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Have Evangelicals Changed Their Minds about Karl Barth? A Review Essay with Reference to the Current Crisis in Evangelical Identity

James R. A. Merrick

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One can scarcely read a contemporary work of evangelical theology today without encountering the name of Karl Barth. Not only is there increased attention, but there appears to be a change in sentiment as evangelicals now feel less inclined to make negative assessment the trend of their engagement with Barth, suggesting that the fiery scepticism of the 1950s and 60s has subsided. One might conclude that this is simply a consequence of the rapidly booming industry of Barth studies, an industry whose output at times rivals that of biblical studies. Yet closer inspection reveals that Barth has become a significant, and, in some cases, primary conversation partner for evangelical theologians. There is a sense that Barth is important for evangelical theology. Why are many evangelicals more interested in Karl than Carl (Henry)?

I The Evangelical Identity Crisis and the Barthian Turn in Evangelical Theology

The recent intellectual and cultural climate has placed a number of demands upon evangelical life and thought. Evangelicalism is facing something of an identity crisis. We seem to have lost the battle for respect in the academy so nobly waged by Henry and other 'neo-evangelicals'. The births of numerous evangelical seminaries, in the hope of giving evangelical scholarship an academic forum and presence, have at times, been more of a step backwards, isolating evangelical scholars and stu-

***James R. A. Merrick**, an ordained Anglican minister, holds the degrees of Master of Arts in Christian Thought and Master of Theology in Church History from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL USA. Currently, he is completing a doctorate in Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen Scotland. This is a review article on* Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences *ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. ISBN 978-0-8010-3127-4 Pb pp 282). Email: james.merrick@abdn.ac.uk*

dents from more public contexts. Megachurches may have proved to the world that evangelicalism is thriving, but many now lament at how the church has adapted itself to worldly strategy, its liturgy being exchanged for entertainment, its worship replaced with evangelism, its ethics turned into legalism, and its message watered down for the sake of simplicity and mass appeal. Additionally, while the United States has witnessed the political success of evangelicalism, the fear-based and propagandist tactics of some evangelical activists have called the movement's integrity into question. The media has in turn capitalized on those evangelical leaders who have either caused public scandal by personal failings or have had to apologize for foolish comments. Evangelicals are publicly portrayed as a mindless mass naively devoted to an intolerant religion preached by sensationalists, cunning opportunists, and ignorant slanderers. There are now mounting pressures on evangelicals to distinguish themselves again, to distance themselves from the intellectual and cultural retreats of fundamentalist separatism and sectarianism, to discern new strategies for ecclesial life and mission, and to develop sophisticated answers to today's questions.

Simply proclaiming what the Bible says has lost its immediate impact on today's culture. Indeed, many have deplored the almost overnight shift from relative familiarity with the Scriptures to widespread biblical illiteracy. As a result, evangelicals, once so accustomed to narrowly exegetical, prooftexting theology with its tendency to reduce theology to biblical studies, are in search of a more holistic, robust, and satisfying theology. The growing interest in the 'theological interpretation of Scripture' is but one example of evangelicalism's quest for a theologically vibrant and culturally compelling witness.

It is this search for respect, identity, and compelling answers to new or unanswered questions that has sparked today's interest in Barth. Evangelicals are turning to Barth, some perhaps just to garner the appearance of sophistication. Nevertheless, his theology is thought to provide a way forward that lessens the stress of being an evangelical in today's world. Bernard Ramm appears to have won out over Henry, Gordon Clark, and Cornelius Van Til. In fact, two members of the Evangelical Theological Society, Kurt Anders Richardson[1] and John Franke,[2] have recently written sympathetic guides to Barth's theology, both of which champion Barth as pioneer of postmodern evangelical theology. This turn to Barth has ruffled the tweed jackets of more than a few traditional evangelicals. Without the outspoken critics of Barth, some worry that evangelicalism will turn into Barthianism, a shift that will jeopardize the movement's adherence to biblical authority and relax if not tranquillize its historic zeal for missions, evangelism, and ethical activism.

1 *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

2 *Barth for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006).

II A Review of *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*

Evangelicals thus need direction and guidance concerning their relationship to Barth. This new book edited by Sung Wook Chung, then, is timely. It intends 'to be a balanced attempt to appraise Karl Barth's theology from a consensual evangelical perspective' (p. xx). Great evangelical thinkers, Kevin Vanhoozer, Henri Blocher, and Timothy George among them, move doctrine by doctrine in an effort both to explain and to evaluate. Here is an evangelical guided tour through the dogmatic theology of Karl Barth that seeks to point out hazard and spectacle alike.

The book begins where Barth began, the doctrine of revelation. Gabriel Fackre first tries to steer between the objective and subjective in Barth's thought, uncovering what George Hunsinger has termed 'actualism', i.e., Barth's tendency to understand *being* as contingent upon divine *willing* so that ontology is constituted by an event. He then traces how revelation is reflected in the natural world, witnessed to in Holy Scripture, and presented (made present) in the church. Fackre criticizes Barth's actualistic notion of revelation, suggesting that despite the emphasis on the objectivity of the Word, it falls into subjectivism. Yet this judgment appears to be made in neglect of an important feature of Barth's thought. The concept of revelation, according to Barth, includes human reception (subjectivity) precisely because it is *revelation*. Subjectivity and objectivity must be intertwined since the purpose of revelation is for the reality of God to penetrate human hearts and minds; God's revelation is, as Barth liked to say, 'imparted to men'; it is reconciliation. It seems inappropriate, then, to say that Barth falls into subjectivism simply because he realized human reception must occur for revelation to truly transpire. Fackre's point that Barth's actualism does not procure Scripture as a stable medium of revelation is much stronger and well worth serious attention by both Barthians and evangelicals. The essay ends with a series of affirmations and problems which I believe will go a long way in pinpointing where Barth is helpful and harmful from an evangelical perspective.

Kevin Vanhoozer provocatively asks whether Barth can be called 'a person of the book'. This essay on Barth's doctrine of Scripture seeks to understand past evangelical critiques, locate misunderstandings, and mediate the dispute. After an analysis of Van Til's, Henry's, Ramm's, and Donald Bloesch's conclusions, Vanhoozer hazards a rescue in the form of a generous reading of Barth's doctrine of Scripture using speech-act philosophy. Barth could consistently say, as he did, both that the Bible *is* the Word of God and that it *becomes* the Word of God (again, actualism) by maintaining that the Bible *is* the Word in its locutions and illocutions and *becomes* the Word 'when the Spirit enables what we might call illocutionary uptake and perlocutionary efficacy' (p. 57). The net effect: the Bible contains by the Spirit the very words of God (inspiration) but those words remain ineffectual until by the same act of the Spirit (illumination) they direct the reader to the Word. Vanhoozer also reminds evangelicals that Barth's relocation of the authority of Scripture in the author-

ity of God was not due to doubt over the text as revelation, but to his Reformed sense that revelation is the miraculous grace of the free, sovereign God who as such remains the active Subject of his revelation. Barth did not intend to disparage the text, but to uphold and account for the sovereignty of God. This essay moves evangelicals beyond the false conclusions that Barth's actualistic doctrine of Scripture was founded on existentialism or that his reticence to see authority as a predicate of the text itself was due to his acceptance of higher-criticism; Vanhoozer surfaces the theological convictions that drive Barth's doctrine of Scripture. And while his charity might at places border on wishful thinking, his essay is certainly one of the most constructive and enriching, helping evangelicals overcome common caricatures of Barth's commitment to biblical authority.

The editor's 'A Bold Innovator: Barth on God and Election', like his doctoral thesis,[3] accuses Barth of innovation, and that quite repeatedly (nineteen times in a seventeen page article!). Readers will probably wish Chung would not have expended so much effort to prove a thesis Barth himself acknowledged,[4] a fact Chung curiously ignores.

His charge of 'innovation', which he dubs as a deficient deviation from Reformed theology, runs as follows: Barth's rejection of substance metaphysics in favour of 'actualism' means his theology proper is not a viable evangelical option since traditionally evangelicals have held the former. When he argues that Barth adapted Reformed theology, particularly its notions of sovereignty and grace, according to an alien Kantian epistemology, he is in many ways simply reiterating the critique of Van Til. Indeed, he echoes Van Til when he complains that Barth 'constructed a God who is significantly different from the God of many Reformed evangelicals' (p. 70). But while acknowledging that Barth diverged because he felt substance metaphysics introduced *unbiblical speculation* into the doctrine of God, Chung instead simply proceeds to attribute this innovation to Kantian 'philosophical presuppositions' and thus does not seriously entertain the possibility that Barth's 'actualism' is truer both to Scripture and to Reformed theology as Barth had hoped. Instead, he is content with noting the surface discrepancy, and merely asserts that 'Barth's actualism is a pattern of thought that the Bible does not endorse explicitly or implicitly' (p. 64). I fear, and I have this worry about his doctoral thesis as well since it also follows the procedure of noting an apparent difference and then just attributing it without any sustained analysis to 'philosophical presuppositions', that his argumentation assumes what it is trying to prove.

The reader is left asking where Scripture holds up substance metaphysics as the paradigm for understanding the being of God? After all, the dominant biblical portrait of God is not that of a super-substance to which

3 *Admiration and Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

4 See, e.g., Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), p. 147 where he describes his thesis as a 'step forward, an innovation'.

various metaphysical attributes can be ascribed, but of a personal agent who is identified by his character which is revealed through his acts and relationships. Unfortunately, Chung scarcely advances beyond past complaints for he mistakes the Reformed character of Barth's thought for *philosophical* presuppositions. And in all of this, the question as to what it means to be evangelical/Reformed lingers: Does it simply mean the exact repetition of previous conclusions down to the very *letter* (i.e., philosophical presuppositions) or does it mean fidelity to the *spirit* of Reformed theology?

Oliver Crisp offers a descriptive essay on Barth's doctrine of creation. He outlines four areas of 'convergence' and four areas of 'divergence' between Barth and the Reformed tradition. The former, characterized as only 'partial agreement and overlap' (p. 84), are: (1) the triune God creates while the Father is the primary agent; (2) creation is a sovereign act of God; (3) supralapsarianism; and (4) the interconnectedness between covenant and creation. Divergences listed are: (1) rejection of a positive role for natural knowledge; (2) denial of any apologetic value of creation for faith; (3) classification of Genesis 1-3 as 'saga' rather than a historical narrative; and (4) the nature of God's 'time' and its relationship to 'created time.'

These latter points have been documented before. Barth's rejection of apologetics and natural theology, for instance, were recurrent themes when he fielded questions in Chicago during 1962, and both have been major factors in the dismissal of his theology as sub-evangelical. Yet Crisp is aware of the driving concerns behind Barth's thought, making him better suited to accurately level criticisms. When, for example, Barth argued that creation cannot be truly known apart from God's revelation in Christ, Crisp notes that Barth was attempting to avoid a naturalist doctrine of creation, that is, a doctrine that begins neutrally (from non-Christian beliefs about the world) by harvesting the insights of the natural sciences and naturalist philosophy and subsequently supplementing such with Christian revelation. For Barth, as Crisp correctly ascertains, such a naturalist grounding allows non-Christian commitments to set the terms for Christian theology and thereby interprets the supernatural acts of the Creator on the basis of natural, created realities, the result of which can only be for Barth sub-theological and idolatrous.

The author is also unwilling to repeat previous mistakes made by evangelicals. Notable in this regard is his comment that 'Barth's characterization of Genesis 1-3 as saga is not a thinly veiled way of saying "Genesis 1-3 is a fairy tale"' (p. 89). Crisp does reissue the call to censure Barth's rejection of natural theology as too drastic. However, he does not develop this critique. Thus, we still await a crisp evangelical rebuttal of Barth's arguments (a) that natural knowledge of God is only knowledge of the natural, created order, not of the supernatural, Creator and (b) that any assertion to the contrary is a category mistake of idolatrous proportions.

A witty and playful, yet penetrating exploration of Barth's anthropology, including his hamartiology, is provided by Henri Blocher; it is substantially informed not only by a vigilant reading

of Barth, but also by considerable secondary literature; it is essential reading. Blocher shares Van Til's scepticism, namely, that Barth's theology is neo-orthodox rather than a fresh Reformed theology. He writes of Barth's 'innovative power' (p. 98), warning that 'if one reads Barth's statements as if they were Calvin's, one is likely to miss Barth's original sense' (pp. 99-100). Apparently what counts as 'Reformed' is reproduction, not reformulation; Barth's reform of Reformed theology is a move toward something else, not a fresh *ad fontes*.

Blocher begins by detailing Barth's conviction that anthropology must be christologically conceived. For Barth, Christ is the one true man, so much so that even Adam was a type of Christ. However, Blocher questions whether Barth does in fact follow through with his method, noting (but not detailing) that 'Barth wavers between the affirmation of the identity of Christ's humanity and ours and the emphatic warning that they remain different' (p. 107). He also questions whether Barth could in fact complete such a task given his actualism. After a reminder that events demand interpretation which requires a 'frame of reference', he asks: 'How can we discern, from the event [of Jesus Christ] itself and without prior knowledge, what is to be ascribed to deity and what to humanity?' (p. 107). In other words, Blocher wants to know how Barth, without any conceptual framework concerning true humanity, can determine what is true of Christ's humanity so as to then proceed to define the nature of humanity accordingly.

Yet he seems to stumble on to the answer, even if he is unwilling to let it stick: 'The teaching of the Bible does provide [for Barth] the guidelines and the grid needed for the interpretation of the Event' (p. 108). The reason why Blocher refuses to let it stand is not because of Barth's actual exegetical practice, but because his practice is not supported by his doctrine of Scripture. Finally, Blocher disputes the legitimacy of Barth's approach. Quoting Berkouwer, he explains that Barth's contention that humans participate in Christ's humanity reverses the Scriptural pattern of thought which sees the incarnation as Christ participating in our humanity.

This is a substantial criticism and here, as throughout, he engages Barth exegetically, arguing that Barth's appeal to John 1:2; Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:2f. 'overlooks two important textual facts' (p. 110): these passages are sapiential and are framed on a diptych structure. Hence, Blocher's final verdict: Barth's christocentrism fails because it is not constrained by the canonical Christ. According to Blocher, only those put under the 'spell' of Barth's rhetoric would follow his approach. The essay's strength is its exegetical engagement with Barth. It is light, however, on application of the analysis to evangelical theology.

Kurt Richardson's essay represents some of the shifts within evangelical theology. Whereas Clark and Henry found Barth's eschewal of propositional revelation deeply problematic, he sees it as the future of evangelical theology. Richardson rightly recognizes that Barth's opposition to propositions was not motivated by subjectivist or existentialist moorings, but by an attempt to remove idolatry from the-

ological inquiry, parallel to his rejection of natural theology. Indeed, by avoiding such Barth was trying to safeguard the unique objectivity of revelation, an objectivity grounded in God himself, not the created world. Richardson argues that Barth replaces propositions with the presence of Christ. It is the resurrected reality of Christ as he is present in the world through Spirit and church that grounds theological activity, not some natural phenomenon. He unfortunately stops short of outlining how this specifically bears on current evangelical theological methodology.

Frank Macchia explores Barth's pneumatology from an evangelical Pentecostal perspective. He traces the themes of Lordship, Spirit and Christ, Spirit and Church, verbal inspiration, and new birth. In the course of this discussion he proposes a way to mediate the dispute between Philip Rosato[5] and John Thompson.[6] Rosato claimed that Barth gradually became less a christocentric and more a pneumatocentric theologian. Thompson vigorously rebutted. Macchia argues that while Thompson was right to discern Barth's christocentrism as sustained throughout, Rosato was correct in that Barth's theology was working its way from salvation which is Christ-centred to redemption which is Spirit-centred. Macchia does seem to miss the fact that the debate is not over where one is in Barth's corpus, but over the reality of revelation which for Barth is always Jesus Christ. Yet his mediation is a helpful contribution and I think there is something to his basic intuition.

Furthermore, despite the subtitle, 'An Evangelical Response to Karl Barth's Pneumatology', Macchia's essay even in its 'evangelical appraisal' section offers little *specific* discussion of how Barth's pneumatology might 'converge' with or 'diverge' from evangelical pneumatology; he limits his comments to declaring his general satisfaction with it. And here Macchia misses what is ripe for evangelical reflection. For Barth, because Spirit and Word exist in trinitarian relationship, revelation is not just Word, but also Spirit. Consequently, revelation includes what he termed 'revealedness', the impartation of the Word by the Holy Spirit to human hearts and minds. Therefore there is no Word apart from the subjective work of the Spirit (another dimension of Barth's actualism).

Given its roots in Moravian Pietism and English Puritanism, evangelicalism has always maintained that true religion is heart religion, and that no reception of the Word truly occurs until the Spirit breathes new life into the Christian's soul. Barth's linking of Spirit and Word provides evangelicals with a *trinitarian* framework for their cherished convictions that loving Christ means living by the Spirit and that authentic Christian confession is rooted in religious affections.

Alister McGrath's essay on justification does not concern the doctrine itself, but its place within Barth's project. Much like Blocher and Chung, he judges Barth's doctrine of justification as another instance of defection from Reformation theology. Barth's novel-

5 *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981).

6 *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1991).

ties, he says, prompt 'the exploration of alternatives' (p. 174). McGrath sketches the historical backdrop both to the Reformation's and to Barth's view, concluding that whereas Luther focused on the moral dimensions of salvation, Barth, working with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kantian epistemological hangover, transposed the term 'righteousness' into the epistemological domain. 'Barth' surmises McGrath, 'has thus placed the divine revelation to sinful humanity at the point where Luther placed the divine justification of sinful humanity' (p. 182). After expositing Barth's 1914 essay on 'the righteousness of God', McGrath acknowledges 'that Barth's early dialectical theology, or mature "theology of the word of God", might represent a recovery of the Reformer's insights into the significance of the *articulus iustifactionis*' (p. 180).

However, 'this seems not to be the case' for 'its themes are incorporated and reinterpreted within the parameters of a dialectical theology, with its particular concerns relating to the actuality of divine revelation' (p. 180).[7] This leads him to the puzzling claim that Barth magnified Luther's 'otherness of God' motif to the marginalization of Luther's understanding of 'human bondage to sin', suggesting that the 'lack of interest in human bondage to sin, so characteristic of the liberal school and nineteenth-century theology in general, thus passed into the dialectical theology of the early twentieth century [sic]' (p. 181). The statement is strange because it is standard to see dialectical theology as a movement that, among other things, recovered the Reformation's hamartiology in contrast to Protestant liberalism's anthropological optimism.[8]

Similarly, readers of Barth will scratch their heads over some of McGrath's more curious comments such as, 'Barth has simply no concept of divine engagement with the forces of sin or evil' (p. 182), 'the death of Christ does not in any sense change the soteriological situation [for Barth']' (p. 188), or for Barth '[t]he dilemma of humanity concerns their knowledge of God, rather than their bondage to sin or evil' (p. 188). It seems that McGrath's dichotomy between 'dialectical' and 'Reformation theology', needed to make his case that Barth is of the former and therefore cannot be of the latter, has led him to overlook quite an amazing amount of contrary evidence, particularly the fact that for Barth there is no dichotomy between 'revelation' (epistemology) and 'salvation' (forgiveness) since Barth's hamartiology (!) demands the Spirit's work of regeneration for human reception of revelation. This is why Barth can say revelation is reconciliation.[9]

7 A conclusion he shares with Chung whose thesis was completed under his supervision.

8 For example, note R. V. Schnucker who, after discussing the key theme of the otherness of God, remarks: 'The movement also stressed the sinfulness of humankind' ('Neo-orthodoxy', in Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], p. 820).

9 Barth's words are worth quoting in full to make the point: 'To the extent that God's revelation as such accomplishes what only God can accomplish, namely, restoration of the fellowship between man with God which we had disrupted and indeed destroyed; to the extent

McGrath also ignores both the Reformed character of Barth's version of dialectical theology and, most unfortunately, how Barth derived his theological epistemology from *moral* justification (for Barth since justification teaches that Christ's righteousness comes in contradiction of human works, so too God's revelation does not supplement natural human knowledge, but comes in contradiction of it).

Regrettably, McGrath concludes that 'Barth operates within much the same theological framework as the *Aufklärer*, Schleiermacher and the liberal school' (p. 188). Since Barth continued the modern quest for the epistemic justification of theological knowledge he did not make a complete turn back to the Reformation which perceived the heart of the gospel and humanity's deepest problem to be the forgiveness of sins. Here again is another essay echoing Van Til's worry that Barth wore modern rather than Reformed glasses. McGrath has little to say about how his discussion might bear on evangelical theology, contenting himself with the rather weak suggestion that Barth challenges evangelicals to double-check whether the Reformation's accent on justification is biblical.

Timothy George is refreshing as usual. His treatment of Barth's ecclesiology begins by highlighting how Barth's theology arose from pastoral concerns. He shows that Barth tried to avoid the 'domestication of God', whether in the form of Roman Catholic over-realized eschatology or Nazi Germany's cultural optimism. Unlike Chung, Blocher, and McGrath, George is not afraid to draw parallels between Barth and the Reformers, noting that he is a 'Protestant theologian in the Reformed tradition' (p. 202) who at places 'stands in the best tradition of John Calvin' (p. 199). George exposits five themes: (1) the invisible church becomes visible by the Spirit; (2) Jesus Christ is Lord and head of the church; (3) the church is created by the Word; (4) the church's existence is cruciform; and (5) the church exists to manifest God and be his witness to the world. George concludes with suggestions for current evangelical life.

He finds that Barth's linking of God's election with the church challenges individualistic evangelical ecclesiologies, reminding evangelicals that Christian existence is corporate. Also, George believes that Barth's rooting of the efficacy of the church's witness in Scripture and faithful proclamation is a healthy alternative to the futile employment of marketing techniques and entertainment in an effort to attract people and plainly present the gospel.

John Bolt proposes a study of Barth's eschatology as a helpful corrective to evangelical imbalance. He looks at four themes: 'eschatology is about Jesus Christ', 'Jesus as victor', 'threefold *parousia*', and 'theology in progress' (*theologia viatorum*). The first three are employed to correct dispensationalism's errors, particularly those of focusing end-time hope on this-worldly chronology and a solely futur-

that God in the fact of His revelation treats His enemies as His friends; to the extent that in the fact of revelation God's enemies already are actually His friends, revelation itself is reconciliation' (*Church Dogmatics* I/1, 2d ed. [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975], p. 409).

ist understanding of Christ's kingdom. Of the theme of the *parousia*, for example, Bolt remarks: '[Evangelicals should] appreciate that the notion of a threefold *parousia*, the effective coming and presence of Christ as a past and present reality as well as a future reality, provides us with a solid biblically based, kingdom-oriented perspective that is far superior to the futuristic speculation of dispensational premillennialism' (p. 225).

After sketching the backdrop to his essay by briefly outlining two different interpretations of Barth's *theologia religionum*, Veli-Mati Kärkkäinen suggests that the opposing views of Paul Knitter, who suggests Barth was a traditional exclusivist, and Paul Chung, who understands Barth to be a pluralist, stem from a tension in Barth's thought. He then embarks upon his own reading wherein he highlights two poles: (1) particularist themes such as the Trinity as fundamental to the identification of the Christian God, Christ is the only true lens for understanding the world and human history, and God's revelation occurs exclusively in Jesus Christ; and (2) universalist themes such as acknowledgement of 'other lights' outside the church, universal salvation, and no one religion is right, even Christianity, except by the justification of God. Kärkkäinen is inclined toward the inclusivist reading. In conclusion, he admits that it is 'difficult to assess the implications' of his reading of Barth for evangelical theology. Here, then, is another essay that avoids the book's goals of detailing convergences and divergences.

Kärkkäinen's inclusivist reading is arrived at in neglect of two important issues: First, the fact that Barth's 'universalism' implies an openness toward other religions is not a position at which Barth himself arrived in his doctrine of election. Secondly, if Barth advocated inclusivism it would have completely undermined the foundational planks of his dogmatic project. Barth's theology is grounded in the Reformation's *solus Christus* where the uniqueness of Christ entails an ecclesiology where the church, as Christ's body, is the locus of God's revelational activity. For him to have suggested that there is an event of revelation that occurs apart from Christ's body would mean the abandonment of his doctrine of revelation, the very launching point of his theology.

The relevance of Barth for postmodernism is considered in the final essay by John Franke. He begins where he always does, describing the so-called 'postmodern turn'. He then explores various postmodern interpretations of Barth such as Hans Frei's postliberal reading and Walter Lowe's, Graham Ward's, and William Johnson's nonfoundationalist readings. Bruce McCormack's critiques of these readings are introduced and allowed to stand. In the constructive portion, Franke argues that Barth's actualism is conducive to the postmodern turn in that it evokes an epistemology that both accounts for human fallenness and finitude and can sit well with some postmodern insights about the nature of language. His suggestions, then, are not concerned with the relevance of Barth for evangelical theology, but for the *postmodern context*. And here it is indeed startling that he believes a cultural context has readied the theological climate for Barth's relevance. Of course, Barth opposed all attempts to

allow a cultural shift or a philosophical trend to set the agenda for theological thinking.

It is an open question whether Chung gave his contributors a clear and specific description of the book's aims and an outline of what a successful essay would do since half of the essayists, as noted above, do not attempt the book's intention to explore convergences and divergences between Barth and evangelical theology. The majority of essays focus on expounding Barth's thought or offering a nuanced interpretation. Those who do note convergences and divergences, with the exceptions of Vanhoozer and Fackre, tend either to repeat past criticisms or to limit their comments to something so broad that it could be said about almost any theologian (thinking here of Bolt's argument that Barth corrects dispensational eschatology, a conclusion that can be drawn from any Reformed theologian).

There is also a lot of redundancy in the book. Facker's, Vanhoozer's, and Macchia's essays each consider Barth's understanding of Scripture's divine inspiration, making it appear as if Chung was not very scrutinizing in crafting the book's contents and keeping his contributors to a specific goal and task. Furthermore, as a reviewer I regret to say that, apart from a few positive examples, these essays contribute little, whether in terms of Barth studies or evangelical responses to Barth. The analyses of Barth are often weak or common to the existing literature, and the evangelical reflections are absent, well-known, or shallow.

Finally, Chung's book misses its goal to appraise Barth from a 'consensual evangelical perspective'. In his preface, Chung oddly contradicts himself on this matter. He first admits that there is and will be *no* consensus on Karl Barth amongst evangelicals because 'evangelical theology is increasingly becoming a diversified, not uniform, movement' (p. xix). Then in the same breath he justifies his project on the basis that there are 'core family values' (p. xix) according to which his contributors can judge Barth's theology. But the disparity concerning Barth's appropriateness for evangelical theological reflection and, most severely, the fact that the 'core family values', a purported constant, are nowhere present as criteria by which these evangelical essayists evaluate Barth's theology means that there is no 'consensual evangelical perspective' in this book.[10] I am much more optimistic about the recent work edited by David Gibson and Daniel Strange, *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*,[11] which not only proceeds from a definite shared perspective, but is also far more penetrating, perceptive, and informative both in its interpretations of Barth and in its evangelical evaluations.[12]

10 Again, one has to ask why Chung did not alert his contributors to these 'core family values' by which they were supposed to be evaluating Barth?

11 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008).

12 There are several distracting editorial issues: e.g., Sentence two on the first page does not begin with capitalization (see also, pp. 169, 276). Macchia's essay includes two confused sentences, one that begins (again without capitalization) 'with Barth puts' (p. 165) and the other, 'One is initiation in Christ' (p. 167). On p. 229, references remain in the text rather than footnoted; in note 85 John W. Webster should be John B. Webster (p. 231).

III Have Evangelicals Changed Their Minds about Karl Barth?

Despite the shortcomings of this book, we might ask in light of it: Have evangelicals changed their minds about Karl Barth? While many of the old objections to Barth's theology are still very much alive—suspicion over Barth's version of Reformed theology, his subjectivism, and his rejection of natural theology—in an important sense the answer is 'Yes', evangelicals have changed their minds about Karl Barth because the deep mistrust and anxiety of the earliest evangelical evaluations is absent from these essays. Lacking in this book is the sense that Barth's theology is thoroughly flawed and that no part is able to be integrated within evangelical theology. Gone too is the urgency that prompted early commentators to warn evangelicalism of the 'dangers' of Barthianism.

To illustrate this, it is helpful to recall one of the earliest evangelical responses to Barth, that of Van Til. Van Til recognized the similarities between Barth and evangelicals, and perceived this not as an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation but as a threatening temptation for evangelical theology. He saw Barth's theology as a deceptive distortion of true evangelical theology and worried that many might be fooled by Barth's use of evangelical terminology. Thus, with the scepticism of a modern biblical critic and the zeal of a televangelist, Van Til repeatedly warned evangelicals of the 'new modernism' represented by Barth.

He tried to surface what he thought was a modernist and therefore unorthodox core in Barth's thought which he believed Barth deceptively hid from view by dressing it in Reformed jargon. Van Til was convinced that no aspect of Barth's theology could be introduced into evangelicalism for all of his thoughts were infected by the disease of modernism. Like Matthias Flacius Illyricus who declared that in times of crisis there were no points of *adiaphora*, this early evangelical embattled in the fundamentalist-modernist era could not even hint at compromise with Barth's theology for such would concede too much to modernism.

With the possible exception of Chung who seeks to ensure that Barth's theology is perceived as 'absolutely innovative', these authors are much more charitable, able to appreciate aspects of Barth's thought without worrying that evangelicals will be Barthianized the moment their approval is given. And this is at least partially due to the distance current evangelical life has from the intensity of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.[13] As the battles to protect evangelicalism from modernization and to vindicate her in the public sphere through academic credibility and political influence have smoldered into the current ambiguity of evangelical identity, many of today's evangelicals no longer feel the pressure to simply dismiss Barth's theology as a danger to the integrity of evangelicalism.

13 This provokes interesting questions that cannot be explored here: Have evangelicals become ignorant of their past? Or, do today's evangelicals feel that the urgent tasks of yesterday are no longer worthy of pursuit today?

Indeed, as these evangelical essayists show, Barth's theology can now be engaged without the Van Tillian attempt to uncover a conspiracy. And while some of these thinkers feel it is best to be cautious about Barth's thought or find reasons for questioning it altogether, this is done without the suspicion and defensive posture of the past. There is little worry here about conceding too much to modernism. Absent, then, is Van Til's scepticism that Barth's theology is thoroughly corrupt and that no thought is salvageable for evangelical theology.

This increased charity has allowed evangelicals to appreciate and appropriate areas of Barth's thought that were previously stigmatized as off limits and hastily misread as sub-evangelical. The doctrine of Scripture is obviously the most notable area in which we see this. In addition to Vanhoozer's generous reading which finds Barth much closer to evangelicalism on biblical authority than previously thought, there are the identical comments of Timothy George and Oliver Crisp: Crisp writes that 'in practice, the way [Barth] uses Scripture is very conservative' (p. 95 n. 39) and George declares 'Barth's actual use of the Bible […] is not only extensive but exemplary from an evangelical perspective (p. 207). Fackre, who has reservations, similarly remarks: 'Barth practices what he teaches by his detailed and profound theological exegesis, letting Scripture speak its own Word. So stipulated and practiced, Barth appears to reflect characteristic evangelical emphases on the authority of Scripture' (p. 14). This more charitable approach has opened evangelical eyes to see Barth more as a kindred spirit than as a neo-orthodox nemesis on the doctrine of Scripture.

While there are certainly negatives that accompany this more welcoming engagement, such as the foolish attempt to turn Barth into the saviour of all things evangelical, positively it provides an opportunity for growth and opens new avenues for fruitful study. Continuing with the example of Scripture, Barth's so-called 'theological exegesis', while not always sound, has much to offer evangelicals currently moving beyond a narrowly exegetical theology into a 'theological interpretation of Scripture'. For Barth, 'being biblical' is not simply matching doctrinal conclusions with prooftexts, but *reasoning canonically* to doctrinal conclusions. Being biblical, then, is not merely a matter of arriving at an outcome that can be hailed 'biblical' because its conclusion accords with *a* conclusion found in any passage of Scripture, but of patterning or, better, disciplining one's thought *after* canonical thought patterns; the truly biblical theologian *thinks after* or *with* (*Nachdenken*)[14] the Scriptures so that the theologian *sees* and *understands* the subject matter (*Sache*) of the biblical text

14 Note Richard Burnett's definition of this term: '[I]t means accompanying with one's own thoughts the thoughts of an author along a particular path—not necessarily the genetically reconstructed thoughts—but the thoughts of the author as stated and with reference to a particular subject matter' (*Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], p. 59).

in the same way its Author did (and does).[15]

Few evangelicals have reflected substantially on Barth's biblical reasons for and reasoning to his doctrinal conclusions. Now that the intense context of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy has passed and evangelicals are in search of an identity and theology for the future, we can expect study of Barth's exegesis to be profitable, stimulating, and, when appropriate, formative. At the very least, such study will facilitate a more accurate assessment of his thought.[16]

15 On Barth's 'theological exegesis', see: Burnett, *Barth's Theological Exegesis*; Donald Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1995); and David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the* Church Dogmatics, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).

16 Many thanks to David Collingwood, Steve Garrett, and Hans Madueme for instructive comments.