, "Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons," in *Barth-Studien* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1982), Eberhard Jüngel reorients the location of the shift from dialectic to analogy to 1924 in Barth's "Church and Theology" which was a response to Erik Peterson's "Was ist Theologie" Erik Peterson, "Was ist Theologie?," in *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1951)? Jüngel is commended by McCormack insofar as he deemphasizes the importance of Anselm and 1930 for Barth's development. In the end however, he is not immune to the pervasive influence of Balthasar's thesis and therefore falls under McCormack's critique. So too, would the following studies be implicated in McCormack's critique for their interest in arguing that Barth's theology became critically realist in 1930 and not earlier. Steven G. Smith, *The Argument to the Other: Reason beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 162, 166, Stephen H. Webb, *Re-Figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 157, Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910–1931*, 133, 182, Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth 1909–1922", 194. See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 5–6.

<sup>80</sup> Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barth'schen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik"*, 38–39.

<sup>81</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 163.

Barth's explication of Romans 9–11.<sup>82</sup> The implication here is that Barth's dialectic between this world [*Diesselts*] and the world beyond [*Jensseits*] in his first *Römerbrief*,<sup>83</sup> led him to what Beintker refers to as a "complementary dialectic" which is consistent with Barth's allusion to Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative difference" in the "Preface" to the second *Römerbrief*. What is critical to note is that the difference between supplementary and complementary dialectic is marked by a different understanding of time and process. In the interest of truth, Beintker argues that Barth's second *Römerbrief* turned from a supplementary dialectic marked by process to a complementary dialectic marked by more consistent contradiction.<sup>84</sup> Although it appears that Beintker's interpretation lends itself well to Balthasar's explication of Hegel's influence in the first *Römerbrief*,<sup>85</sup> in fact, McCormack will draw a strong distinction between the two.

For McCormack *Realdialektik* acts as a unifying medium between Beintker's supplementary and complementary forms of dialectic. From its earliest stages therefore, Barth's theology will be understood according to a stable onto-logic which prevails throughout the remainder of his theology. This explains why he will argue that even "In *Romans* I, both the *realdialektische* relationship between 'real history' and 'so-called history' as well as the *realdialektische* relationship between 'real humanity' (in Christ) and the 'unreal humanity' (in Adam) are of the supplementary type. In both cases, what is in view is a relationship in which 'real reality' overcomes 'unreal reality.'" <sup>86</sup> Hence, after McCormack, the autonomous ontic reality of God is established from the outset and as a result the idea that there is some need to apprehend the ontological development in Barth's theology according to dialectic and analogy is unnecessary because Barth's ontology is stabilized from the point his theology becomes dialectical. Thus, McCormack's title takes two of its primary terms, dialectical and realist and instantiates them as *Realdialektik* in Barth's theology from 1919 onwards.

Having pointed out the contradictions in any attempt to continue interpreting Barth's theology in terms of a shift from dialectic to analogy, McCormack concludes that "if there is one point on which

<sup>82</sup> Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik"*, 113.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung 1919)*, vol. 2, *Gesamtausgabe* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985), 167ff.

<sup>84</sup> Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik"*, 115.

<sup>85</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 67.

<sup>86</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 163.

all recent Barth scholarship agrees, it is that von Balthasar's belief in a second 'break' in Barth's development cannot be sustained."<sup>87</sup> He goes on to conclude that what is still up for contention is the role of Anselm in Barth's thinking and then sets out upon the task of developing his own periodization of Barth's development which confirms two things. Firstly that Barth's theology is best characterized as "the unfolding of a single material insight through several differing models of explication, thereby emphasizing the continuity which prevailed in that development from the first emergence of the new starting-point in 1915."<sup>88</sup> And secondly, that "shifts in Barth's models of explication had their roots in material decisions in dogmatic theology, thereby underscoring the fact that Barth was from first to last a theologian (and not a philosopher turned theologian as von Balthasar and those who followed in his wake seemed to imply)."<sup>89</sup> These two points act as driving forces in his alternative paradigm for Barth's development. I'll list its main points here:

1. Dialectical Theology in the Shadow of a Process Eschatology (1915–January 1920)... Dialectical Theology in the Shadow of a Consistent Eschatology (January 1920–May 1924)... 3. Dialectical Theology in the Shadow of an Anhypostatic-Enhypostatic Christology (First Stage: Pneumatocentrism, May 1924–September 1936)... 4. Dialectical Theology in the Shadow of an Anhypostatic-Enhypostatic Christology (Second Stage: Christocentrism, September 1936 and following).<sup>90</sup>

In McCormack's new account, Barth was not motivated to change his theology throughout the 1920s for onto-logical clarity, rather, he was driven by problems inherent to theology itself. The distance between the first and second *Römerbrief* is driven by a need to make a process theology more consistent. The changes in his Dogmatics from Göttingen to Münster to Bonn to Basel are driven by clarifications to his Christology. In a later essay, McCormack argues that a century from now Barth's doctrine of election will be remembered as his greatest contribution.<sup>91</sup>

The differences between McCormack and Balthasar seem stark. After McCormack, it no longer makes sense to interpret Barth's theology according to a shift from dialectic to analogy. When we notice the onto-logic inherent to McCormack's depiction of dialectic in Barth's first and second *Römerbriefe*, in other words when we note the way McCormack integrates realism into dialectic at an early point

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 21–22.

<sup>91</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. J. B. Webster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92.

in Barth's theology, any talk of ontological development in Barth's thinking after this point becomes impossible as well. Furthermore, Barth's theology is so thoroughly theological in its progression and disposition that to inquire into his ontology is to misunderstand his intention altogether. If our interest in Barth's ontology is to continue after McCormack therefore it will have to evince some form of criticism. We must tread very carefully in this regard however, for what we will come to see is how McCormack is right exactly where he is also wrong. He is right to cite consistency and to critique Balthasar's emphasis upon a shift from dialectic to analogy, but it is precisely in his account of this consistency that he misses the ontological implications of Barth's development. In order to demonstrate this point we will inquire into the third adjective he applies to Barth's theology, "critical."

In reference to his break with the liberalism of Herrmann in 1915 McCormack explains the meaning of Barth's break and the logic of his counter to Balthasar in one fell swoop:

The idealistic theology of Barth's youth would be replaced by what will here be described as a "critical realism". The word "critical" is meant to suggest that Barth never simply abandoned his idealistic inheritance. Idealism would prove to be a valuable ally in establishing the limits of human knowing. Barth would continue to acknowledge the general validity of the idealistic point of view where knowledge of the "given" was concerned. The "given" (or what we customarily think of as the "real") is the product of the knowing activity of the human subject. The word "realism" is meant to suggest, however, that after the break Barth would always insist that the divine being was real, whole, and complete in itself apart from the knowing activity of the human subject; indeed, the reality of God precedes all human knowing.<sup>92</sup>

What McCormack is arguing is that the difference between Barth before the break and after is that he affirms a critical realism, i.e. a realism that takes Kant's idealism seriously. Barth affirmed the limits Kant placed upon human subjectivity insofar as this justified his attempt to consistently begin his theology with the "objectively real 'self-presupposing divine subjectivity' in revelation."<sup>93</sup> If McCormack had stopped there, Balthasar along with much of the secondary literature would agree. In fact, our thesis here confirms this in its entirety. This is precisely where McCormack is right. The crucial insight which marked Barth's break with his teachers at Marburg was that after Kant, he could justify beginning with

<sup>92</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 66–67.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, citing, *Spieckermann, Gotteserkenntnis : ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*, 72–82.

God as given, that is God as revealed reality. It is precisely at this point, however, that McCormack fails to recognize the full import of his argument.

This misunderstanding of the ontological problems the critical nature of Barth's theology implied explains the reason why McCormack has to disagree with Barth's own reflections upon his own development. What is striking is the similarity between the explanations McCormack gives for Barth's own citation of the distance between *Römerbriefe* I and II and the shift Barth cites in 1930. In both cases, McCormack argues that Barth was exaggerating the changes he made in order to respond to his critics. In the case of the *Römerbriefe*, Barth's intentions were always the same and therefore the significance of the confusion his commentary wrought is not Barth's fault. Because McCormack knows what Barth meant, he is therefore able to disregard the significance of Barth's own desire to clarify the onto-logic his theological strategies implied. As McCormack has it, "What we see emerging in Barth's critique of *Romans* I is a tendency to exaggerate the distance which separated the second edition from the first in order to acquire an independent reading for the revised version."<sup>94</sup> So too, McCormack challenges Barth's emphasis upon the significance of his book on Anselm (which McCormack himself cites on p. 421) in Barth's essay, "How I Changed My Mind" for *The Christian Century*.<sup>95</sup> Here again McCormack cites Barth's primary reason for emphasizing this shift is because he sought to distance himself from his critics.<sup>96</sup> As McCormack goes about proving his argument, Barth's claims about the differences in his thought over time are made out to be exaggerations. "It is the contention here, however, that *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 are indeed merely a revision of the 1927 work. Simply put, Barth exaggerated the difference between the two."<sup>97</sup> These citations should lead us back to an important question. Why does McCormack have to contradict Barth's own account of his development?

One answer can be found in the sources he cites in support of the more nuanced account of dialectic he evinces for Barth's earlier theology, Spieckermann and Beintker. Beintker and Spieckermann both remain infatuated with excavating a more nuanced account of dialectic and analogy in Barth's theology over the 1920s. What is noticeable in Spieckermann, in particular, is that her account does in fact maintain a high significance for Anselm and 1930 in Barth's

<sup>94</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 181–82.

<sup>95</sup> Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 42–43.

<sup>96</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 15.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

theology because she discerns that an ontic priority is established over the noetic objectivity Barth emphasized prior to this time.<sup>98</sup> Spieckermann sets Barth's development of the terms reality [*Wirklichkeit*] and possibility [*Möglichkeit*] in order to explicate his early theological development more generally.<sup>99</sup> Her argument echoes the sentiments of Jeffrey Pugh's *The Anselmic Shift* which explicates Barth's argument in his *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* "that the ontic ratio claims a certain priority, even though 'its part in truth is fundamentally the same but higher than that of the noetic ratio.'"<sup>100</sup>

These arguments however, are unacceptable to McCormack's periodization. For McCormack, *Realdialektik* always precedes and stands as the ground for noetic dialectics.<sup>101</sup> This accounts for McCormack's inability to cite Spieckermann's argument as convincing him that 1930 remained significant for Barth.<sup>102</sup> In other words, Spieckermann did not sufficiently account for the ontological difference between 1919 and 1930 so as to clearly refute McCormack's attempt to read *Realdialektik* which is the precise term he uses to encompass and therefore deemphasize the significance of the ontology Barth develops in his 1930 work on Anselm.<sup>103</sup> As a result, McCormack chides Spieckermann's emphasis upon Anselm as a weakness in her "otherwise brilliant analysis."<sup>104</sup> Emphasizing the significance of *Realdialektik* in Barth's *Römerbriefe* is therefore a way of refuting both an ontological and analogical shift at an early point in Barth's theology. His argument being that "though it was not set forth in those precise terms"<sup>105</sup> the ontological distinctions believed

<sup>98</sup> Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis : ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*, 228–29.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 11ff.

<sup>100</sup> Jeffrey C. Pugh, *The Anselmic Shift : Christology and Method in Karl Barth's Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 1990), 103.

<sup>101</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> "The one weakness in Spieckermann's otherwise brilliant analysis lies in her understanding of the role played by the Anselm book in Barth's development... But if *Fides quaerens intellectum* is not connected in some way with the emergence of so-called "analogical thinking" (because the 'turn to analogy' occurred at a much earlier point in time), then the logical question to ask is: why continue to attach so much importance to it? Spieckermann's answer is that the Anselm book sets forth a 'revision of method' based upon a clear distinction between the 'ontic' and the 'noetic' rationality of the object of theology (and the priority of the former over the latter). But that answer, as we shall see, is a problematic one because such a distinction was presupposed earlier (though it was not set forth in those precise terms)." *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>103</sup> For a more detailed account of the onto-logic of Barth's explication of Anselm's *Proslogion* 2–4, see, Timothy Stanley, "Returning Barth to Anselm," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>104</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

to be uncovered in Anselm are in fact presupposed in Barth's earlier *Realdialektik*.

As we have already said, McCormack is right to emphasize the theological realism whereby Barth's theology gains its distinctive gravity. It is precisely on the imprecision of the ontological language however, that McCormack continues a devastating misunderstanding of Barth's theology. In McCormack's periodization a taboo against noting ontological development is established. Namely, it attempts to erase the ontological aspects true of Barth's development and in so doing depicts Barth at odds with himself. He has in this sense done little better than Balthasar in resolving the problems created by imposing analogy and dialectic upon Barth's development. McCormack is right to cite analogy and dialectic as inadequate terms for apprehending Barth's theological development, but in cutting off the possibility that ontological development was taking place in Barth's theology he misses the full import of Barth's "critical" nature. The problem with Balthasar's thesis was not that it failed to recognize that Barth was a theologian through and through. Rather, in critiquing Balthasar, McCormack adopts a taboo which quarantines ontology from Barth's theological development in a way which fails to recognize, as Barth himself did, that to speak theology on its own objective reality required either a total abolition of ontology from theology or a total integration of ontology into theology such that the two would be indistinguishable.

We could therefore, agree with Bruce McCormack and Michael Beintker's assessment that the Göttingen and *Christliche Dogmatik* are very similar to each other.<sup>106</sup> However, when it comes to the *Church Dogmatics*, we find McCormack's conflation of all of Barth's dogmatic attempts at prolegomena to be unsatisfactory. From the opening pages it is clear Barth gained a confidence in speaking of the existence of human beings in relation to the being of God which is markedly absent from the previous drafts. Hence, in the opening paragraphs of Barth's first volume he could confidently say that "the question of truth [*Wahrheit*], with which theology is concerned throughout, is the question as to the agreement of the Church's distinctive talk about God with the being of the Church [*Sein der Kirche*] . . . namely, Jesus Christ."<sup>107</sup> It is our contention that the difference between Barth's 1932 *Church Dogmatics* and his previous drafts of dogmatics in 1925 and 1927 can best be understood in the ontological terms he gained through his dialogues with figures such as Erich Przywara and are evidenced in the work Barth himself cites as significant for his development. As such, it is far better

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 375, Beintker, "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion," 46.

<sup>107</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/KD2.

to see Barth's first two attempts at dogmatics as an interruption of what would later become Barth's mature theological ontology in the *Church Dogmatics*.

In his 1956 lecture, "The Humanity of God," Barth discusses Balthasar's belief that his development could be understood via the turn from dialectic to analogy. It was here that Barth cited Balthasar as a "shrewd friend from another shore."<sup>108</sup> But then Barth goes on and says something which resonates deeply with the problems we have been uncovering in McCormack's thesis:

But was not this formal principle merely a symptom of a more deep-seated, essential infirmity in our thinking and speaking at that time? I believe it consisted in the fact that we were wrong exactly where we were right, that at first we did not know how to carry through with sufficient care and thoroughness the new knowledge of the deity of God which was so exciting both to us and to others.<sup>109</sup>

What we would suggest here is that McCormack has rehearsed Barth's own mistake. In attempting to radicalize the theological overcoming of ontology too early in Barth's theology he too is wrong precisely where he is right. McCormack seems to conclude, contra Barth's own admonition to the contrary, that Barth did in fact "carry through with sufficient care and thoroughness that new knowledge of the deity of God" at Romans I and following. Just as Barth saw, McCormack is right to see that the objective reality of God was presupposed at this early stage, but he is wrong to argue that Barth had settled a sufficient articulation of how to say God and reality in the same sentence until a later date. As Barth and Balthasar both imply, analogy and dialectic were simply symptoms of a deeper problem. This helps explain why "beyond appreciating the theological importance of concepts such as paradox, either/or, the moment, difference, and fear and trembling Barth never really undertook a thorough study and analysis of dialectic."<sup>110</sup> This is a point Beintker himself acknowledges,<sup>111</sup> and we would argue that this should influence how we interpret both McCormack and Balthasar's theses.

This leaves us with our final conclusion: If dialectic and analogy are symptoms of a deeper onto-theological problem, then it is time that we abandon the dialectic/analogy schematic and simply focus upon the ontological nature of Barth's theology. Although McCormack is right to argue that analogy and dialectic are inadequate

<sup>108</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1967), 44.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42, n 109.

<sup>111</sup> Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik"*, 230–38.



terms for apprehending the shifts in Barth's theology and although he is right to deemphasize the notion of a turn or break in Barth's theology at 1930, this is not to say that Balthasar did not himself recognize these same problems. Balthasar's account of Barth works best when we focus on the relation analogy and dialectic were trying to account for. Future research into Barth's thought will do well to keep this relation in focus precisely because Barth himself has it well in mind in the various strategies he employs over the 1920s. With this focus in mind figures like Frei and Balthasar remain as vital interpretations of a period of development which produced one of the most magisterial pieces of theological scholarship of the last century. We avoid their work to our own detriment.

*Timothy Stanley*  
*Centre for Religion and Political Culture*  
*The University of Manchester*  
*School of Arts, Histories and Cultures*  
*Samuel Alexander Building*  
*Oxford Road*  
*Manchester, M13 9PL, UK*  
*Email: timothy.stanley@manchester.ac.uk*