

Chapter 3

Ecumenical mission: the Church's mission to itself.

What causes conflict in the Church? We are told here that it arises because in the Church there emerge people with the best intentions and Christian zeal who no longer understand aright the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in its unique redeeming power, who even fear and hate it and who extol and demand in its place or alongside it (as if anything could stand alongside it!) fulfilment of the Law as the condition for the salvation of man. This means tempting God and leading men astray and overthrowing their souls. (Barth 1965:13)³⁰

1. Introduction.

In this chapter, the argument will not focus on how Barth influenced different denominations³¹. The previous chapter spoke about Barth's views on the church's place in relation to God. This used an extremely broad definition of church, although it was placed in a narrow context of human history. As we view the church from an historic perspective, it becomes quite clear that the church itself does not display a unity in the message it proclaims. This is mainly due to dynamics in the church that do not always take cognisance of the fact that different perspectives are certain to arise when an institution is made up of people who themselves have varied experiences, histories and interpretations of Scripture. What is the role of divergent denominations within the Christian faith? Can we truly speak of one Christian faith in the presence of so many different Confessional movements? These are the questions that will be explored.

³⁰ This chapter in the mentioned source first appeared as an essay in *Leben und Glauben*, July 10, 1937.

³¹ An explanation of this is found in Keller (1933:58-206).

2. Is there a place for denominations in Barth's ecclesiology?

The starting point of this discussion on Barth's understanding of the wider church's mission-work must be to comment on Barth's understanding of the place and role of different Confessional movements³² who understand themselves to be (or to be part of) the Church. To take for granted that Barth saw each denomination as part of the Church, would be to assume that all different Confessional movements understand, practice and operate within a specific missional framework.

Although Barth tends to speak of the Christian Church as a Body which surpasses the confines of Confessional limitations, he nevertheless engages with different denominations, with the aim of gaining clarity on the Church's evangelical calling.

The simple answer to the above question is: "Yes". This is seen in some of his discussions with different Confessional movements. The more complex "No" to this question will be reflected in the way Barth's ecclesiology is not dependant on the existence of different Confessional movements.

Consider the following quote:

The requisite fidelity to the fathers and the confession of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic and therefore Evangelical Church cannot mean that alongside the rule and the standard given to the Church in Holy Scripture, we have to recognise the Reformers, and the Reformation Confession, and the dogma of the Early Church as renewed and confirmed by them, as a second principle of the doctrine and life of the Church. There is no such second principle (CD 1/2:828-829).

³² In this chapter, the terms "Confessional movement" and "Denomination" are used interchangeably. The preferred term is "Confessional movement". This term captures the essence of the difference between denominational communities. We are unlike because of our confessions. To only use the term "Denomination" is limiting and ambiguous.

In Barth's ecclesiology, the Church's existence is not dependant, nor defined by the sum total of Christian denominations. Denominations exist as separate entities, bearing testimony in dissimilar ways, and from varied perspectives, to the same Lord. Yet, we cannot define different denominations as completely independent entities. To separate denominations to this extent without allowing different interpretations and expressions of faith — which is a response to divine revelation — would nullify any notion of a truly universal Body which spans beyond time, space and confession.

Here lies a specific tension between the Church as a movement with its own history and tradition, and the church as emancipated colonies belonging to the same body. It may even be that the church, from its own perspective might wish to be disconnected from the other individual bodies when their confessions assume that their status within the broader Body is elevated even to the extent that it may view itself as the only and true Church³³.

The reality is that denominations do not exist because of different revelations by God to different groups. Denominations exist as separate Confessional movements because of schism. Although schism is not always aggressive and confrontational, history tells us that this is normally the case³⁴. If we can give any positive reflection on schism, it may be described as different responses and expressions of faith to divine revelation. This interpretation is shaped by history, culture and other external factors.

³³ This may serve as a definition to differentiate between a legitimate Christian denomination and a Christian sect. Although this definition may be true in the majority of cases, it is obviously flawed when one considers the position of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the Protestant movement.

³⁴ The Reformation sparked several uprisings, revolutions (such as the Puritan Revolution) and persecution. Only after nearly two centuries of instability do we find a stabilization by the end of the seventeenth century (Cross 1974:1166).

Recognizing this point, Barth does not shy away from the schism-factor that produces different Confessional movements within the Church. In fact, he takes some time and effort to make sense of schism within the church before embarking on church unity in *Church Dogmatics, Volume 1, Part 2* and *Volume 4, Part 1*. Here are insightful comments in Barth's discussion:

The only schools of thought which are permissible and legitimate in the Church are those in which the points at issue are obviously differences in the interpretation of the common faith which in its previous confessions the Church has recognised to be important, although it has not yet found in them their final solution (CD 1(2):834).

This clearly demonstrates that Barth's view on denominations does not afford any particular denomination the station of being closer to the Divine Truth than others. The premise, as we have seen, is an understanding that there is one Church, which is universal in nature that cannot be confined by any Confession, decree or institutional boundaries. The best we can do to make sense of the existence of different denominations, is to accept them as different responses to the same revealed truth. But even this view of a pluralistic response is subject to certain conditions. Barth does not make these conditions clear in his discussion, but a rational approach to this problem would suggest that different responses cannot be mutually exclusive, but should operate with the acknowledgement that it exists within the context of equally valid responses. This recognition should, however, not prevent critique of, discussion or even admonition between different Confessional movements.

Confessions should therefore not be adopted as a replacement for divine revelation. Although one finds Christ in the Church (and church) through its ministry, the

authority of Christ cannot be overshadowed or replaced by the weight or place of the Church (Sykes 1989:76). Confessions serve as a description of a particular movement's response to divine revelation in a specific context. To serve a greater purpose than this may be an infringement on the revelation received. This definition is validated in Barth's conversation with the German church.

In the preface to CD III/4 Barth comments that Confessions "...exist in order that we may go through them (not once but continually), but not in order that we may return to them to take up our abode in them"³⁵. Barth's view of the denominational phenomenon is therefore that denominations are not fixed in the confines of their confessions, but that it is essential for the well-being of the Church that denominations acknowledge the inherent flexibility of their confessions, which creates an openness to discussion and possible co-operation between divergent confessional movements.

There is, however, another form of schism — that resulting from varied opinions between different personalities and or individuals, which does not necessarily have its base in clear doctrinal differences. Examples of this are the Church of England's split from the Roman Catholic Church and more recently the continuous splits in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement³⁶.

Barth speaks harshly against this form of divide (CD IV/1:675) as it cannot be seen to be in the interest of a continuous development of the Christian faith. Barth conveys

³⁵ Also referred to in Gollwitzer (1961:7).

³⁶ The Pentecostal-Charismatic schisms are particularly individualistic as one does not find a well-defined Confession of Faith in any of the Ministries. Ministries tend to be named after the individuals who take leadership of these ministries while there is no clear description of any form of ministerial succession.

the thought that where schism takes place, it cannot take place without proper conversation between parties of different opinion. “The existence of this kind of plurality of ‘Churches’ is in conflict with both Ephesians 4 and the *credo unam ecclesiam*” (CD IV/:675).

Second, parallel existence cannot only result from conversations and decisions made by the involved parties, but it includes by nature the opinion and recognition of the Church beyond their existence and opinion. Anything less than this does not reflect an ecclesiology of one body, but would imply that there are independent parts of this body that have the freedom to disconnect themselves or others from the body without the Body’s consent, or even its knowledge.

Schism, and the formation of a new denomination or a theological tradition, is not an individual self-recognition but is done with the recognition of the greater Church. It is for this reason that in the Evangelical Church, Barth is able to identify three recognised doctrinal divergences: The Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church and the Reformed Church (CD 1(2):832). Although these denominations have clear doctrinal differences, in each case where their Confessional Statements caused their “semi-independent” state, there has always been a broader recognition and acknowledgement of their place in the wider Christian Church. Furthermore, we find openness to theological discussion and co-operation with Christians from different confessional backgrounds within these movements³⁷.

³⁷ Personality- and opinion-based schism is extremely problematic in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. There is little evidence that suggests that in this movement in the Christian Church, valid doctrinal difference is the cause of schism. It is therefore difficult for these fragmented structures to belong to a body that acknowledges their existence as well as recognises their differing theological- and doctrinal emphases.

Barth's understanding of denominations is therefore conditional on the denomination's history, the extent to which it is bound by its Confession and its availability to recognize, engage and co-operate with other Confessional movements. Where certain Confessional movements are unable or unwilling to view themselves as part of a greater Body (which is made up of Confessional movements different to itself), doubt can be cast on the validity of their being called Christian denominations. Denominational differences are at best problematic, but a reality with which the Church has to live.

There may be good grounds for the rise of these divisions. There may be serious obstacles to their removal. There may be many things which can be said by way of interpretation and mitigation. But this does not alter the fact that every division as such is a deep riddle, a scandal (CD IV/1:675).

To Barth (CD IV/1:676), denominational existence within the Church is a token of its brokenness, in a measure due to the sinful nature of those who respond to God's self-revelation and who strive to be the Body of Christ, the Church.

3. Engaging with different Confessional movements.

Barth engaged primarily with two Confessional movements — the Reichskirche of Germany and the Catholic Church. This is evident in Barth's theology as one finds the trend in Barth's writing to be reactionary to theological developments that are posed by either of these movements at any given time. In this thesis, especially in Chapter 6, I refer further to Barth's engagement with the German Church.

Some points are worth mentioning. The first is that Barth did not view the German Church's self-righteous attitude to mean that it had full right to believe that it was acting within the full truth as revealed by God³⁸. In fact, Barth saw this attitude of the German Church as symptomatic of the neo-Protestant movement – a symptom that can be traced back as early as the 18th century (Barth 1965:16). Barth, needless to say, protested against the arrogance and corruption of the Evangelical Church (1965:16).

In his essay entitled *The Church's opposition — 1933*, Barth (1965:16-17) formulates fundamental points concerning his opposition to the German Church:

1. The German Church's endorsement of the Aryan paragraph;
2. Its rejection of the Old Testament implied by the Aryan paragraph;
3. Arianism in their Christology;
4. Naturalism and Pelagianism in their doctrines of justification and sanctification;
5. Idolizing of the State, and
6. That besides Scripture, the German Church saw its nationalism/patriotism, its history and political situation as additional sources of revelation.

The underlying conflict that Barth had with the German Church concerned its doctrine of revelation. If the German Church took seriously the distinct difference between the God who reveals and the creation which receives that revelation (as described in Barth's theology), it would simply not fall into the post-millenarianist

³⁸ In an essay entitled "Church and State" (Barth 1960:101-148), Barth sketches the tension that exists within the Church by drawing reference to, among others, the relationship between Jesus and Pilate and between the early church and Caesar. In this description Barth points out that neither the church nor the State can claim being the undisputed bearer of God's Will and intent for the world. This tension will be explored further in Chapter 6.

trap that it set for itself. Although its eschatological approach is different, Barth's discussion with the Catholic Church followed a similar line, but with a much greater sense of being able to identify with this theology than that of the German Church.

During his time in Münster (1925-1930), Barth grew in his familiarity and appreciation of Catholic theology, mainly through his contact with Erich Przywara (Webster 2000:4). Barth's conversation with Catholic theologians also included, among others, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Hans Küng.

This does not mean that Barth's theology was mostly in agreement with Catholic Theology, or the other way around. Von Balthasar (1992:386-389) offers a critique of Barth's approach to ecclesiology by raising crucial points that represent differences between Catholicism and Barth's theology.

Von Balthasar (1992:386) lists some of these points of difference as being "...an infallible Magisterium, the number and praxis of the sacraments, the veneration of the saints and especially of the Mother of the Lord". These points are indeed major differences between Barth's perspective and Catholicism, but Von Balthasar does not dismiss Barth's approach out of hand. He, in fact, engages with Barth on these issues, displaying a respect for Barth that is worth noting.

Von Balthasar's first objection to Barth's ecclesiology is in the centrality of the Doctrine of Christ in the shaping of the other doctrines. To Von Balthasar (1992:386) there is a danger in making Christology the foundation on which all other doctrines are based. The question is asked of the motive for this emphasis, suggesting that Barth may have ulterior motives. Von Balthasar (1992:387) goes as far as naming some of

these motives. He (1992:387) sees this position as Barth's guarding against any form of human interference and therefore pollution of the interpretation of God's self-revelation. Von Balthasar's criticism suggests therefore that Barth's distrust of humanity and humanity's ability to receive and interpret divine truth has led Barth to a theology that demands the work of God in all areas of doctrine to the exclusion of the human element. Christology, more specifically, Incarnational theology speaks to this point, as Barth's position does not suggest any form of human agency in this event. This is evident in Barth's questioning of the validity of Mariology (Barth 1967:61-66). It furthermore serves as a guard against a Modernist attempt to define, and thus to have some form of mastery over the interaction between God and creation (Von Balthasar 1992: 387). Moltmann (1992:51) describes the irresponsible way by which Modernism draws certain conclusions: "We isolate objects in order to know them, by separating them from their contexts, subjecting them to a single viewpoint and excluding all other aspects". In this respect, Barth's position carries validity.

To Von Balthasar (1992:387) these motives form the basis of Barth's refusal of *analogia entis*³⁹. Von Balthasar (1992:387) describes his objection to Barth's view in the following way:

The attempt by Karl Barth and his disciples to bind the distinctively Catholic doctrines with (a philosophical) doctrine of analogia entis at any price has failed — unless one understands by analogy of being the union of divine and creaturely natures that was brought about once and for all in Christ or God's refusal to suppress human nature in communicating his divine nature or the ability of human nature to serve the divine. This service is a genuine service, but it is always, in the Church, a service commanded, borne, enabled and executed by divine grace.

³⁹ This concept is discussed in detail in point 3.2 of this chapter.

In order to work and reveal Godself in and through *analogia entis*, Von Balthasar (1992:387-388) describes two characteristics of God. The first testifies to God's freedom (1992:387). If God is totally free, then God must be free to use the analogy of being as a mode of God's self-revelation. This implies that Barth's refusal of *analogia entis* does not portray a true freedom that Barth (CD I/2:661-694) claims for God's being.

The second defines God's relationship with humanity as based solely on grace (Von Balthasar 1992:387). For God to use *analogia entis* as a form of making Godself known, the greatest expression of grace is observed. As God bestows God's grace on humanity, the same grace binds people together and so ensures the formation of the Church. In turn, the Church becomes an extension of God's self-revelation and means of salvation. Von Balthasar (1992:387) describes this process in the following way: "It is grace itself that assumes hierarchical and institutional forms in the Church in order the better to lay hold of man, who is of course a being bound by nature, structure and law."

Barth does not stand without an answer to this engagement, but responds with an argument that not only describes the Doctrine of the Church, but also paves the way for the reconciliation between divergent points of view within the Christian Church.

3.1 Catholicism and Protestantism

Helmut Gollwitzer (1961:7) describes Barth's interaction with Catholicism as follows:

...it is not surprising that in debate with Roman Catholics his theology is regarded on the one side as the most consistent realisation of the intention of the Reformation (E. Przywara) and on the other as the opening up of 'a new possibility of fruitful interconfessional conversation' (R. Grosche), or indeed as both 'the strongest development of Protestantism and the closest approximation to Catholicism' (H.U. von Balthasar, H. Küng).

But still, to profess that the church is “one and undivided” is an idealistic statement, if not one of denial. The blatant schism between the Catholic and Protestant churches bears witness to this. Yet, it is in Barth’s theology that one finds an open and frank conversation, which speaks to the heart of the schism, namely the doctrine of revelation.

Furthermore, Hütter (2000:141) notes that Barth raises two questions that are asked by the Catholic Church to the Protestant Church. The first is whether and how far Protestantism sees itself as a church. It is understandable that the Catholic Church raises this issue, for, paradoxically, both the Catholic and the Protestant churches adhere to the Nicene Creed’s article on ecclesiology (believing in One church), but see themselves as separate from the each other. Then there is an error of logic in dogmatics and confession. If the Protestant movement claims total independence from the Catholic Church, then it cannot hold onto the Nicene confession. Stalemate ensues as the Protestant movement can respond with exactly the same argument. From the Catholic perspective, this independence would reduce the Reformation to an act of liberal individualism. The Reformers had no intentions of starting their own denominations, but to reform the Catholic Church. The Protestant movement has moved far away from these intentions.

The second question is whether and how far the Protestant Church is a Protestant⁴⁰ Church. The Protestant movement during the Reformation was one of protest, but its self-recognition as a separate entity to the Catholic church has shaped it into a new entity: a unique and independent strain of the Christian Faith. Now there are two distinct poles: Protestantism and Catholicism which seem to have very little to say to each other.

Recognizing this profound schism, Barth argues for what is, in effect returning Protestant theology to its roots in the Reformation (CD II/2:532). If Protestant theology is able to successfully do so, it would focus more on promoting a genuine Protestantism that aims to reform perceived distortions in Catholic theology but which does not seek to out-do it. This places the Neo-Protestant and Catholic traditions at the conversation table and speaks against the obvious denial by either party of the others' place in the Christian faith. Neo-Protestantism must note that the Catholic tradition cannot be denied. It carries with it a rich history of Christian living and thought, which itself is the birthplace of its own identity.

“...the business of the Church of the Reformation was, according to Barth, its struggle with its counterpart: the Roman Catholic Church” (Hütter 2000:137). Yet, if Barth were to choose between the Neo-Protestant and the Catholic traditions, he claims that it would be better to choose the latter (CD II/2:529). This move in itself is not satisfactory to Barth as there is a danger in the Catholic church of seeing itself as the

⁴⁰ I acknowledge that the term “Protestant” is derived from “...the *Protestatio*’ of the reforming members of the Diet of Speyer (1529) against the decisions of the Catholic majority” (Cross 1974:1135). “Pro testare” means “testifying for”. The Reformers therefore “testified for” what they believed to be the true meaning of the Christian faith. The objection and protest against some of the Catholic doctrines and practices were subject to the proclamation of the Reforming members’ own beliefs. By placing the emphasis on “protest” in the term “Protestant”, I intend it to be interpreted as a form of indirect protest that emanates from the Protestant movement’s “testifying for” its own stance.

sole human response to God's revelation, therefore denying any other form of Christian expression (CD II/2:530).

One of the conversations that the Protestant movement could engage in, which relates to its seemingly different doctrines of revelation and salvation, concerns the Catholic church's belief in and expression of *analogia entis*. In his conversation with the Catholic tradition, Barth does not criticize without offering constructive suggestions. Where Barth encourages the Protestant movement to protest, engage and offer alternatives, so he acts within the same guidelines.

3.2 Analogia entis.

One point Barth could not agree upon with the Catholic tradition was its view of *analogia entis*⁴¹. Mechels (1974:40) describes Barth's objection to *analogia entis* as the pronouncement of heresy in both the Catholic Church as well as that of the fundamental premise of Modernism. The danger in the acceptance of *analogia entis* by Modernism is that this concept now found its way into the teaching of the wider church (Mechels 1974:40).

To Barth (CD II/2:141), *analogia entis* is an error that assumes too much about creation's ability to understand God's relationship with God's creation. To speak of *analogia entis* first assumes that there is a way in which God is to be compared to creation and vice versa (CD II/2:141). This is a necessary step if the relationship between God and creation is to be described objectively. If this is true, then Barth

⁴¹ "Analogia entis = analogy of being, i.e. any analogy which suggests that there is something in the being of man which has its analogue in the being of God." (Busch 1976:215)

draws the next logical conclusion, that such an observation would only be possible if there were an observer other than God and creation, and by default, greater than both God and creation (CD II/2:141). The observer would therefore have an objective, measured picture of God and of creation and be able to gauge the extent to which the image of God is projected onto creation.

This image would no longer be revealed by God, but by something other than God. This is clearly not in accordance with Christian belief. *Analogia entis* creates a second flaw in Catholic theology and affects especially, as noted by Yocum (2004:99), “Marian dogma, the *ex opere operato* theology of the sacraments, a guaranteed infallibility of the Church’s teaching office, and the hierarchical constitution of the Church”.

Barth (CD I/1:xiii) then embarks on a journey, describing that which he expects of the Protestant church. Barth does not “do away” with the image of analogy as proposed by the Catholic tradition, but in identifying *analogia entis* as a distortion in Catholic doctrine protests against it and seeks to reform the idea. He does this by proposing a changed definition of the belief, namely an *analogia fidei*.

It is difficult to understand Barth’s rejection of *analogia entis*, given his acceptance of the two natures of Christ. This, to Barth, is not in conflict, for it is in Jesus Christ that what rationally would relate to *analogia entis* is transformed into a question of *analogia fidei*.

Barth's *analogia fidei* starts with the doctrine of God and the doctrine of revelation. If we as created beings were to speak about God, how would we do this? An apologetic approach assumes that there is an inherited or acquired knowledge within the created order that is able to prove the existence of God and therefore God's relevance to the created realm. But God is God's own proof and exists before the questioning thinking of the metaphysicist or theologian (Highfield 1989:10).

The analogy comes in two parts, first in God's self-revelation and then in God's gift to humanity – faith. (Highfield 1989:10-11)⁴². The relational aspect of this analogy is therefore not based on a human, or created discovery, but finds its roots in the very being, self-expression and self-revelation of God. As God “is”, so God's intention is not to remain hidden or to be discovered by God's created order, but to expose Godself in love to the very creation that exists out of God's divine freedom and love. The knowledge and subsequent interaction between creation and God is made possible through creation's ability to be in relationship, not only with God, but also with itself in the light of that divine relationship. This is an act of faith, which is a gift. The full expression of this knowledge is given in the Word (KD I/1:VIII).

God sees the world as it really is. Humanity is able to gain some of this understanding through the work of the Spirit, therefore re-enforcing *analogia fidei*. (Ward 2000:284). Barth is not the only theologian who holds this view. A closer reading of

⁴² See CD I/1, p.234-244. In this section Barth goes to great lengths describing the “economics” of revelation. Religion, in its classic definition, is seen as a human attempt to find God. The Christian faith does not subscribe to this definition as its sole knowledge of God is gained through God's self-revelation. When God reveals Godself, creation – and more specifically humanity – needs to accept this revelation. This “acceptance” is not done on the basis of equals, or in the acknowledgement of a correct and sensible argument from creation (or humanity's perspective). Part of the redemptive work of the Spirit is the enabling of the created to come to accept the revelation of the Creator. This “acceptance by Faith” is as much a salvific work as the reconciliation done by Christ.

Moltmann's pneumatology yields this also: The Spirit speaks and engages with creation, continuously pointing towards the Son, who is Himself the testimony of the love of the Father and this enables creation to respond to the Word (Moltmann 1981:220).

3.2.1 How is Barth's reaction received?

One of the main critics of Barth's refusal to include the possibility of *analogia entis* was Hans Urs von Balthasar. Highfield (1989:12-13) and Von Balthasar (1992:35-36) maintain that Barth indeed possesses an *analogia entis* in his theology in that true covenantal relationship between God and humanity would only be possible in the presence of such an analogy⁴³. Jesus becoming human, being able to become our "brother" and the embodiment of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity, displays a very similar covenantal relationship between man and wife. This makes *analogia entis* not only a possibility, but a reality (Von Balthasar 1992:163).

McCormack (2000:108-109) is correct in stating that Von Balthasar is "...right for all the wrong reasons." Barth's understanding of *analogia entis* is not bound in the act of

⁴³ Highfield (1989:12-13) summarizes Von Balthasar's identification of Barth's move from dialectical theology towards a more analogous one. The first stage in Barths' dogmatics as recorded in the First edition of *Der Römerbrief* and the prolegomena to *Church Dogmatics* created a pure dialectical relationship between God and creation. As God reveals Godself, immediately the possibility for a response to nothingness (*das Nichtige*) is created. In *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* and *CD I/1*, Barth bridges the gap between the created and the infinite by posing that the touching point between God and creation in terms of revelation and response to God's self revelation is found in the concept of "The Word of God". The third stage in this development is found later in Barth's *Doctrine of Creation* (CD 3), where the *analogia fidei* is made concrete in the self-revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. Keller (1933:215-217) similarly argues that Przywara describes Barth's denial of *analogia entis* in his concept of God as a contradiction. If God is totally other, and God has become known in the finite realm, then God must have changed from an absolute transcendent God to an absolute God within us. If *analogia entis* is denied in this approach, then Barth's argument must be an example of absolute irrationality. This is a misinterpretation of his (Barth's) theological approach, as described earlier.

God associating Godself with humanity or vice versa. If any analogy exists, it must exist in “an eternal divine act of self-determination and a historical human act of self-determination and the “being (divine and human) which is constituted in each” (McCormack 2000:109). Barth rather understood the relationship between God and humanity in terms of *analogia fidei* in that “...the correspondence between the existence of God and the existence of the human person as something that only discloses itself in faith in the God who affirms all human beings in the man Jesus.” (Krötke 2000:166). Mechels (1974:44-45) adds to this point by listing five points in Barth’s theology that argue for an *analogia fidei* instead of an *analogia entis*.

The first is that Barth’s theology does not exclude the self-revelation of God through humanity as Von Balthasar (1992:387) suggests. In Jesus Christ, God reveals Godself in human flesh⁴⁴. There is nevertheless an ontological difference between God and creation. God cannot be identical with God’s creation, but is able to express Godself in created terms through Jesus Christ.

The second point (Mechels 1974:45) is that in Jesus Christ, the freedom of God and God’s self expression becomes visible for all of creation to see. This self-disclosure in human flesh is more than Adoptianism. Adoptianism creates a case for *analogia entis*, but in God’s self revelation in Jesus Christ, creation becomes aware of the being and will of God and then embarks on the journey of justification and sanctification by faith.

⁴⁴ This is the crux of the two-nature concept in orthodox Christology.

This leads to Mechels' (1974:45) third point, that God, in Jesus Christ, becomes accessible to creation in an act of grace. Grace is therefore not found in the imparting of God's identity to humanity in the *analogia entis* as Von Balthasar (1992:387) suggests, but becomes accessible and real to human existence by receiving the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ by faith.

Faith in God's self-expression in Jesus Christ becomes the fundamental premise of the Christian Church: that the Word is not devalued as it is revealed in flesh. The Word of God is the same Word as presented in the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Mechels 1974:45).

The final point (Mechels 1974:45) is that through Jesus Christ, the objective possibility of God's self-revelation is confirmed. The objective perspective does not lie with creation, for creation receives this self-disclosure in faith, but rests with God, who in God's grace enables creation to receive and enjoy the full benefits of God's revelation in Jesus Christ through the gift of faith.

Hart (2000:46), like McCormack, remarks that in Barth's theology there is no *analogia entis*. Therefore, to find a correspondence between the created and the uncreated in terms of relational ability, is to read into Barth's theology something which is not there. In the context of the doctrine of revelation, this means that when God uses objects for the purpose of revelation, God bestows on them characteristics, which without God's intervention, they simply would not possess.

One wonders whether it is fair to describe Barth's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in the manner in which Keller (1933:224) does:

Barth...declared recently that he considers the Roman Church as the greatest heresy of Christian history; especially her doctrine of analogia entis and of the Imago Dei, i.e., her attempt to interpret human life as an analogy to the divine, and the fallen man as still representing the image of God in the original creation.

Using this quote to describe Barth's view on ecumenism would be misleading. As we have seen, Barth's dedication to inter-confessional conversation can only be described by his passion for reform. This is the reformation of all doctrine and teaching which the church deems to be inconsistent with the Christian message. This leads us to the following question:

4. How does Barth see the ecumenical movement?

To make it quite clear from the start, if ecumenism means, the establishment of one church by human power and for human power, then it is not true ecumenism, but the beginning of the end for the institutional church. Karl Barth (2003a:83-92)⁴⁵ views such an approach as a distinct threat to the church. This means that the church has moved to a position where it views itself as being a humanly, and/or anthropocentric community, which is the sole interpretation and expression of the Church.

⁴⁵ Mangina (2004:192-193) comments on this work and states that Barth's perspective implies that an authentic ecumenism will not be realized from inter-continental discussions and agreements, but can only become a reality in the world when congregational communities take themselves seriously as forming part of the Church. This implies that small Christian communities understand their existence as a work of God and that their calling is to bear witness to their Lord. Once this happens, different ecclesiastical communities will be drawn together in fellowship, not out of confession or creedal agreement, but out of a common understanding and celebration of the Lordship of Christ and witnessing in His name. Confessional differences will nevertheless still form part of this relationship as different communities will practice their response in faith differently from those from divergent confessional backgrounds.

Barth was exposed to two different kinds of ecumenical work, the one as a result of the ecclesiastical-political situation in Germany and the other of inter-confessional dialogue. We will view these separately.

4.1 Political ecumenism.

“...Barth’s initial interest in involvement in the ecumenical movement and the WCC grew out of his struggle for the renewal of the life and witness of the church in Germany under Hitler in the 1930’s.” (Weiser 2000:447).

Barth (1965:9)⁴⁶ describes two forms of ecumenical activity, which took place in Germany: at first, there was the struggle by the State, through the German Christians to unify the German Church. Secondly, there was the Confessing Church, which, in a sense became unified in its fight against the unification with the German Church, which ultimately became the religious mouthpiece of the Reich.

Considering Barth’s view on ecumenism as described earlier, it is easy to see how ecumenism that is driven by anthropological motives announces the death of the church. “Ecumenism” to the German church involved the social structuring of a nation to coincide with what it believed to be the Kingdom of God. Such a post-millenarianist approach simply could not work. The establishment of the Confessional church with the acceptance of the Barmen declaration in 1934 heralded another form of ecumenism, where the motive was not to restructure society, but to be obedient to the message of the gospel and to witness to her Lord in a politically volatile period. The success of the Confessing church enforces Barth’s position and eliminates any thought that his approach to ecumenism is idealistic.

⁴⁶ T.H.L. Parker’s idea as presented in the Editor’s introduction of this publication.

4.2 Inter-confessional dialogue.

In his Foreword to *Gottes Wille und unsere Wünsche*⁴⁷, Barth (1965:26-27) writes: “Lutherans and Reformed cannot and must not confess today in opposition, but rather as evangelical-Lutherans and evangelical-Reformed. I have never been a friend of the so-called “Union” of the nineteenth century, nor am I one today.”

By this it is clear that ecumenism does not mean that different denominational confessions should be abolished. To do this would show a lack of appreciation for the divergent emphases that exist in separate traditions. In the same breath, the ecumenical mission of the church is not to convert those of one confession to another confession either. Ecumenism is not synonymous with non-denominationalism, nor does it call for discussions between confessions to prove which denomination is the bearer of the greater-truth.

After visiting the Vatican to ask questions about the resolutions of Vatican II (which he was not able to attend), Barth remarks that the “Conversion” from Catholicism to Protestantism and vice versa was not something to be desired. True conversion is to Jesus Christ, resulting in the person belonging to the One, holy, catholic and apostolic church, confessing the Lordship of only one Christ (Barth 1968:18).

Barth disagreed with some of Catholicism’s teachings. We explored this earlier in his debate concerning *analogia entis* and *analogia fidei*. Another struggle that Barth had with the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church was the way in which it taught the

⁴⁷ Initially published in 1934, *Theologische Existenz Heute* Volume 7. p. 4-8.

Church as the revelation of Truth. Barth simply could not believe that any confession could make that assertion. In this assertion he also implicated the Old Protestant tradition (CD I/1: 15-16).

Any church-community, whatever denomination it belongs to, cannot see any part of its being or its teaching as infallible. The implication would be that all teachings or modes of existence deemed infallible would not be investigated any further and by default is closed to any discussion. In Barth's understanding, only the being of God occupies such a position. This view makes *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* a valid starting point for different confessional movements who long to express their place in the Body to Christians of other Confessions. Ecumenism starts with the recognition that the Truth of God and Church is something that is revealed by grace and received in faith (an extension of *analogia fidei*). Ecumenism is about the common response by different Confessions to the revealed Truth.

“Ecclesial difference does not matter as long as the nature and location of the identity of God's activity and of Christ's body is rightly understood.” (Hütter 2000:148)⁴⁸.

This, in essence, is the church's witness. Where different denominations stand in relation to these fundamental Christian truths is defined by their Confessions. If explored earnestly, it may be found that the projected differences that various

⁴⁸ Here Hütter is commenting on a quote from Barth reading: “The Reformation restored the Church as the Church of the Word. Word is the revelation and self-mediation of another person who meets us. And if this person is the person of God, his Word is the expression of his authority; not of his domineering over us, but of his Lordship over us. God encounters me in his Word, and this means that he directs me through his commands and through his promise; that I am to believe him and obey him. These categories differ fundamentally from other categories. By them is declared and established...the immutable subjectivity of God, the freedom of God above all instruments, the uniqueness of God's authority. To declare and establish this truth is the business of Protestantism. We cannot see that this is really done in the Catholic teaching.” The quote is referred as taken from p.324 of *Roman Catholicism: A Question to the Protestant Church* by Karl Barth. This source is not found in any list of Barth's writings. I trust that Hütter here has access to a publication that is not readily available.

Confessional movements assume about one another may not be as great as initially anticipated.

This is how Jüngel (1986:38) interprets what Barth has to say about the differences between the Catholic and Protestant traditions:

For Barth, the modern Protestantism of both Left and Right represented a Catholicism tempered by negligible heresies, sharing a common Semi-Pelagianism which entered in the eighteenth century by the two open doors of Rationalism and Pietism⁴⁹.

If ecumenism is not about eradicating or converting other Confessional movements, then what is its task? Joseph Mangina (2004:191) summarizes the answer well by writing: "...an authentic ecumenism cannot be simply an intra-ecclesial affair, but must have its eyes open to the world to which the Christian witness is directed."

The church's ability to be in conversation with itself is a positive statement to the world of the health in which the Body finds itself. The church without conversation is not united and cannot speak with authority to a world, which is constantly in conflict about relationship, reconciliation, and forgiveness or even about a God who calls us to love.

It is therefore the church's duty and responsibility to be at mission within itself, not only for its own benefit, but for the good of those to whom the church should witness about its Lord. "The reminder is: 'Church, go back to your fundamental task!'. The essential task of the church is preaching the Word. This and nothing else. This demand effects a sort of cleansing of the temple." (Keller 1933:42).

⁴⁹ In this sentence, Jüngel makes use of Barth's words from "*Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung*", December 26, 1911, p.1. The exact extractions are not indicated in the quote above.

To Barth, ecumenism must be rooted in an honest return to and engaging with Scripture (Mangina 2004:191). In Scripture, we find the testimony of how God has revealed God-self in different situations, proclaiming a “Good News”, which lies at the heart of the Church’s existence. It is this “Good News” that calls a Body into being, which by faith witnesses to the relational image of God and is the eschatological hope for all creation.

In the ultimate ground of all reality in the Trinity, we do not find a unity in which multiplicity disappears into the dark night of undifferentiated nothingness. Rather, we find a unity which presupposes and gives ultimate value to a relationship, reciprocity, and mutuality among members in a loving communion of equals (Braaten 1990:424-425).

Guder (2003:42) identifies the Church’s missional focal relationship with the Trinity in Barth’s understanding of “sending”. The Father sends the Son, the Son asks the Father to send the Spirit and so, in turn, the Church is sent. Being sent as one, Barth describes the church further as “...‘the early-historical form of [the] existence of Jesus Christ’⁵⁰[which] provides additional opportunities for ecumenical discussion” (Jüngel 1986:51).

Conclusion.

Fundamentally, ecumenism starts from the premise that the church is a recipient of God’s revelation and as a Body, responds to it in faith. This is a gift from God. As the church is made up of people, who themselves have distinct personalities, cultures, histories and understandings of who God is, it is inevitable that different expressions of faith will come into being.

⁵⁰ Jüngel here quotes Barth (CD IV/1:661).

Openness to conversation is precisely the measuring rod which determines whether Confessional movements truly form part of the Body, or whether they should be identified as sects. The greatest gift the church can give to the world is not to be of one mind on all issues, but to be able to seek the mind of God together, or, as Rosato (1989:108) asserts:

Mutual openness is not often considered an outstanding Christian virtue, let alone a form of evangelical repentance, but as Barth and his Catholic conversation partners earnestly lived it, it embodied the cardinal virtues which render Christian love prudent, temperate, just and courageous.

Chapter 4

The Church and Religion.

“Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sanctu ex Maria virgine et homo factus est” (Barth 2003b:132).

“Among the most important idols to be resisted are those of institutional religion, which often seeks to manipulate God in service of its own self-interest” (Mangina 2004:177).

1. Introduction.

The church is in continuous conflict within itself as it searches for the truth. In the previous chapter, the conclusion was reached that this seeking is not a sign of weakness within the church, but that it is part of the church's mission towards itself. The manner in which the church engages with itself in its quest for truth indicates the place where its commitment lies in terms of who it acknowledges as Lord. If the search is motivated by self-preservation, the institution takes priority. Where it is motivated by a common acknowledgement of its dependence on God's revelation for its own unity, there the focus moves towards God.

There is another form of a search for truth that shapes the church, especially its missional status. This is found in the church's relationship to other religions. Each religion claims some form of ultimate truth that cannot be moved or shaped. Situational factors, doctrinal understanding and culture may nevertheless influence the expression of this truth.

This chapter will not investigate the finer details concerning the expression of truth, but will describe the nature of the church's relationship to other religions particularly in the manner in which it influences its character and mission. The main themes in this chapter will therefore concern the issues of truth, revelation and the expression of perceived truth and revelation. In exploring these themes, Barth's teaching on inter-religious relationships will be described and specifically explored in the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

We will use Judaism in this description, as this is the relationship that Barth speaks about the most in his view on the inter-religious relationship. We must, however, acknowledge that the use of Judaism contains certain constraints. The first is that Judaism is not as uniquely different to Christianity as for example, Hinduism. There is a natural relationship between Christianity and Judaism as Christianity finds its origin in Judaism. There is no such natural relationship to Hinduism and many other religions. Does Christianity's status as the continuation of Israel hamper this description? My answer is "No". It is helpful to see how Christianity engages first with those religions closest to its own history and personae before we describe Christianity's relationship to religions totally "other" to itself.

Two theologians have made significant contributions in describing the relationship between Christianity and Israel. They are Hans Küng, a Catholic theologian and Jürgen Moltmann, a Protestant. By first describing their points of view, the delicate relationship between Christianity and Judaism in Barth's theology will become clearer.

2. The relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the theologies of Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann.

2.1 Hans Küng.

Describing the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Hans Küng starts from a premise that most Christians may find surprising: Jesus did not start a church (Küng 1968:72). By this Küng means that Jesus did not see His teaching as the establishment of a religious movement outside of Judaism, but that He saw His own teaching as a continuation of God's active self-revelation in its history. Küng (1968:72-73) describes Jesus' view of Israel and its history as existing in unity, but as a nation without direction. The role of the Messiah, both in Israel's Messianic expectation and in Jesus' interaction with Israel as Messiah, is to bring about a restoration in the meaning of the people of Israel (Küng 1968:73).

Küng (1968:72) refers to the calling of the disciples as a deliberate symbolic gesture of Jesus' hope for a restored Israel. On one level, the twelve disciples represent the whole of Israel while, on another, the diversity of their identities and personalities symbolises the unification of Israel. Israel, at the time of Jesus' ministry was obviously not a community with a common identity or expectations. Israel seemed to have been scattered through foreign cultural practises, distrust within the community itself and the growing economic schism between the rich and the poor.

So, if Jesus did not start a church, but believed in the unification of Israel, then where does the church fit in? To Küng (1968:73) the Church is an eschatological community, which finds at its centre, the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The

Church is therefore the outcome (*telos*) of the community that God started with the Covenantal history of Israel. For this reason, the Christian faith and Judaism share an inseparable connection: that God has called them into existence and has given them the task to declare God's being, intent and action to the world.

The call to be disciples in this definition is not extra, nor different from the existing call of Israel. The early followers of Jesus are found to call themselves the Church only after the resurrection of Christ (Küng 1968:90). The identification by Christians to be the Church is a post-Easter development. The point of the connection between the early disciples and Judaism resonates well with Jesus' teaching. Jesus does not proclaim the existence of a new religion, but speaks about the formation and coming of the Kingdom of God.

Two dangers then come to the fore in the Christian faith. The first is found in the event where the existing Church may see itself as the centre of the development of the future Kingdom of God (Küng 1968:94). This, it cannot be, for the Christian faith, together with Israel, is a community journeying towards the consummated Kingdom of God. As much as Christianity can err by associating itself exclusively with the Kingdom of God, so it can also fail by dissociating itself from the Kingdom of God completely (Küng 1968:95). Although the Christian faith is not the fulfilment of the Kingdom, it is called to be herald of the Kingdom of God. Küng (1968:74) describes this tension by stating that

...this reign of God is always seen in the gospels as a future entity created solely by the gift and the act of God, not as a worldly, temporal reign of God on earth which would develop organically through our human actions, would grow intensively and extensively, become institutionalized and finally be more

or less specifically identifiable with the Church. The reign of God cannot be identified with the people of God, the Church, any more than the saving act of God can be identified with man's reception of salvation.

The testimonies of both Israel and the Christian faith nevertheless entail the proclamation of salvation. If God has called the Christian faith into existence, then it must be concluded that Israel has somehow failed in its task. Israel's failure is twofold: It has made God's plan of salvation exclusive to its own culture and it has failed to recognise God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ (Küng 1968:144-146). Küng (1968:145) describes this failure as follows:

The salvation of all: here the perspectives become much wider, since on the way to salvation the Jews are linked to the Gentiles as much as the Gentiles to the Jews and since Israel's vocation is no longer an unconditional privilege, but has become a promise of unlimited grace and mercy for the whole human race, of which Israel is a part.

In this quote, Israel is not portrayed as having been neglected by God. Even in Israel's failure is it called and instrumental in the process of salvation. The acceptance of Israel is miraculous and is an act of grace. This perspective is closely associated with a Pauline view of the relationship between the Christian faith and Judaism. In Romans 9, the hope of Israel's salvation as well as the hope for Israel's return to being instrumental in the salvation of the world is expressed. Küng (1968:145) concludes that "...if the 'rejection of Israel means the 'reconciliation of the world', how much more will their 'acceptance' bring 'life from the dead'! Hence the ordering of salvation has been totally reversed: Christ is the dividing line". Israel exists for the Church and similarly the Church exists for Israel (Küng 1968:146). The final plan of salvation is not exclusively for either of these groups, but for the entire human race.

2.2 Jürgen Moltmann.

Moltmann (1992:135-150) argues along similar lines to that of Küng. He describes the relationship between the Church and Israel by affirming a definite connection between these two entities (Moltmann 1992:137). Moltmann (1992:137-138) bases this relationship on two factors. The first is the historic relationship that exists between the Christian faith and Judaism. To say that the Christian faith was created *ex nihilo* would be a misrepresentation of the Church's origins and not a true reflection on the debt Christianity owes Judaism for its own existence. The separation between Christianity and Judaism is exaggerated by Christianity's differentiation between the Old Testament and New Testament in the Bible. To Moltmann (1992:138) this is deceptive and creates assumptions about the relationship between the Church and Israel that are not true. It may, for instance, create the illusion that the Israel remained God's chosen people for the duration of Old Testament history, but that God has established a new community, namely the Church, in the New Testament. This new community serves therefore as a replacement for Israel. This is a misrepresentation of the Biblical testimony.

The unity of the Old Testament and New Testament in the Bible is shaped by the Covenantal relationship between God and these entities and especially in their Messianic expectation (Moltmann 1992:138-139). In the Old Testament Israel awaits the Messiah who would bring about the restoration of Israel. In the New Testament the Christian faith celebrates Jesus Christ as the Messiah and awaits His return for the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

There is an obvious difference in these Messianic expectations, but these divergent views should not be the cause of an unbreachable rift between the Church and Israel. Moltmann (1992:139) argues for the opposite of this outcome: that the different emphases in Messianic expectations link Israel to the Church and *vice versa*.

Israel's continued hope for the Messiah reflects the shortcomings of the Christian Church and of the world. It raises the point that the Church does not exist in the consummated Kingdom of God yet. The Church exists in a world with which it must engage for the sake of both the credibility of the Church's existence and the world's salvation (Moltmann 1992:139). Similarly, the Church challenges Israel to strive towards its own salvation and to express its Covenantal relationship freely for the purpose of the salvation of the world.

So, what did Jesus do? Moltmann (1992:142) agrees with K ung's point that Jesus did not start a church. Jesus did something more: He made the fellowship of the disciples possible. He did this without discontinuing Judaism, or even advising against it. The result of Jesus' teaching is found in the early followers' moving from the synagogue to *ecclesia*. The emphasis of the faith returned to the concept of community — a community found by grace and existing in Covenant. This is the testimony of both the Church and Israel.

Moltmann (1992:148-149) describes the relationship between Christianity and Judaism as follows:

Judaism impresses on Christianity the experience of the world's unredeemed nature. But where the Church remains faithful to its calling, it remains a thorn in Israel's side too. It testifies to the presence of the reconciliation of the

world with God, without which there is no well-founded hope of its redemption. Thus the Church ‘makes Israel jealous’ in order to save it, as Paul said (Rom. 11:11,14). And thus Israel makes the Church jealous in order that it may hope (148-149).

Theologians like Moltmann and Küng have very clear views on maintaining a unity between Christianity and Judaism. Both present a challenge to Christianity to recognize its own existence as a continuation of Judaism. Barth (CD II/2:287) agrees with this notion, but describes their relationship in a new light — in terms of a response to revelation.

Is it possible to describe Christianity and Judaism as separate responses to God? From a dogmatic perspective it may be suggested that they have distinct differences in how revelation is understood. If this is the case, then there must be differences in how these two traditions respond to God’s self-disclosure. This in turn will have certain consequences for the way in which both Christianity and Judaism define their sense of being a Covenantal community. Before these questions can be answered, Barth’s perspective on the difference between Christianity and religion needs to be explored.

3. The Church and Truth.

3.1 What is religion?

Barth does not have much to say about *religions* per se, but defines *religion* and critiques it in the light of the revelation of God adhered to in the Christian faith⁵¹.

Also, when speaking about religion...

Barth is rather less concerned with what Christians should think about non-Christians than he is with how modern concepts of religion, religious

⁵¹ This point is also made by Di Noia (2000:244).

experience, and religious consciousness have influenced what Christians think about being Christian. Because he believes this influence not to have been an entirely healthy one, a good deal of what Barth has to say about religion is critical (Di Noia 2000:244).

Generally, religion is understood to speak about humanity's experience of encountering the Divine and giving expression to it. This is then practised in a systematic and defined manner. From this definition we could deduce that the Christian faith is a form of religion like all other religions. The nature of this experience nevertheless eludes the logic of the human being as it is coloured with mystery and a dynamic power which is beyond the control of the created being. It is for this reason that a perfectly defined and comprehensively systematic religion does not seem to exist. All religions, while at the same time claiming to be the custodians of some form of ultimate truth, also admit a path of journey and continuous discovery and re-discovery.

Mangina (2004:6) is right when he draws the pinnacle of this religious thinking to the Kantian motto "*sapere aude*", meaning "Dare to know". This is also closely linked to the theological insight by Anselm of Canterbury — a description that Barth found to be of significant importance labelled "Faith Seeking Understanding". There is, however, a distinct difference being these points of view. The Kantian definition depends on rationalism and the rationalization of religion. The point of religious excellence is found in the measured understanding of the particular religion. The definition offered by Anselm describes a "mystical" journey of discovery, which is not defined or controlled by rationalism. The point of religious excellence in this perspective seems to offer the exact opposite of that of Kant, namely the complete surrender to a God who can only be observed in awe. Both acknowledge a point

beyond the current experience and expression of religion that serves as a motivation for the continued adherence to the religious system.

It is here that Barth and Schleiermacher engage in conversation (Hood 1984:118) about the nature of religion. This is not to say that Barth and Schleiermacher side with either Kant or Anselm. The nature of their discussion concerns the question whether humanity is able to reach toward the “point of excellence” and how it does so. I will not examine this conversation in detail, but a short summary will suffice to bring the point across. Schleiermacher uses as the basis of his theology, humanity’s dependence upon or consciousness of God (Hartwell 1964:5)⁵². In humanity’s innate relationship with God, whether this relationship is conscious or unconscious, an encounter with God justifies and endorses the dependence of humanity upon God. Barth posed several objections to this view. Bender (2005:38) describes the essence of his objection well:

In Barth’s estimation, Schleiermacher had attempted to explicate the religious self-consciousness of persons as the ground of religion while maintaining a place for the unique revelation in Christ as the origin of faith. In the process, Schleiermacher defined Christ’s unique revelation as the perfect actualization of a human religious ideal. For Barth, however, if classical Christian dogma and Scripture are right in seeing in Christ a final and definitive revelation of God, then in Schleiermacher’s Christology, ‘we have a heresy of gigantic proportions.’

If religion is humanity’s natural act of seeking God out⁵³, even if this “instinct” is an initial act of God within the existence of humankind, then it still assumes that God is

⁵² Also (Barth 1982:213).

⁵³ Vlijm (1956:66) suggests the following: “De mens ziet kans in de wereld te zijn en mens te zijn. Dat is oorsprong van alle religie. Hij meent zonder God te kunnen doen, wat hij alleen door God en met God kan doen. Daarom is de religie de radicale tegenstelling van het geloof. Beeldmaken, hetzij geestelijke denkbeelden, hetzij zichtbare afgodenbeelden, allerlei ceremoniën tot rechtvaardiging en heiliging van zichzelf, het komt alles voort uit dit éne centrum”. “Humanity is willing to be in the

something that is lost and must be found, plus, it emphasises the point that the focus of religion is not placed on the relationship of a revealing God with God's creation, but becomes obsessed with the human self-achievement of gaining a God-knowledge (Bentley 2003:28). Schleiermacher's approach to religion creates the space where humanity is posed the question "What must I do?" This question is raised with an awareness of self's co-being with God, although it is "under God".

Barth (1962:17) describes this approach to faith as a rebellion against God, because the message of God's self-revelation (when we read the biblical account of God's involvement in human history), is that God has already done what we as humanity are trying to achieve. Barth's view of religion implies that even in the event of a person having an underlying God-consciousness waiting to be realized, any perfect human would not know what to do when s/he first, attempts to fathom God and second, tries to win salvation. If this were indeed possible, humanity would still be posed another set of questions: Salvation from what?⁵⁴ Salvation to whom? Is the grand ideal of salvation for the person to be saved from God-ignorance? Is it God-consciousness that is redeemed (liberated) in the place of the individual? What does God use as criteria for judgement and differentiating between the godly and the godless? These questions call for another understanding of religion that embarks on a journey from another point of departure.

The first step to be taken, is to find the place of religion in the dimensions of time and space. To Barth, religion is something that is not a permanent fixture or an

world and to be human. This is the origin of religion. It intends to do without God that which it can only do through God and by God. For this reason religion is in radical opposition to faith. The making of idols, whether it be spiritual or observable idols, through all kinds of ceremonial attempts to justify itself and to make itself holy, stems from the same origin" (My translation).

⁵⁴ This point is argued very strongly in Barth (1982:217-218).

unchangeable entity in history (*Historie*), but which moves with history (*Geschichte*) as a continuous response to the self-revelation of God and therefore evolves as a result (CD I/2:302). This immediately dispels the idea that religion is unchangeable and that it is beyond correction. It also places religion in a subjective relationship to God, where the contrary would enable religion to view, describe and respond to the Divine in an objective manner.

If we believe that God is beyond space and time⁵⁵ and that God is from eternal to eternal, then the natural conclusion that we can come to is that in order to understand God perfectly within the confines of space and time, it would literally take God an eternity in time and space to reveal Godself and a second dimension in eternal time and space for creation to receive this revelation in a systematic and defined manner.

The notion that religion is the instrument to find God without taking cognisance of this dilemma, makes a nonsense of the definition of religion as described in the first paragraph of this section. Religion *per se* claims an impossibility, a matter that Barth (CD II/1:324, IV/1:413) cannot accept. The testimony of the Christian faith therefore has to be different to the impossible claim made by religion. A religion that stands in opposition to this claim, therefore depends upon God's revelation, as well as a response to God in history before it can even start the process of being able to speak about God. This, in Barth's theology is where a miracle takes place⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ An assumption made in faith, for the experiential dimensions of space and time within the Godhead cannot be described, other from the basic pronouncement of such experience in texts such as Exodus 3:6,14 and Revelation 1:8.

⁵⁶ Note that this miracle is not purely described within the context of the Christian religion, but that it is a miracle in time and space and is available to all.

The miracle takes place in the Person of Jesus Christ as full revelation of God within time and space. Not only do we find in Jesus Christ the full revelation of God, but in Him we also find the full mystery of God. If Jesus were the full revelation of God without being the revelation of the mystery of God, it would imply that God could be confined to time and space and therefore observed and measured. If this were the case, Christianity could immediately lay claim to the title of being a perfect religion. It cannot do so.

By the mere nature of Christianity's emphasis on the spiritual journey, we must concede that there is still much of God that is unknown. This does not mean that the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ was partial or imperfect. As beings, limited by time and space, we will be struck and moved by the Christ-event for eternity, but cannot define God in our own terms⁵⁷. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ carries as its purpose the reconciliation between God and humanity, by grace (CD I/2:307).

This mystery demands faith and a belief in God's grace that goes beyond the constructs of human reasoning, religion and even beyond the understanding of an innate God-need. This grace, and revelation of God's grace are both forms of God's initiative. Our response can only be one of faith. It does not mean that we do not have to embark on the journey of "faith seeking understanding" as if understanding our faith is not an act of faith in itself. The point is that any attempt by religion to discover God, or use its own initiative to define God is what Barth meant when he stated that such religion should be understood as unbelief (CD I/2:314).

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 13:10 gives a profound picture of the tension that Christians face between the revelation and mystery of God.

Barth (CD III/1:48-82) defines this history of faith in terms of three stages: Schöpfungsgeschichte, Bundesgeschichte and Heilsgeschichte (Hodgson 1989:26). God takes initiative to create in freedom and in love. In the act of creation there is already a defined form of relationship between the creator and the created. We will discuss this point later in this chapter. This relationship is not created by the initiative of the created, but the created finds identity and purpose flowing from its relationship with the creator. From this point onward, God defines this relationship and continues creating by embarking on a covenant-history and salvation-history. These two histories go hand-in-hand and facilitate the subtle continuation of creation-history⁵⁸: “...the creation of all the reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this proposed covenant and with a view to its execution.” (CD III/I:36).

Faith is a gift from God — the ability to respond to God’s revelation, but is also the act of response to God’s faithfulness in these histories. The notion of a response to revelation does not make sense in religion, because it is in religion’s nature to seek a definition even of the mystery of God — a characteristic implied by the term revelation.

4. The Church and Revelation.

4.1 Truth and Revelation.

One cannot deny the peculiar common thread in different cultures of a religious understanding of self and one’s world. This religious awareness does not seem to have a common humanly-initiated origin, as different cultures may have displayed

⁵⁸ I deliberately do not use the terms “history of covenant” and “history of salvation”, as these terms would give a totally different meaning to that intended by Barth.

this awareness without being in contact with other religiously-orientated societies for several centuries. Barth (CD I/2:282) notices the independent development of a God-awareness among different cultures throughout history and how these beliefs seem to ask the same questions: about “the world’s beginning and end, the origin and nature of man, moral and religious law, sin and redemption” (CD I/2:282).

Here, Barth describes an understanding of a God who, without any self-revelation, is hidden, but who finds a response through the phenomenon of religion when revelation takes place. Barth (CD I/2:282) gives the following explanation:

To allow that there is this whole world apart from and alongside ‘Christianity’ is to recognise that in His revelation God has actually entered a sphere in which His own reality and possibility are encompassed by a sea of more or less adequate, but at any rate fundamentally unmistakable, parallels and analogies in human realities and possibilities. The revelation of God is actually the presence of God and therefore the hiddenness of God in the world of human religion.

A response to God’s self-revelation implies that the initiative for a God-awareness is not anthropocentric, but must be God-inspired and therefore revealed. By faith’s nature as a reactive event, responding to the initiative of God in revealing Godself, one therefore has to conclude that this prevents any one religion from stating that it is the sole custodian of divine truth to the exclusion of other religions. To do this would be arrogance and a sign of ungodliness.

This places a dilemma at the door of the church, which has, as an essential element of its practice, a history of attracting people away from other faiths in order to participate in the Christian family. Is Christian evangelism to people of other faiths therefore an arrogant and ungodly practice? Although we can site many examples of

how Christian evangelists and missionaries have, through the ages, disrespected and disregarded other religions⁵⁹, Barth (CD I/2:326) offers a theological argument that creates a different understanding of Christian mission and evangelism:

Religion can just as well be exalted in revelation, even though the judgment still stands. It can be upheld by it and concealed in it. It can be justified by it, and — we must at once add — sanctified. Revelation can adopt religion and mark it off as true religion. And it not only can. How do we come to assert that it can, if it has not already done so? There is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners. If we abide strictly by the analogy — and we are dealing not merely with an analogy, but in a comprehensive sense with the thing itself — we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion. In our discussion of ‘religion as unbelief’ we did not consider the distinction between Christianity and non-Christian religion. Our intention was that whatever we said about the other religions affected the Christian similarly...Therefore the discussion cannot be understood as a preliminary polemic against the non-Christian religions, with a view to the ultimate assertion that the Christian religion is the true religion.

This means that the negative association Barth makes with the term religion, can also be applied to the *religious* expression of the Christian faith. When speaking about the church’s “right to convince”, one first has to ask the question whether Christianity can be declared a religion of revelation, or as the revelation of religion (CD I/2:284). To be a religion of revelation puts the Christian faith alongside all other religions with absolutely no leg to stand on when claiming to be a “superior religion”. The point must be made that not all religions are forms of responses to revelation. Consider the following quote:

In Barth’s view, the difficulty here is not so much with the emergence of the category of religion as such, but with the normative role that this category has come to play in neo-Protestant theology (and, presumably, in cognate projects in other theological traditions). Where classical theology would require us to interpret religion and religions in the light of revelation, neo-Protestant theology instead encourages us to regard ‘the nature and incidence of

⁵⁹ One only has to consider how many indigenous people from Africa, North- and South America and other parts of the world display a sense of bitterness towards the colonialists who forced their presence in these places and forced their religion upon these people.

religion...as the norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God' (CD I/2:284). It is this reversal of revelation and religion that Barth laments..." (Di Noia 2000:248)⁶⁰.

The Church's relationship with other religions could be described as being competitive in nature. This is only true when arguing that one should rather respond to God through a particular religious methodology than another. But, what separates the Christian faith from other religions *per se* is the recognition of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, not only to Christianity.

This creates another dimension in the religious world. If Jesus Christ is the full self-expression of God to the whole created order, then Christianity stands in a new relationship with other religions, namely a revelation of a response to God. The emphasis in this definition is that God acts first and that the expression of the response to God is not a pre-emptive act of human initiative. Christology, here, plays a very important role. If Christianity were only a religion of revelation, then an emphasis would be placed on the divinity of Christ that corresponds directly with the God-picture of Christianity and would not be relevant to any other religious expression. The humanity of Christ would not matter, for Christianity would exclusively be concerned with a revealed God who becomes the possession of a religious system. The focus is then on the divine characteristics of the Christ such as the incarnation, miracles and the resurrection.

⁶⁰ Vlijm (1956:53) shares the same point by stating: "Hij wijst deze weg af, omdat het uitgangspunt van deze weg ligt in een onzekerheid aangaande het wezen van de openbaring, een onzekerheid aangaande het werk van Christus. Hij heeft er geen bezwaar tegen, dat het thema van de religie in de theologie aan de orde komt, maar wel tegen de ontwikkeling, die reeds in de zeventiende eeuw voortgezet is, waarin de theologie vervallen is aan het absolutisme van de mens". "He rejects this view, because it leads to uncertainty concerning revelation and also makes uncertain the work of Christ. He does not raise an objection against the establishment of the theme of religion, but against its development, which already started in the seventeenth century by falling prey to the absolutism of humanity." (My translation).

The Biblical picture of Christ does not portray Him as being only driven by these Divine characteristics, but it is important to note that Jesus was concerned about human living in a response to God's work within the person. Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, does not speak of metaphysical or supernatural phenomenon as a sign of God's work within the person or community, but speaks about a lifestyle of mutual respect, love and dignity, which promotes the awareness of God within human experiences. There is nothing in the Sermon on the Mount, which seems to contradict the orthodox teachings of any religion, but what makes it important in the Christian faith, is that it is revealed through Jesus Christ. Although these teachings may not contradict the teaching of religions other than Christianity, this is a good example of the hiddenness of the revealed God in human religion.

If we are to cite the Bible as a testimony of God's call to humanity's expression of true religion, then the question of the authority of Scripture needs to be addressed. To this question, Barth (CD I/2:521) gives a short, but concise answer: "The literally inspired Bible was not at all a revealed book of oracles, but a witness to revelation."

Klaas Runia (1962) wrote a detailed description of Barth's approach to Scripture, which gives greater clarity to his approach than the quote given.

Runia (1962:4) draws on Barth's (CD I/1:348) description of the nature of God's self-revelation to the world through the Word. This is a three-way relationship between God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the testimony of Scripture and the proclamation of the Church. This relationship is characterized by interdependence between these

forms of expression of God's Word. If the proclamation of the Word through the Church, for instance, served as the sole agency for God's self-revelation, then it would have nothing to say, because it would not be able to refer to the Christ-event or depend on Scripture. This is not to say that these three elements are inseparable. Scripture is not Jesus Christ, nor is it the Church's proclamation.

Scripture therefore does not need any validation from sources other than the revealed Word of God in Jesus Christ and is given life through the continued proclamation of the Church (Runia 1962:8). Barth (CD I/2) does not portray the Bible as revelation. Scripture can only serve as a witness to the self-disclosure of God. It cannot be more than that. The relationship between Scripture and revelation is nevertheless not one-directional. Runia (1962:19) notes that revelation needs a witness in order for its message to be conveyed. Scripture serves this purpose by being a record of God's interaction with people at different times and places. The uniqueness of the Bible, another point defining its authority, is in its witness centering around the person of Jesus Christ (Runia 1962:38).

Scripture is therefore not the direct revelation, but can best serve the Church and the World as a secondary source of the direct revelation of God, not forgetting that people served as authors of the books and letters it contains.

This point raises the question of the fallibility of the Bible, and by default affects the way in which the authority of Scripture is understood. The Bible cannot replace or become the revelation of God, for in its witness it used human agency, language and symbols to convey the message of God's self-revelation (CD I/2:499-501). The

recipients and their instruments therefore fall short of giving an accurate account of God's self-disclosure.

Instead of threatening the authority of Scripture, this factor gives greater credibility to it. The key is in the notion of Inspiration. If Scripture were not inspired, then all we would have in the Bible is a collection of philosophical speculation concerning the activity of God in the created realm. Christian Scripture is not inspired in the manner Islam claims inspiration in receiving the Q'uran. The consistency in the general message of Scripture, pointing towards and reflecting upon the Messiah, gives a clear indication of the hand of God at work in its formulation. Inspiration does not only apply to the writing of Scripture, but in Barth's theology also relates to the receiving of Scripture (Runia 1962: 138).

The authority of Scripture for Barth therefore carries the essential message of the nature of God's self revelation: "The authority of Scripture is revelatory authority" (Runia 1962:184).

The testimony contained in the Bible points towards Jesus (Old Testament) and reflects upon the Christ-event (New Testament) and becomes the most valuable document in terms of our understanding of the nature of God and God's salvific work in history, specifically revealed in Jesus Christ.

When Christianity therefore claims to contain a truth, it does so, knowing that it stands in the same danger as any other religion to anticipate that which God has done, wills to do and will be doing (Knitter 1985:84). And so, Barth's view of Christianity in relationship to other world religions cannot be described in hierarchical terms. If

God reveals Godself in and through the person of Jesus Christ, a revelation to the whole of creation, then the best Christianity can do is testify to this revelation in the midst of religious systems that claim receipt of divine revelation themselves (Di Noia 2000:254-255). “In Jezus Christus is de eenheid tussen God en mens de eenheid van voltooid geschieden, zo is ook de eenheid van openbaring en religie te denken als de eenheid van een nog te voltooien geschieden”⁶¹ (Vlijm 1956:54).

4.2 Revelation and salvation.

Di Noia (2000:253) states: “...the truth of the Christian religion must be seen within the doctrine of the justification of sinners”. To view the Christian faith in the proposed manner, gives new insight into the concepts of revelation and salvation. It also creates a clear relationship between these two points. If Christ is God’s revelation to all and Christianity serves as a testifying servant to this revelation of God to all, then salvation cannot be understood in terms of whether a person subscribes to one religious response to God or another. Salvation is not the move from one point of faith to another. These matters would certainly prove to be correct if Christianity stood completely outside of relationship with any other form of faith.

It would also be naïve to simply describe salvation as the expulsion of evil from either the individual or society. To do so does not give sufficient cognisance of the complete self-revelation of God, but implies a salvation by works or a salvation proven by works. In Barth’s day this form of salvation took the form of “religious socialism”

⁶¹ “In Jesus Christ the unity between God and humanity has taken place, and so it must be seen that the unity between revelation and religion is something that still needs to take place” (My translation).

(Hunsinger 1991:141), not too dissimilar from the different forms of Liberation Theology in our day.

Barth's fight is against human-made and human-owned terms of salvation in religion, "which God's revelation in Jesus Christ has unmasked" (Hartwell 1964:88). In describing this approach by Barth, Hartwell (1964:89) defines two forms of heretical religious expression that exist in the world. The first is "Man-made religion"⁶², which refers to humanity's ability to know God and obtain the ability to justify and sanctify itself by means of humanity's own religious efforts. The second is "Man-owned religion", which he describes as the "religious man, who imagines that he can transform God's revelation in Jesus Christ into religion and, therefore, into something which he can master so that he is able to handle revelation as if he possessed and owned it" (Hartwell 1964:89).

To Barth (CD IV/3:928) the consequences of sin are relevant to all, irrespective of our differences in faith. Sin, in this context meaning any form of inner or outer expression of God's "No!"⁶³. Salvation, in principle is not owned by any religion, but is the product of any person's response to God, receiving the Divine "Yes!" as revealed in Jesus Christ and giving inner and outer expression to this revelation.

⁶² I am aware of the exclusive language used in these terms. I choose to use these as the author originally penned it, not out of agreement with such usage, but feel that any other inclusive substitute would distort the author's initial intent.

⁶³ God's "No!" and "Yes!" are both Barthian terms, which I expect the reader to appreciate in context.

5. The expression of Truth.

5.1 The expression of salvation.

Following from the previous point, Hartwell (1964:9-10) interprets and summarizes the theme of God's revelation as described in the first edition of the Epistle to the Romans, stating that Barth's notion of God's self revelation as the basis of our faith places a severe criticism on what humanity may view as morality, religion and culture. It is not as if Barth negates the value or importance of these aspects of human existence, but warns that it must be handled with care lest it could be used by humanity as a means to its own salvation.

In his sermon of 19 January 1913, Barth used Amos 5:21-24 effectively in speaking against the religious piety of his society (McCormack 1995:98-99). In this sermon, he addressed and argued against the idea that people's religious serving of God through institutional religion ensures salvation and that there seems to be a natural schism between what Christians deem to be worship and secular living. Such an interpretation of the Christian Gospel is a complete distortion of what Jesus represented. Salvation takes place in the realm of relationship, particularly the relationship between God and creation. This relationship then becomes the foundation for interaction within creation. The relationship between God and creation must not be understood within the boundaries that such hinges particularly either exclusively on the personality of God and/or of humanity. This means that the relationship between God and creation is not based on the premise that God owes it to creation to reveal Godself, nor is it expected that creation owes God some form of loyalty or affiliation. This relationship is an expression of God's freedom and God's ability to love and therefore is revealed in freedom (CD IV/3:166). Jesus Christ is the visual and literal self-expression (CD

IV/3:167) of this Divine freedom. As much as God reveals in love and freedom, so humanity has the ability to reciprocate in love and freedom. This too is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who is therefore central in understanding the relational dynamic between God and creation and cannot be dismissed as just another religious icon.

Von Balthasar (1992:193) raises an objection against Barth's reasoning by describing it as moving from the general to the specific. He contests it on the basis that Barth's theology represents a generality that is based on specific self-declared truths. These truths include concepts like Israel as a people, the Church as a people amongst other people and a Christ who is open to interpretation.

To Von Balthasar (1992:193) the starting point is precisely the opposite. It is in the specific Word of God revealed through Jesus Christ that God and humanity can be reconciled and it is this truth that gives the people of Israel, and more specifically the Church, an authority and status that supersedes any other form of religious expression. The authority of the church is therefore likened to the visible Body of Christ being the only instrument through which the will of God to humanity can be revealed in the post-ascension world.

Barth does not deny that the Church is the "locus of true religion" (CD I/2:280), but cannot recognize the church as the true religion at the expense and to the exclusion of other religions. This caution must be ascribed to Barth's (CD I/2:326-327) realisation that "religion" can exist in the church and that God can reveal Godself in religions other than Christianity. This argument would bring us back to the beginning asking

whether religion *per se* can be the sole custodian of truth and speak on behalf of God to other competitive religions. Where does that put Christianity in terms of other religions? The short answer is that Christianity as religion is on par, because Jesus Christ is not only God's revelation to Christianity or the Christian religion, but is a self-disclosure to the whole of creation, including all its peoples, irrespective of race, colour or creed. Where the Christian faith accepts Jesus Christ as the revelation of God without succumbing to the temptation of owning that revelation, that is where Christian life becomes religion-less and transforms from being a religion to a witness of this self-revelation (CD I/2:338).

There is an innate problem in religion, especially the Christian religion as it tends to see itself as able to speak about revelation in an either-or way (CD I/2:295). In doing so, revelation is labelled as being either authentic, superficial or an untruth. This implies an ownership and comprehension of revelation and what is revealed.

Religion, more so the Christian religion, needs to confess that as long as revelation is "God's sovereign action" (CD I/2:295), there must be a sense of mystery both of the revealer and the subject of such revelation.

This relationship between Christianity and the other religions is theoretically very appealing, but is there a practical viability for such an option? The following section explores one relationship that Barth describes in more detail than any other inter-faith relationship, namely that between the Christian faith and Judaism.

Using the theory of Barth's inter-faith relationship, we should be able to conclude that the church's role is not so much to convert the Jewish faith to Christianity. The

church has a mandate to witness to Israel concerning the God-revelation in Jesus Christ and so to work towards a common God-centred community on earth that transcends the limitations of institutional religion (Mebust 1981:18).

6. The Church and Israel: Christianity and Judaism.

Barth (1954c:196-201) describes four “problems” relating to the Jewish⁶⁴ nation:

Firstly, the Jewish nation still exists. By all means and purposes the Jewish nation should have been destroyed several times in history. Some significant moments in history include the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the Holocaust during the Second World War. Their existence is a miracle, but is also significantly symbolic. It speaks about judgement and grace: Although creation should have been destroyed because of its rebellion against God, it still exists by God’s grace.

Secondly, the Jews are a people and not a homogenic nation. We tend to speak of the Jewish nation as if they are one culture, one tradition and one race. Then we need to acknowledge that even Abraham was a wanderer whose cultural background was obscure. During the entry into the Promised Land, several clans joined under one banner and formed the Biblical nation of Israel. Today we find Jews from diverse cultural origins, who have adopted the Jewish way of living. This, too is symbolic and represents the holistic, non-discriminatory grace of God in the establishing of a divinely inspired community (Wouk 1988:18-21).

⁶⁴ One wonders how fair it is to classify Judaism as a religion. Judaism is not only a defined form of faith, but it is also a culture. To be a Jew requires a full commitment by the individual to form part of the faith and to participate in its practices. Conversion to the Judaism, qualifies the individual as a Jew and therefore part of the community. Thereby, speaking about the Jewish people automatically includes all aspects of Jewish-ness, including the faith (Wouk 1988:8-31).

Thirdly, we have to ask a question: What are the origins of anti-semitism? One may speculate that the negative attitude towards the Jewish nation may have something to do with people's identification with the Jewish nation and longing to have the same form of cohesion between faith and culture that the Jewish nation has. With this envy comes a recognition that the Jewish nation, technically speaking, does not have any roots while many other people can claim roots in terms of recognized land-ownership, a homogenous population and common cultural-identity. This sparks patronizing engagement on behalf of the "non-Jews" and results in the Jewish nation becoming natural victims of this anger and rebellion.

The fourth problem concerns the notion of the bearers of truth. Both Judaism and Christianity hold stubbornly to the notion that it heralds the greater truth. Judaism claims that truth is not solely the possession of the Christian faith, but that the truth has a history before Christianity's existence in the form of Judaism. Christianity claims that the Christian truth is the continuation of the Jewish truth and therefore bears a more "developed" truth. The recognition of Jesus as Messiah describes this point. Judaism cannot accept Jesus as the Messiah, because the Messianic expectation created by the truth it believes in will not allow it to. The Christian faith allows for Jesus' acceptance as Messiah, claiming that Judaism is mistaken and therefore blinded by its perceived truth.

These four tensions between Judaism and Christianity form the basis of discussion between these two religions. Although Barth recognizes these tensions, he is also quick to propose that Judaism and Christianity cannot be interpreted as two

independent religions, each holding on to an element of divine truth that can be shared with the rest of creation.

6.1 Salvation.

The Christian Church and Israel must be seen as an unfolding of the human response to God's revelation in history. They are two characters, among many that give expression to the God-event. These characters also build on each other and cannot fully give expression to God's revelation when they function in isolation from each other.

Israel and Christianity not only have their own histories of their individual responses to God's revelation, but they both are symbolic of God's relationship with creation. Israel is representative on two different levels. First, Barth (CD III/1:238) identifies the relationship between God and Israel through the covenant as being symbolic of God's intent for the whole of creation. It is as if Israel becomes the channel, or the mediators of this covenantal relationship between God and creation. It is an eschatological relationship started with Israel that would grow as the rest of creation responds to this revelation as Israel did (CD III/1:238).

On another level, Israel also symbolizes creation's rejection of God's self-revelation and represents the broken nature of creation's ability to respond to God's grace in faith. Jesus then becomes an extension of this dual-role relationship. In Jesus we find the full expression of the relationship God intended to have with creation; a relationship that began with Israel (Hunsinger 2000a:137), but then one which evolved to God's "No" to creation's sin through the redemptive act of the cross.

Barth uses the Jewish nation as those who represent the whole of the fallen human race (Demson 1989:661). The role of the church comes into play here. It is a somewhat post-millenarianist approach, but let us consider the following evaluation of Barth's notion of the Judaeo-Christian relationship:

“Das messianische Reich, das Jesus verkündet hat, ist nicht gekommen. Warum ist es nicht gekommen? Weil die Juden als Volk nicht an den Menschensohn geglaubt haben”⁶⁵ (Peterson 1950:411).

Here, Peterson depends on Romans 11:25 for an eschatology which professes that once the nations have come to a place of submitting to the Lordship of Christ, Israel will find its salvation too. The consummation of the Kingdom depends on this (Peterson 1950:413). This is a fair reflection of Barth's description and leads to the following definition of the Church: The community, based on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, progresses towards the salvation of the nations and is a continuation of the community of all nations in Covenant with God, established in Israel, having become the salvation of Israel. The Church cannot be seen outside of its relationship with Israel, but must be understood as a subjective community shaped by a history of God with Israel specifically. This has become the continuation of the community described by the Jewish nation in their responsive history to God's revelation.

Demson (1989:661) recognises a dilemma that is presented in Barth's approach to the relationship between Christians and Jews. It implies that Israel has ceased to be in true relationship with God and that God has chosen a “new” avenue through which to communicate God's intention with the world. A careful reading of Barth will

⁶⁵ “The Messianic Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed, did not come. Why did it not come? Because the Jews as nation did not believe in the Son of Man” (My translation).

nevertheless eliminate the suggestion that he spoke disparagingly about the Jewish nation and belief. The core of the relationship between the Church and Israel is cemented in the Covenant relationship God has established with both of these communities. Stemming from this recognition, a further assertion must be made, namely that the Covenant between God and Israel and the Covenant between God and the Church are not two separate covenants. God's covenant with humanity as depicted in the covenant between God and Israel, finds its fullest expression in the person of Jesus Christ (Tanner 2000:114). It is this revelation that forms the Church and its testimony.

The relationship between the Church and Israel is not only the story of the development of Christianity, but becomes a solution to one of the fundamental problems in the Jewish religion — Incarnation: “Judaism knows no incarnation, but it does know an indwelling of God in the tabernacle, the temple – and, most important, the Jewish people themselves.” (Mangina 2004:79)⁶⁶. If the Incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Covenant established between God and Israel, then even in the emergence of the Church, the Incarnation must confirm Israel as an “elect” people⁶⁷. Barth here argues that it is impossible, looking at Israel's history of unfaithfulness and sinfulness to accredit them with the term “people of God”.

⁶⁶ See footnote 15 of this source on Wyschogrod.

⁶⁷ “For it is incontestable that this people as such is the holy people of God: the people with whom God has dealt in His grace and in His wrath; in the midst of whom He has blessed and judged, enlightened and hardened, accepted and rejected; whose cause either way He has made His own, and has not ceased to make His own, and will not cease to make His own. They are all of them by nature sanctified by Him, sanctified as ancestors and kinsmen of the one Holy One in Israel, in a sense that Gentiles are not by nature, not even the best of Gentiles, not even the Gentile Christians, not even the best of Gentile Christians, in spite of their membership of the Church, in spite of the fact that they too are now sanctified by the Holy One of Israel and have become Israel.” (CD II/2:287).

Their “election” and Covenant relationship with God is an act of love and grace as much as the Christian Church claims its election as an act of love and grace. It is therefore illogical to juxtapose Israel and the Church, where Israel is seen as all that God rejected, and the Church as all that God accepts. As much as Israel is not accepted by God out of their own proven worthiness, but by grace and the freedom of God’s love, so the Church in its sinfulness becomes the continuation of Israel as it is accepted by God in the same fashion. The constant in this equation is God. The dependant variables are the Church and Israel. If the Church, Israel, or any concept of divine community were the constant, then we would be able to describe this community as nothing less than a conscious move towards humanism.

God freely chooses to be with another who is not God, to exist alongside something not Godself, by creating the world. In a similar act of free love, God goes beyond mere coexistence with the world to show concern for it, an active engagement with it. God preserves the world from the threat of nothing, gives it room for its own active responses to God’s initiatives to it, and directs it in service of the fellowship that God establishes in the beginning with a particular people, Israel (Tanner 2000:115).

7. Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Bosch (1980:63) raises an important argument. He states that if we consider that salvation comes from the Jews as described in John 4:22 it does not mean that Christ has become irrelevant to the rest of the world. It may be argued that the pinnacle of Jesus’ journey was Jerusalem, but one must then consider that before Jerusalem, Jesus travelled throughout the region. “‘Geographically’ Jesus journeys to the temple, to Jerusalem and his death, ‘theologically’ he is bound for all the nations. In the final analysis He Himself would take the place of Jerusalem and the Temple (John 2:19-21)” (Bosch 1980:63). If one therefore has to think about the history (Geschichte) of

Jesus in Israel, then the central theme is how Jesus has become the liberation of Israel and the embodiment of the apostolic sending of the Church to the nations (Klappert 1980:40).

A question that tests Christianity's claim on Jesus is simply this: "Was Jesus Christ a Christian?" This is a complex question. The first answer is: "No". Jesus was a Jew. He was born from a Jewish family (Matt. 1:1-17), He formed part of the Jewish people (Lk. 2:21-38), He partook in Jewish customs and festivals (Matt. 26:17-30), He was even mockingly acknowledged as a person with some form of influence in the Jewish community (Matt. 27:11). At the same time, it is also clear that Jesus moved beyond the parameters of Jewish nationalism (Lk. 7:1-10) and Jewish religious teaching (Matt. 6:38-39). There was something new in His teaching that resonated with Judaism, but added the awareness of a relationship with God that is not confined by the rights and practices of institutional religion (Matthew 5-7).

For Christianity to think of Judaism as a religion with its own "independent existence or reality" (Sonderregger 1992:8), would be a mistake. When thinking of Barth's concept of the community of God and how both the church and Israel are incomplete people responding to the revelation of God in time and space, both Israel and the Church should be regarded as two manifestations of the one body which are both unified yet divisible.

When God reveals Godself, even to these religious traditions, Barth (CD II/1:342) deduces two requirements placed on humanity enabling it to recognize and respond to this revelation: "the obedience of knowledge" and the "humility of ignorance". By

this Barth asserts that irrespective of one's religious history, humanity first stands before God as a receiver of Good News. Responding to revelation therefore requires a sense of obedience to the Revealer. As God reveals, humanity, or religion, cannot fully claim an immovable understanding of such revelation, but can only hold onto the truths that are revealed in an acknowledgement of its own ignorance. That which is revealed, is God's truth. As recipients of this revelation, humanity may find itself being "swallowed up by ignorance" (CD II/1:342).

It may imply a wandering down the path of relativism, as if to suggest that in our ignorance all truths should be given equal standing and that humanity will only be able to assess true, divine truth at the end of such a journey in time and space. For Barth the difference between these "truths" is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the truth of our religion, but not only our religion, but of true religion. As God becomes Incarnate, revealing Godself in Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, so a relational focal-point is created in human existence that suggests that God and creation can be in good standing with each other. Jesus — the revelation of God, and not Jesus — the sole possession of the Christian religion, becomes the proclamation of God's judgement and redemption to all creation.

This raises another extremist positional question: "Should we believe in universalism?" This point is elaborated in the next chapter, but where it concerns non-Christians, Barth believes that God's plan of reconciliation with all of creation must be realized, as the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and the recognition of this revelation through the power of the Holy Spirit is too great to be challenged or rebelled against by any person or system (CD IV/3(1):355).

There are two criteria that Christianity must consider when it engages with other faiths (Knitter 1985:87). The first is the extent in which Jesus Christ is believed to be the revelation of God and the enabler of justification. The second is the question whether this one religion is justified in such a way that “nothing is really affirmed or answered in the world of religions” (Knitter 1985:85).

What is the place of the Christian faith in relation to other faiths? It must be to bear witness to the Incarnational God in Jesus Christ. On answering the question on Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit, Barth (1958:68-69) expresses the view that the meaning in the “Divine Conception” is there to proclaim that Jesus is fully God and not a demi-god or a human instrument of divine revelation. The latter would border, for Barth, on Natural Theology. “Jesus Christ not only declares the Covenant between God and man, he is that Covenant...As to those men, prophets and apostles, who give witness to Jesus Christ, they do not incarnate God’s Covenant, they are not God’s Covenant, they simply declare it.” (Barth 1958:69). But at the same time, to be born of the Virgin Mary, God in Jesus Christ is Human (Barth 1958:69).

In no religion do we find God described as being so near (taken that by religion we use Barth’s definition whereby loosely, humanity searches for God). Instead of searching for and “discovering God”, God reveals Godself. Revelation is therefore central to the debate about religion and faith. Secondly, there is a description of the nature of the relationship between God and Creation, confirmed in the Incarnation, Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, echoed in the Jewish and Christian doctrine of creation. It speaks of the relationship between God and Creation being a

relationship of love and grace. It is unlike, for instance, the *Enuma Elish*, where humanity is described as being created as a result of envy, greed, power and death. The aim of creation and its relationship with God is to know life in its fullness and it is enabled to do this through the continuous work of the Spirit (John 10:10).

Religion is not the sole custodian and enabler of this life. In fact, religion can get so caught-up in its own existence, symbols and practices that it loses touch with the faith-aspect of the gift of relational life with God. Moltmann (1991:32-41) sees evidence of this dilemma between religion and faith in the symbols in the church. He describes in detail how the cross can be described as an irreligious symbol in the life of the Christian church. If Christianity seeks to celebrate its faith in terms of God's immanence, God's justice and God's love, then the cross can be a confusing symbol to the world outside the church. In essence, the cross in its original context, is symbolic of total rejection by both God and society. It is a symbol of death. In the declaration of Jesus' innocent death, the cross also represents a lack of justice and the failure of divine intervention into the suffering of the innocent. There is an inferred interpretation regarding the use of the symbol of the cross in the Christian church.

In the modern context, the equivalent symbol would be to place in the front of the sanctuary an electric chair, or even the gallows. What would people think about the symbolism if they walked into a church to worship and were confronted by these symbols while hearing a message of divine justice, hope and love? Where the Church claims the cross of Christ, but fails to believe in or testify to the revelation of God in the cross (Luther), and the victory over the cross in the resurrection, then the Church's symbolic representation of the faith it proclaims is misleading.

The same can be said about theology. Barth firmly believed that the Christian gospel, holding on to the witness of the risen Christ and humanity being drawn to God in the power of the Spirit was and is God's self-revelation (Dalferth 1989:21), but at the same time when we speak about theology, it must be done in a way that theology speaks about God and not merely about the human experiences of God (1989:23). The truth therefore lies in God's self-revelation and cannot be contained exclusively in the human experience or rational response to this divine self-revelation⁶⁸.

*We do not need to delete or retract anything from the admission that in His revelation God is present in the world of human religion. But what we have to discern is that this means that God is present. Our basic task is so to order the concepts revelation and religion that the connexion between the two can again be seen as identical with that event between God and man in which God is God, i.e., the Lord and Master of man, who Himself judges and alone justifies and sanctifies, and man is the man of God, i.e., man as he is adopted and received by God in his severity and goodness. It is because we remember and apply the Christological doctrine of *assumptio carnis* that we speak of revelation as the abolition of religion (CD 1/2:297).*

Does God want the whole world to become Christian? This is a loaded question.

Without recourse to "Yes" or a "No", Barth (CD III/3:483-517) clearly indicates that what God longs for in creation, is community. Christianity forms part of this community that God is in the process of establishing.

The way in which we understand salvation in the Christian church must also be shaped by our view of the Incarnation in history. This is important, because to Christians, the Incarnation is one of the pivotal points around which our faith revolves. It is because of Jesus that we exist and because we believe in a God-with-us

⁶⁸ This point is re-iterated by Klappert (1980:39)

that we share a message of hope. Hans Küng describes this process (1964:274-288): The church often views the Incarnation *sub specie temporis* as an earthly-historic event, the place in human space and time where God becomes flesh. It often claims for itself this historic event to the exclusion of others who believe they have received a revelation from God by other means.

With reference to Schleiermacher and other liberal Protestant approaches to Christology, and specifically the Incarnation, Mangina (2004:8) observes that “Christianity is a form of religion; religion is not about abstract doctrines, but about matters of experience, value, or personal meaning; at the centre of this experience stands Jesus – not the incarnate Logos of classical Christian thought, but the human preacher and healer, a historical figure knowable by historical means”.

What would happen if we viewed the Incarnation *sub specie aeternitatis*? Küng (1964:276) suggests that there is a fundamental difference between the two perspectives. The first suggests that God is present in the Judaeo-Christian perspective of time and history. The latter argues that all things find themselves in God’s eternity (Küng 1964:276) and that the Incarnation should therefore be a revelation to all of creation and not the sole possession of any particular faith-grouping.

Sub specie aeternitatis, this might be briefly formulated as follows: In His eternity and thus unchangingly and yet in a totally free way, God, the Father, sees and loves (begets) His Son who is man. The Incarnation becomes a reality in a specific space-time point of our history. Yet, in the eternity of God the incarnation of the Son is, and really is, fixed in God’s decree where no shadow of alteration exists. Thus in His eternity, God decrees Himself in His Son to be man (Küng 1964:279-280).

One should therefore be extremely careful in how one presents Incarnational theology in the light of the doctrine of election. Mangina (2004:74), for instance interprets Barth's understanding of election and Incarnation in the following way:

In the Old Testament 'election' means 'Israel', since God does not exist without his people. In the New Testament this same language is applied to the church, the ekklesia chosen 'in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4). God's election takes up space in the world through the existence of these peoples. Or should we say, this people: in a decisive stroke, Barth construes Israel and the church as but two forms of a single community, centred in Jesus Christ.

It is unclear if this is what Barth's Christology and ecclesiology represents. In fact, the argument can be put forward that even such an approach views the Incarnation *sub specie temporis*. It makes God a slave to His creation, dependant on His creation for His own existence and self-revelation. Consider:

The election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God by which the existence of Jesus Christ is to be attested to the whole world and the whole world summoned to faith in Jesus Christ. This one community of God in its form as Israel has to serve the representation of the divine judgement, in its form as the Church the representation of divine mercy... (CD II/2:195)⁶⁹.

There is a subtle difference between what Mangina is stating and what Barth is describing. Barth did not recognize Christianity as the one true faith, but did not deny the possibility for it to be so. Christianity as a religion, and like other religions, might become faith (Bosch 1980:165)⁷⁰. We never "have" or "own" the gospel that is imparted by the Christian church to "non-Christianity", but we, like all of creation,

⁶⁹ This is the exact quote that Mangina (2004:74) uses to argue his point.

⁷⁰ Jenson (1981:36) argues this point by stating: "All religion is eschatological vision. It is true that apart from the gospel, the future is regularly met by erecting barriers against it, by stuffing barns and burying talents, by positing gods whose eternity is timeless and setting these against the oncoming Spirit – but Barth reminds us that Christianity is up to the same thing, only excepting that the gospel nevertheless sometimes gets said in it."

perpetually receive it (Bosch 1980:165). To speak of ourselves as Christians and to speak on behalf of Christianity is not without prejudice.

Barth (1954b:134-135) notes, that to do this, is to speak with a perspective that is very influenced by Western thought. During the Cold War, to be Christian, meant to be Western and anything else was regarded to be non-Christian and therefore anti-God. To think in this way, that Christianity and Westernism represents freedom leads to the thinking that anything other than Christianity or Westernism is an expression of oppression in need of liberation. It shows Christianity's and Westernism's ignorance of ways of living other than itself; a blindness that cannot even comprehend the possibility of a reality other than itself. We see this clearly through the cultural ignorance that the United States of America has displayed in conflict-situations in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

This does not mean that the Church's mission to the nations or other religions is irrelevant. It serves a very role in creating awareness of God's self-revelation to the whole of creation. This leads the bearer of the Good News down a path that is not always popular⁷¹. The Witness can therefore not speak of a relationship with God only from the parameters of a measurable affiliation to any particular religion, but "...we can speak of 'true' religion only in the sense in which we speak of a 'justified sinner'" (CD 1/2:325).

⁷¹ McCormack (1995:99-100) quotes Barth's sermon of 4 May 1913:

"A prophet is in all things, precisely the opposite of that which most people expect from a pastor these days and of that which most pastors have really been... Of a pastor people think: he is our employee. We have chosen him and pay him and therefore it is the first responsibility of his office to strive to get along with everyone, to be nice to everyone and give offence to no one. The prophet is the employee of God. For him, it is a matter of indifference what people think of him and what they do to him. He cannot be comfortable with those to whom he is sent. He knows that if he does his duty, they will be shocked by him and indignant. Of a pastor, people expect above all that he preserve and care for old customs... The prophet is the representative of the unaccustomed... he says: Either-Or!"

Allow me to close this section with a quote in which Sonderegger (1992:152) gives utterance to a balanced approach to Christian mission in the light of the relationships discussed in this chapter:

The mission of the Church in the world under God's providence cannot be devoted to bringing those outside the faith into the shelter of divine grace and protection. God orders and rules history: all nations are already under the grace and judgement of their creator. Indeed, the Church in its worldly place as witness to this providence, must follow the same path laid out for it in the covenant itself. It must take the "journey into the far country", from here to there, offering its life and witness for the sake of the world. No event or place in history is outside the Church's concern; no commitment to human beings "in general" takes the Christian beyond the loving freedom of God.

Revelation is an act of God. By God's grace we receive this revelation and are enabled to interpret it. It is not for us to own, distribute, or measure others by our understanding of it. It is a gift of love and grace, which forms the foundation of our relationship with God and those whom God created us to be in community.