

## **The Revelation of God: The Theanthropic Man and Book**

Bill Roach

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### **Introduction**

Karl Barth, like most contemporary theologians, is Christocentric in his approach.<sup>1</sup> That is, his theology found its focal point in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Methodologically Barth was dialectical in his approach. That caused him to create a necessary development whenever the flow of thought seemingly creates a contradiction between a thesis and antithesis. This necessarily created a new position not espoused in the history of thought. This dialectical approach can be observed in three of Barth's Christological positions: 1) Creedal Christology by creating synthesis between Alexandrian and Antiochian Christology; 2) Protestant Christology by creating a synthesis between a Lutheran and Calvinist understanding of the Lords Supper; 3)

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<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart, *Karl Barth in Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Donald M. Borchert, editor (Farmington Hills: Thomas Gale, 2006), 478.

Anthropological Christology by creating a synthesis between the sinless and sinful Christ.

Barth's revelational Christology and Bibliology taught a systematic unity and relationship between the incarnate personal Word of God and the propositional word of God.<sup>2</sup> This paper is going to argue that there is theological precedence to claim that Barth's dialectical Christology informed his Bibliology, laying the methodological ground necessary to substantiate the neo-orthodox understanding of the incarnational analogy, which affirms the sinfulness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. This paper will demonstrate this thesis by exploring: 1) Methodology and Christology: Barth's Innovation of Dialectical Christology; 2) Doctrinal Christology: The Systematic Nature of Christology; 3) Revelational Christology: The Living and Propositional Word of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: This paper will properly employ Barth's distinction between the Word of God (Jesus) and the Word of God (Bible) when it is appropriate to understand Barth.

## Methodological Christology: Barth's Innovative Dialectical Christology<sup>3</sup>

Theological method is essential to a person's doctrine. In his book *Proving Doctrine*, David H. Kelsey attempts to understand the various uses of Scripture in modern theology. While many conservative evangelicals would disagree with many of his conclusions, they can agree with the claim: "That sort of 'theological methodology' is at once part of Christian theology and yet logically prior to systematic theology."<sup>4</sup> The point being that a person's systematic theology is logically grounded in their theological method, and in order to understand a particular theologian they must understand and interpret that author according to their theological method.

The *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* includes a section titled "Interpreting Barth."<sup>5</sup> The authors confess that many

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 6. See also: David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003); Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations In Christology*. (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 8-33.

<sup>5</sup> John Webster, *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

theologians have noticed a development in Barth's theology. In one place Barth seems to affirm position 'X' and in another place he affirms position 'Y.' Webster states, "Barth's central role in the new trend which came to be called 'dialectical theology' demanded much of his energy and took him all over Germany, bringing him into alliance with figures such as Bultmann, Brunner and Gogarten."<sup>6</sup> Barth used this method to make syncretistic statements, balancing his theology by affirming apparently contradictory propositions. When applied to his Christology the *Cambridge Companion* states, "One point, however, has been almost universally overlooked. Barth is probably the first theologian in the history of Christian doctrine who alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochian' idiom."<sup>7</sup>

The dialectical method found its roots in Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Dialectic. Kant set out to affirm four sets of thesis and antithesis, but he did not resolve the dialectic of the antinomies with a synthesis.<sup>8</sup> It was his successor Johann Gottlieb Fichte who, in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, first introduced

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>8</sup> See Graham H. Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1962); John E. Llewelyn, "Dialectical and Analytical Opposites," in *Kant-Studien* 55 (1964), 171-174.

into German philosophy the framed triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. It was followed by Friedrich Schelling, not by G. W. F. Hegel. Fichte did not claim that the antithesis could be deduced from the thesis; nor, did the synthesis achieve anything more than the uniting what both the thesis and antithesis had established.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion, Hegel was not the first individual to affirm a dialectical method. In fact, he did not actually use the terms of the triad. This method finds its roots in Plato's *Parmenides* and in the notion of "world process" in the thoughts of Heraclitus and the Neoplatonist Proclus.<sup>10</sup> What was new in Hegel's philosophy was the idea of a necessary movement. Though a formal contradiction could not be found in thought, nature, theology or society, the conceptual inadequacies were considered by Hegel as a leading necessity to further a phase of development in philosophical ideas. The impact this had upon later German dialectical theology is that when contradictions (not necessarily formal contradictions) are

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1921-1924).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Robinsons, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1941; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford Clarendon Press, 1953); James Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, Vol. II (U.K.: Cambridge, 1902; reissued, 1963), 168-179; Aristotle, *Topica*, translated by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge in *The Words of Aristotle*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1928); Ernst Kapp, *Greek Foundations of traditional Logic* (New York: Columbia Press, 1942); and Friedrich Solmsen, *Die Entwicklung der Aristotelischen Logik und Rhetorik* (Berlin, 1929).

discovered, inevitably the flow of thought necessitates a further development in ideas.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the dialectical method allowed for Barth to create a necessary development in theological Christology. *The Cambridge Companion* states:

But by speaking now in an ‘Alexandrian’ idiom, and now again in an ‘Antiochian’ idiom, by switching back and forth between them dialectically, Barth hoped to provide as descriptively as adequate an account as might be possible of an event that was, by definition, inherently ineffable. The reason why a non-Chalcedonian Christology has been imputed to Barth, one way or the other, would seem to be rooted mainly in a failure to appreciate that he employs a dialectical strategy of juxtaposition.<sup>12</sup>

From this brief survey it should be clear that Barth’s dialectical methodology is the framework for understanding his systematic theology, including his doctrinal Christology.

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<sup>11</sup> See John M. E. McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic* (U.K.: Cambridge, 1896); and G. R. G. Mure, *An Introduction to Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 132.

## **Doctrinal Christology: The Systematic Nature of Christology**

Karl Barth was known for his ability to synthesize all of the disciplines of theology. He was very much aware of the creedal traditions within Christendom. In particular, those pertaining to and affecting Christology. In each of these respects Barth strategically worked out a dialectical method in his theology. This section will demonstrate that Barth's dialectic was applied to three areas of Christology, which later influenced his understanding of Bibliology and the incarnational analogy. The three areas to be explained are: 1) The Creedal Barth: Innovative Dialectical Christology; 2) The Protestant Barth: Christology and Sacramentology; 3) The Anthropological Barth: The Sinless and Sinful Humanity of Christology.

### **The Creedal Barth: *Innovative Dialectical Christology***

Many contemporary Barthian commentators debate Barth's Christological position. Some argue that he was Chalcedonian, others Alexandrian, and a third group who consider him an Antiochian.<sup>13</sup> The *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* states,

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<sup>13</sup> Warren Frederick Groff, "*The Unity of the Person of Christ in Contemporary Theology*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1954), 172, 209, 235-43; and William Richard Barr, "*The Enactment of the Person of*

“When Barth’s Christology has been classified as other than Chalcedonian, it is alleged that he succumbs to one or another of these tendencies or extremes [Alexandrian or Antiochian].”<sup>14</sup> If it is correct that Barth taught a dialectical method would influence his creedal Christology. Hence, an interpreter would be warranted to claim that Barth was neither an Alexandrian nor an Antiochian, but adhered unto some form of a dialectical Chalcedonianism.

*Alexandrian (Docetism)*

One of the primary authors who considers Barth to be Alexandrian in his character is Charles T. Waldrop. In his book, *Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Characters*, he set out to demonstrate from the very beginning [that], “The principle part of this book is to demonstrate that Barth’s Christology is predominantly Alexandrian rather than Antiochian in character.”<sup>15</sup>

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*Christ: the Relation of Conceptions of Christ’s Person and Work in Some Twentieth Century Christological Discussions*” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1985), 1. Other authors within the Alexandrian tradition include: Walter Guenther, *Die Christologie Karl Barth* (Mainz: Gutenberg Universitaet, 1954), 27; Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 185-86; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 33.



Waldrop set out to prove this thesis by arguing for the position of the essential divinity and unity of person in Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> He claims that Barth was Alexandrian in his thought,<sup>17</sup> because he taught that Jesus Christ was directly identical with the eternal Son of God, divine by nature,<sup>18</sup> and in his second stage of existence he united to himself a human nature which is other than a complete person,<sup>19</sup> and that the title “Jesus” and its various uses denotes that he was a divine person, not merely a human person.<sup>20</sup> Waldrop is aware of the Antiochian interpretations of Barth<sup>21</sup> and claims:

The features of Barth’s thought which appear to support an Antiochian interpretation can be accounted for within an Alexandrian framework, while the reference is not always the case. For example, as the Antiochians emphasize, Jesus Christ is the form of revelation, and therefore he is, in some respects, distinct from God. Yet, as the Alexandrian perspective maintains, this distinctness from God does not

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<sup>16</sup> Waldrop, *Cambridge Companion*, 87-127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-101.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-128.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-128.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-85.

preclude the essential divinity of the man, a fact which the Antiochian view can scarcely incorporate.<sup>22</sup>

Waldrop considers this interpretation of Barth to be correct because it properly accounts for the divinity of Christ. Furthermore, it is able to account for Barth's essential theology in the *Church Dogmatics*. In particular, this is the case pertaining to Barth's Christo-centric focus in his theology relating to the crucial doctrines pertaining to revelation, the trinity, election, and reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> Waldrop and others are not unaware of the problems of Barth's Alexandrian Christology, which is why there is the counterpart known as Barth's Antiochian Christology.<sup>24</sup>

*Antiochian (Nestorian)*

As a result of the prevailing controversies in the fourth century it became a creedal standard to affirm a two-nature Christology. Some authors who affirm the Antiochian interpretation of Barth are individuals such as John McTyre, Henry Bouillard, Fred Klooser, and Regin Prenter.<sup>25</sup> Donald Macleod in his book *The*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 165-172.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 172-177.

<sup>25</sup> Jones, Paul Dafydd. *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2011); McTyre, John. *The Shape of Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 154;

*Person of Christ*, explains that standard orthodoxy taught that Christ was truly God and perfectly man, and that it was the task of the theologian of the fifth century to debate: “What is the relation between these two natures? Do they represent separate persons or agencies? Are they mixed or comingled into one person? Or have they been fused together to produce a *tertium quid*, neither human nor divine?”<sup>26</sup> Macleod defines Nestorianism in these words: “The first phase of the controversy began with the emergence in Constantinople of a school of thought which, allegedly, so stressed the humanity of Christ and so distinguished it from his divinity as to convey the impression that the Mediator was two separate persons, one the Son of God and the other the Son of Man.”<sup>27</sup>

The discussion about the unity of the person of Christ is understood by the way each proponent understood the identity of

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Bouillard, Henry. *Karl Barth: Parole de Dieu et Existence Humaine*, 2 vols. (Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1957), 1:122; Prenter, Reginald. *Karl Barths Umbildung der traditionellen Zweinaturlehre in lutherischer Beleuchtung*,” *Studia Theologica* 11, Fasc. 1 (1957); Klooser, Fred. H. *The Significance of Barth’s Theology: An Appraisal, with Special Reference to Election and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 94-95.

<sup>26</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 181

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> Waldrop elaborates upon the Antiochian-Nestorian tradition by claiming:

The Antiochian tradition considers Jesus Christ to be a human person distinct from God. Therefore, he can be said to be divine only because of his relation to God, not his essence. The unity of Jesus with God is a fellowship of a divine person with a human person, established by God's grace. The name "Jesus" denotes a human person, not a divine one.<sup>29</sup>

Those who interpret Barth in an Antiochian manner believe they are justified because they claim that he advocates that Christ is divine only in relation and not in essence. Antiochian thought, while arguing that it is the Word who acted in the incarnation, has tended to interpret "becoming" as an "assuming." In that way, it was able to avoid the implication that the Word transformed into something other than his divine nature during the act of the incarnation. The

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<sup>28</sup> W. Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate* (New York: Harper, 1959), 12-13. Pittenger makes it clear that he prefers the Antiochian view.

<sup>29</sup> Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology*, 85.

concept of “assumption” by God the Word plays a crucial role in his theology.<sup>30 31</sup>

*Dialectical-Chalcedonianism*

Standard orthodox Christology in the Western Church has been Chalcedonian Christology, because it was considered to properly understand and communicate the two natures of Christ. It sets the parameters for theological discourse, keeping theologians away from the heretical positions affirmed in the previous

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<sup>30</sup> G. Wingren, God and Human in Karl Barth (Gott und Mensch bei Karl Barth), *Studia Theologica* 1 (1948), 31-32. Barth *Church Dogmatics*: 1/2, p. 159-160.

<sup>31</sup> Ken Kantzer disagrees with this interpretation and claims: The formula “Mary, Mother of God” Barth defends as a safeguard against Nestorianism. The phrase, however, is not particularly happy because it has led in modern times to the Roman church’s glorification of Mary. The virgin birth, therefore, the reality of which points to the lack of all human work in salvation, has led by Roman exaltation of Mary to a stress upon human participation in salvation. The reality of the human nature of Christ is guaranteed by the virgin birth but also by the clear gospel record of the full humanity of Christ. All forms of Docetism and Apollinarianism Barth repudiates as doing less than justice to the Biblical records. The humanity he ascribes to Jesus Christ, however, is no “speculative humanity.” Man does not first figure out what is humanity and then discover Jesus Christ to be that thing, but he discovers in Jesus Christ what is really humanity (see: Kenneth Kantzer, “The Christology of Karl Barth,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 1.2 (Spring 1958), 25). See: *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 138, 139, and 140; I, 2, 172, ff; and IV, 1, 131.

generations.<sup>32</sup> Soteriologically, Chalcedon recognized that only in the proper understanding of Christ's two natures is he able to be our cure for sin.<sup>33</sup> But this raises the difficulty of the aforementioned discussion, is Barth Alexandrian, Antiochian or Chalcedonian? When Barth's Christology has been labeled as anything other than Chalcedonian, it is alleged that he is either one of the two extremes between Alexandrian or Antiochian.<sup>34</sup> The *Cambridge Companion* to Barth makes an interesting comment when it states: "One point, however, has been almost universally overlooked. Barth is probably the first theologian in the history of Christian doctrine who alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochian' idiom."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore:

But by speaking now in an 'Alexandrian' idiom, and now again in an 'Antiochian' idiom, by switching back and forth

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<sup>32</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh—A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 41-88.

<sup>33</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 127. For others who think that Barth was Chalcedonian see: John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 16-18; Berthold Klappert, *Die auferweckung des Gekreuzigten; Der Ansatz der Christologie Karl Barths im Zusammenhang der Christologie der Gegenwart* (Neukirchen, 1971), 3-5; and Daniel Lee Deegan, "The Doctrine of the Person of Christ in the Theology of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1958), 75-81.

<sup>34</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 129.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

between them dialectically, Barth hoped to provide as descriptively as adequate an account as might be possible of an event that was, by definition, inherently ineffable. The reason why a non-Chalcedonian Christology has been imputed to Barth, one way or the other, would seem to be rooted mainly in a failure to appreciate that he employs a dialectical strategy of juxtaposition.<sup>36</sup>

This has caused people to wonder if Barth intentionally left theologians affirming both positions. Methodologically this does not seem to be the case because according to the dialectic he was not affirming one position to the absolute negation of the other. Instead, Barth affirmed both of them, even in what may seem to be a formal contradiction, because it furthered the necessary movement in the dialectic. In *Church Dogmatics* Barth claimed:

The christologies of Alexandria and Antioch, Barth stated, ‘. . . mutually supplement and explain each other and to that extent remain on peaceful terms.’ ‘We are dealing with testimonies to one reality, which though contrary to one another, do not dispute or negate one another.’ In their original New Testament forms, ‘their relations are so interlocked, that if we are to understand one we must first do

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 132.

justice to one other and *vice versa*'. Certainly no 'systematic unity of principle' can be found that will eliminate the antithesis at stake in saying that Jesus was 'complete in deity' and 'complete in humanity' at the same time.<sup>37</sup>

Barth further applied this method to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Thoughtful readers, whether agreeing with Barth's method or not, can at least appreciate the innovation he brought into the theological discussion by emphasizing the traditional concepts of Chalcedonian Christology, while contemporizing the consequences of the incarnate Word of God.

### **The Protestant Barth- *Christology and Sacramentology***

#### *Historical Background*

During the Reformation there arose a sharp division between the Calvinists and the Lutherans concerning the topic of the *communication idiomata* ("communication of attributes") in respect to the Lord's Supper. If scholars were to examine this debate closely, they would quickly realize that the root of this debate was

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<sup>37</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 24. Also see: Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 132-133.



not so much a sacramental issues as a Christological issue. Donald Macleod states, “There remains a further question. Granted that the attributes of both natures are communicated to the person, can we also say that the attributes of one nature are communicated to the other?”<sup>38</sup> Both Luther and Calvin rejected the Roman Catholic view of the Lord’s Supper, the Roman doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Borrowing from the metaphysical categories of Aristotle, Rome distinguished between an entity’s substance and its *accidens*, an object’s external, perceivable qualities. These qualities indicate what something appears to be on the surface. Beneath the surface or beyond the physical level is a thing’s real substance, its very essence. For Aristotle the *accidens* always flow from the essence. One cannot have the substance of an entity and the *accidens* of another. Rome argued for a double miracle. The substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of Christ’s body and blood while the *accidens* of bread and wine remain. The substance of Christ’s body and blood are now present without the *accidens* of his body and blood, while the *accidens* of bread and wine are present without the substance of bread and wine.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 196.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O’Neil (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), chaps. 61-69 (252-271).

Luther argued that this double miracle was unnecessary. He insisted that the body and blood of Christ are truly present but they are supernaturally in, under, and through the bread and the wine. Luther was still left with the problem that the *accidens* of Christ's body and blood remain hidden to the senses. The Lutheran view is that Christ is present "with" (*con*) the elements of bread and wine. This view is often known as consubstantiation.<sup>40</sup> Calvin also insisted on the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In dealing with those who reduce the sacrament to a mere symbol, Calvin insisted on the "substantial" presence of Christ. While debating with the Lutherans, however, he avoided the term *substantial*, which may have been understood to mean "physical." Calvin affirmed the term when *substantial* meant "real," but rejected it when it meant "physical."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. III. *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, edited by Philip Schaff and Revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 90. Luther states, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given unto us Christians to eat and to drink, as it was instituted by Christ himself." *Was ist das Sacrament des Altars? Antwort: Es ist der wahre Leib und Blut unfers herrn Jefu Chrifti, unter dem Brot und Wein, uns Chriften zu effen und zu trinfen von Chrifto felbft eingefeßt.*

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), Bk. IV. Chap. XVII (555-605).

For Calvin the issue was Christological. He denied Christ's physical, localized presence in the Lord's Supper, because body and blood properly belong to his human nature, not his divine nature. For Christ's physical body and blood to be present at more than one place at the same time, his body would need to be omnipresent. The Lord's Supper is celebrated at the same time in many places of the world. How can the physical body and blood of Jesus be present in all of these places? Calvin answered this by arguing that the person of Christ can be and is omnipresent. But his omnipresence is in his divine nature in that omnipresence is a divine attribute. Christ is currently absent from us in his physical body, but present with us in his deity. He insisted that the communication of attributes was purely verbal. Lutherans on the other hand thought that the communication of attributes was real. Calvin insisted that Luther's view of the Lord's Supper and Christology were a form of the Monophysite heresy. Lutheran theologians countered the Calvinists rejection of the communication of attributes considering it a form of Nestorianism, for they thought he had separated or divided the two natures.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 196-199.

*Karl Barth's Christology and Sacramentology*

Karl Barth was very much aware of this discussion amongst the Reformers. Barth discussed both the Lord's Supper and Christology. Kenneth Kantzer in *The Christology of Karl Barth* states:

In his [Barth's] discussion of the communication of the attributes of Christ he tries to hold a middle point between traditional Lutheranism and traditional Calvinism. Lutherans, he argues, are right on their main point that it is the divine and human Christ who is omnipresent but they are in constant danger of slipping into Eutychianism. Calvinists, on the other hand, are right in their main point that the natures are not to be confused, but they slip constantly into the danger of Nestorianism. The solution is to be found, so Barth avers, in the idea that the body of Christ is present everywhere but in a different sense from that in which the deity of Christ is omnipresent. Precisely what constitutes the difference Barth does not explain. . . . The Lutheran argument that the logos exists only in conjunction with the flesh is correct unless one means, as some Lutherans almost seem to say, that the humanity absorbs all the deity of Christ. The Calvinists were right when they said that the logos was not exhausted in the fleshly existence, but no Calvinist meant

to deny that the whole *logos* is actually joined to human flesh.<sup>43</sup>

The key portion from Kantzer's description of Barth is the phrase "he [Barth] tries to hold a middle point between traditional Lutheranism and traditional Calvinism." This seems to be in continuity with Barth's strategy of synthesizing the juxtaposition of revile doctrines.<sup>44</sup> The *Cambridge Companion* claims, "On the other hand, Barth came to hold what he called a 'neo-Zwinglian' position on the sacraments—affirming that baptism and the Lord's Supper are human actions, denying that they are sacraments."<sup>45</sup> This reiterates the fact that Barth's dialectical is constantly trying to affirm the new position, by not completely affirming either position.

Karl Barth agreed with the Reformers that there was a strong connection between one's Christology and their understanding of the Lord's Supper. In *Church Dogmatics* Barth insisted upon the Word of God in its threefold form – revealed, written, and preached.<sup>46</sup> He considered the sacraments to be products of the Triune God's

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<sup>43</sup> Kantzer, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, 26. See *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 161 and 161; and II, 1, 488 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 130-31; 195-211.

<sup>45</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 195; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, §8—CD I/2, § 18.

revelation, and most extensively as the Word of God proclaimed in the church; which includes preaching and the sacraments, word and action, neither are alone nor separate but “preaching with the sacrament, with the visible act that confirms human speech as God’s act.”<sup>47</sup> The *Cambridge Companion* comments again, “This proclamation, like the bread and wine of communion, is the very Word of God only as it *becomes* this Word of God. Proclamation is proclamation insofar as it is the proclamation of a hearing church as well as the teaching church.”<sup>48</sup>

The essential point of interest from this section is that Karl Barth did not affirm a monolithic understanding of revelation, including Christology and the Lord’s Supper. There are places in his writings when he considered both of them a sign and others where he considered them a sacrament, because he affirmed that both the bread and wine and Christ were the Churches sacraments.<sup>49</sup> Kantzer elaborates upon Barth’s dialectic between Lutheranism and Calvinism, and one source claims Barth affirmed a form of Zwinglianism.<sup>50</sup> The apparent reason for this intentional tension is

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<sup>47</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 201; *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, §§19-21; §§22-4; *CD* I/2, 56-71.

<sup>48</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 54f.

<sup>50</sup> Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 195.

because of his dialectical method in order to affirm an essential progress and *tertium quid* position applied to all of the revelations of God—incarnate, propositional, and proclaimed/sacramental. Furthermore, there is a correspondence between the revelations of God—sacramental, propositional, and incarnational—all of which *become* the Word of God through either proclamation or activity (preaching and the distribution of the sacraments).

### **The Anthropological Barth--*The Sinless and Sinful Humanity of Christology***

Christian orthodoxy affirms that Jesus has two natures in one person, and that in his deity Christ was unable to sin, and in his humanity he was able to sin but he did not. German liberalism did not affirm this position. Instead they argued that Jesus Christ partook of sinful flesh and lived as a sinner like the rest of humanity. Barth recognized this tension amongst the diverging theologies, and just like the other Christological positions, affirmed a third position synthesizing the two extremes. Barth was clear to affirm the virgin birth of Christ. He thought that the purpose of the virgin birth was not to account for Jesus' sinlessness, nor even to explain the deity. Instead it was a sign to stress his humanity. Barth also affirmed the

deity of Christ, considering Jesus to be the sinless Son of God and the height of God's self-revelation.

Orthodox Christology has always taught that Christ was not tainted by sin in both his divine and human natures and that he never committed any acts of sin. The orthodox position has always affirmed that Christ had to be completely human and sinless in order to fully relate and serve as the penal-substitute for humanity. This does not entail that when Christ came in the likeness of "sinful flesh," that he was sinful. Instead it means similarity to a prototype; "sinful flesh" is human nature, which through the Fall came to be corrupted and controlled by sin. Christ's humanity was like ours in that he could be tempted, and lived his life as part of a fallen world of frailty and exposed to vast pressures. But he did not sin, and there was no moral and spiritual corruption in him. Had Jesus been corrupted in any way, he could not have fulfilled the Old Testament pattern, which required a sin offering to be "without blemish" (Lev. 4:3).

Barth on the other hand, by employing his dialectical method, affirmed both the sinlessness and the sinfulness of Christ. In his early Romans Commentary he declared that Jesus "stood as a



sinner among sinners.”<sup>51</sup> In the *Church Dogmatics* he affirmed that Jesus partook of a sinful human nature but that he never actually sinned. As the eternal son of God sin is actually impossible for Christ.<sup>52</sup> In a later section of the *Dogmatics* he softened his position and affirmed the “weakness” of sinful flesh. His sinlessness, as the God-man, in any respect, consisted of his overcoming the sinful fleshly nature which he had assumed. In spite of the reality of his temptation Jesus refused to sin and by his death upon the cross he triumphed over sin.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Barth taught that Christ was tainted by sin, and when worked out in other neo-orthodox theologians they affirmed that Christ committed acts of sin.<sup>54</sup>

Barth had the ability to masterly synthesize all of the disciplines of theology. His position did not strictly adhere unto any extreme, but sought for a middle position. In particular, Barth was able to synthesize the orthodox affirmation concerning the sinlessness of Christ and the liberal position advocating for the sinfulness of Christ claiming that Christ was not *absolutely* sinful nor *absolutely* sinless. Instead, according to Barth’s dialectical

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<sup>51</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 97.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 150ff.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 1, 159, 234, 252.

<sup>54</sup> See Footnote 62.

method, Christ's two natures were morphed into a *tertium quid*, affirming a being that was necessarily sinless and sinful.<sup>55</sup> This is obviously a detrimental position held by Barth, because if true, Christ was not able to serve as our penal-substitute. With this *tertium quid* Christology in mind, this brings us to the point of explaining how Barth's dialectical method affects his incarnational analogy between Christ and the Scriptures. In particular, how his understanding of the person of Christ allowed for him to affirm a *tertium quid* between the two and that Christ's nature was sinful and the Scriptures errant.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Note: As was stated earlier, the Hegelian dialectical method necessarily creates a new being through its "necessary movement."

<sup>56</sup> Note: This analogy could be lengthened to include an evaluation of Barth's understanding of Chalcedonianism or the Lutheran and Calvinism debate, but they are beyond the scope of this paper for these reasons: 1) Barth's understanding of the sinfulness of Christ has more pressing urgency upon an evangelical understanding of Christology and Bibliology, than his modified form of Creedal and Protestant Christology; 2) In contemporary theology most people follow Barth's method to advocate a sinful human Christ, instead of a modified Creedal or Protestant Christology; 3) The purpose of the Creedal and Protestant sections were to demonstrate that Barth created a *tertium quid* between two opposite positions, and that there is a theological precedence to advocate that he did this with his understanding of the sinlessness and sinfulness of Christ. Hence, that understanding of Christology was most likely his and other neo-orthodox theologian's train of thought pertaining to their understanding of the incarnational analogy.

## Revelational Christology: The Living and Propositional Word of God

Inerrantists have long commented on the relation between God's living Word (Christ) and his written Word (Scripture). They have argued that just as Christ is both divine and human in one person (without sin), even so the Bible has both a divine and human nature in one set of propositions (without error).<sup>57</sup> The logic of the incarnational analogy can be stated as follows:<sup>58</sup>

1. God's living Word and his written Word are similar:
  - a. They both have a divine and human dimension.
  - b. These two dimensions are combined in one unity.
  - c. Thus, both are without flaw.
2. Hence, both God's living Word and his written Word are without flaw:
  - a. God's living Word is without sin.

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<sup>57</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 306-18. See also: B.B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*. edited by Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: P&R Pub., 1948); J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958); G. K. Beale *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL, 2008); Harold Lindsell. *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); R.C. Sproul *Explaining Inerrancy* (Orlando FL: Reformation Press, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 126.

- b. God's written Word is without error.<sup>59</sup>

In the work *Defending Inerrancy*, dealing with Barth and the incarnational analogy, the authors state: "There is a strong similarity between the neo-orthodox and orthodox view of Christ. Both affirm the full humanity of Christ and the full humanity of Scripture. Based on this, the reasoning seems to go something like this:

1. There is an analogy between Christ and Scripture.

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<sup>59</sup> Article II of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics States: *WE AFFIRM* that as Christ is God and Man in One Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language. *WE DENY* that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin. The official commentary on the statement claims: Here an analogy is drawn between Christ and Scripture. Both Christ and Scripture have dual aspects of divinity and humanity, indivisibly united in one expression. Both Christ and Scripture were conceived by an act of the Holy Spirit. Both involve the use of fallible human agents. But both produced a theanthropic result; one a sinless person and the other an errorless book. However, like all analogies, there is a difference. Christ is one person uniting two natures whereas Scripture is one written expression uniting two authors (God and man). This difference notwithstanding, the strength of the likeness in the analogy points to the inseparable unity between divine and human dimensions of Scripture so that one aspect cannot be in error while the other is not. The Denial is directed at a contemporary tendency to separate the human aspects of Scripture from the divine and allow for error in the former. By contrast the framers of this article believe that the human form of Scripture can no more be found in error than Christ could be found in sin. That is to say, the Word of God (i.e., the Bible) is as necessarily perfect in its human manifestation as was the Son of God in His human form. Reproduced from *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*. Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1983.

2. This similarity includes the fact that both Christ and the Scriptures are fully human.
3. But as fully human, both Christ and the Scriptures partake of human flaws.
4. Hence, the Bible, like Christ, partakes of human flaws.”<sup>60</sup>

Karl Barth believed that “there are obvious overlappings and contradictions—e.g., between the Law and the Prophets, between John and the Synoptics, between Paul and James.”<sup>61</sup> Why does he affirm this? Because he considers the Bible to be a fallible human book. Thus he wrote in *Evangelical Theology* that “the post-biblical theologian may, no doubt, possess a better astronomy, geology, geography, zoology, psychology, physiology, and so on than the biblical witnesses possessed.”<sup>62</sup> Why is this so? Because “the prophets and apostles as such . . . were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their actions, and capable of and guilty of error in their spoken and written word. . . . But the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 309.

<sup>61</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2.509.

<sup>62</sup> Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 31.

<sup>63</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2.529; 1/1:509). See also: Andrew T. Lincoln and Angus Paddison, *Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary*

According to many errantists, following in the tradition of Barth, who advocate just like Barth that the humanity of Christ was fallible because it adapted unto sinful humanity; so too, the text of Scripture adapts unto error.<sup>64</sup> Errantist Kenton Sparks affirms and explains this position when he claims:

The Christological argument fails because, though Jesus was indeed sinless, he was also human and finite. He would have erred in the usual way that other people err because of their finite perspectives. He misremembered this event or that, and mistook this person for someone else, and though—like everyone else—that the sun was literally rising. To err in these ways simply goes with the territory of being human. These errors are not sins, not even black marks against our humanity. They stem from the design of God, which God has declared to be very good. As a result, the Christological analogy cited in the Chicago Statement seems to be a good

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*Perspectives* (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2007); Rogers, Jack and Rogers McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

<sup>64</sup> Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946); Emil Brunner, *The Word of God and Modern Man*. Translated by David Claims (Richmond: John Knox, 1964); G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*. Translated by Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Andrew T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007); Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, Second ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

one, but it sends in a direction opposite of what the framers supposed. The finite, human form of Jesus tells us that Scriptures authors and their discourse will be finite and human.<sup>65</sup>

Sparks later goes on to insist that “if there is going to be an argument that frees the personalities, ideas, and temperaments of Scripture’s human authors from fallenness and finitude, it will need to take a very different path. The Christological analogy ends before it can serve as an objection to the implications of accommodation.”<sup>66</sup>

From the above citations, it is clear that many theologians like Sparks are advocating a Barthian charge against both the incarnation and the inerrancy of Scripture. The logic of the Barthian error can be stated this way:<sup>67</sup>

1. The Bible is a thoroughly human book.
2. Human beings can err.
3. Therefore, the Bible can err.
4. But a book that can err is not infallible (by definition, “infallible” means to be incapable of erring).

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<sup>65</sup> Kenton Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Hands: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2008), 252-253.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>67</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 273.

5. Hence, the Bible is not infallible (i.e., incapable of error).<sup>68</sup>

This section concludes the synthesis of Christology and Bibliology by Barth and later neo-orthodox theologians. The point to recognize is that because humanity is sinful it necessarily entails sin and error; and since both Christ and the Scriptures are really human, then both of them contain sin and error.<sup>69</sup>

### Summary and Evaluation

This paper has sought to demonstrate that there are two major issues pertaining to Karl Barth: 1) Barth affirmed a dialectical method, which causes him to create a synthesis between two opposing positions. He took the thesis of orthodoxy opposed by the antithesis of liberalism that he synthesized into neo-orthodoxy. Here the dialectical method has significantly less than biblical and

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<sup>68</sup> The Christological charge can be summarized as follows: 1) Christ is a thoroughly human being; 2) Human beings can err; 3) Therefore, Christ can err; 4) But, a human being that can error is not infallible (by definition, “infallible” means to be incapable of erring); 5) Hence, Christ is not infallible (i.e., incapable of error).

<sup>69</sup> David David, *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 1997); H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: A Historical Study 1700-1960*. 2 vols. Twin Books Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).



evangelical results, for while Barth accepted an orthodox view on many doctrines, he retained a liberal view of many others such as Christology and Bibliology. 2) Barth affirmed a doctrine of the incarnation which allowed for sin in the person of Christ and error in the propositions of Scripture. Each of these two issues will be evaluated.

*Evaluation of the Barthian Dialectic*

There are two ways to evaluate Barth's dialectic. The first way is to try to argue against the conclusions affirmed in the dialectic—e.g., the new Chalcedonian position, the middle ground between Lutheran and Calvinist Christology and the Lords Supper, and the sinlessness of Christ. The second way is to critique the method he used in order to arrive at those conclusions. The better of the two ways is the latter because by disproving the method of a theologian, one has in principle disproved all of the conclusions produced by that method.

The main critique against the dialectical method is that it is self-defeating. The first claim that advocates of the method affirm is that "all truth is in process." But this is not necessarily the case. Namely, those affirming a dialectical method believe that their position is true and that it does not change regardless of who uses it, what disciplines it touches, when it is used, where it is used, or why

it is used. Second, advocates for the dialectical method deny absolute truth. This position is also self-defeating. These individuals do not consistently affirm the proposition “all truth is relative.” If they claim that it is absolutely true that relativism is true, this is self-defeating because they have affirmed at least one absolute truth. If on the other hand they claim that this is only a relative truth, then no one can really know if relativism is true. They are left with the dilemma: Either they affirm that relativism is absolute for everyone, which is an absolute claim, or they make an assertion that cannot be made, because the second it is affirmed one will fall into an infinite regress of relative claims. The only way to remove themselves from this painful dilemma is to affirm absolute truth. Third, it is false to claim that all truth is “both/and” and not “either/or.” This is false because it is self-defeating. Advocates of this method do not claim that it is both the dialectical method and all non-dialectical methods, for they realize that would be self-defeating. Instead, by the very fact that they develop the method demonstrates that they believe it is either the dialectical method or another method, but not both.

*Evaluation of the Barthian Sinfulness of Christ and Errancy of  
Scripture*

The second issue plaguing Barth’s method is the ramifications it has upon his understanding of the incarnation of

Christ and the incarnational analogy with the Scriptures. The orthodox evangelical position on Scripture is that the Bible is both a divine and human book co-authoring the autographic text. So the Bible is a “theanthropic” book. As Christ has a flawless union of the divine and human in one *person*, even so the Bible has an errorless union of the divine and human in one set of *propositions*. Whenever someone asks whether Christ or the Bible could error, they must find two answers: As God, Jesus was not able to sin (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). But as a man, the answer is, yes, he was capable of sinning for he was really tempted, but freely chose not to sin (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:3). In a similar respect, in the divine nature the text of Scripture was not able to error. But in the human nature of Scripture, it was capable of error, for it was truly human, but it did not error.

The Barthian charge against both Christ and the Bible is seriously misdirected because the Bible is also the words of the God who cannot error. Hence, as the Word of God, the Bible cannot err. In view of this, one must reformulate the logic of the divine-human natures of Scripture as follows:<sup>70</sup>

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is God’s Word.

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<sup>70</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 314.

3. Hence, insofar as the Bible is God's Word, it *cannot* err.
4. But the Bible is also human words.
5. Hence, insofar as the Bible is human words, it *can err*, even though it does not err.

Of course, as both God's Word and human words, the Bible *did not err*. There is no logical contradiction between "can err" and "cannot err" in this analogy because they are not used in the same sense or relationship. In short, both Christ and the Bible in relation to God cannot err, but in relation to humans, can err—but did not.

Karl Barth and those following him in this respect have created a Christological crisis. They have bought into the Gnostic idea that any contact with human fallenness makes error unavoidable. This argument should be rejected for what it is: neo-gnosticism. The logical implications of denying the incarnational analogy are that both the person of Jesus and the propositions of the Bible are tainted with error. Orthodox Christology and Bibliology have never affirmed that the Second Person of the Godhead or the text of Scripture erred in their person or propositions. Instead, orthodoxy has always denied the premise that *errare humanum est* (to error is human) and taught that God, in both Christ and the Bible accommodated his revelation to human *finitude*, but never to human *fallenness*.

There are a few reasons to reject Barth's conclusions concerning the fallenness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. First, it is contrary to the very nature of the God of truth to accommodate to error (Titus 1:2; cf. Heb. 6:18). Second, it is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture which affirm the sinlessness of Christ (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:3) and the errorlessness of Scripture (Matt. 22:20; John 17:17). Third, there are times in the life of Christ where he clearly did not accommodate to the human situations of his day. It was contrary to his life in that he rebuked the leaders for speaking error (Matt. 23:16-23; John 3:12); it was contrary to his character because both the believers and non-believers found him to be without moral flaw (Luke 23:4, 47; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 3:3; 4:17). Hence, the Barthian analogy should be distinguished from the orthodox analogy for two reasons: 1) God does *accommodate* himself to human *finitude*, but 2) God does not and cannot *accommodate* himself to *human error*. Karl Barth and those following him confuse these two statements. Whatever divine self-limitation is necessary in order to communicate with human beings, there is no error, for God cannot error. It is contrary to His very nature.

## Conclusion

There are orthodox methods and unorthodox methods. Orthodox theological methods if applied consistently will lead to orthodox conclusions. Unorthodox methods if applied consistently will lead to unorthodox conclusions. In the case of Karl Barth's dialectical method, if it is applied consistently, leads to affirming an unorthodox Christology, Soteriology and Bibliology. Barth affirmed a dialectical Christology. He advocated for a middle ground between the Antiochian and Alexandrian creedal positions, a synthesis of the Lutherans and the Calvinists and affirming the sinlessness and sinfulness of Christ. Soteriologically this necessarily leads to affirming a *tertium quid* in the nature of Christ, where he is not really God nor man; hence unable to properly relate to both and serve as our true mediator. When this understanding of Christ was applied to his Bibliology, arguing for the incarnational analogy between the Person of Christ and the propositions of the Word of God, it was found that if consistently applied Barth must affirm the sinfulness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. Both the method and the conclusions of Barth were found to be self-defeating and unbiblical. Nevertheless, in the end, modern theologians should be aware that while there are no new ideas under the sun, there are new ways of affirming those ideas. In each respect orthodox theologians should be prepared to handle the false doctrinal affirmations—whether in word or method.