

Chapter 1.

Karl Barth and the Church: A Theological Problem.

1. Introduction.

Karl Barth is undoubtedly one of the greatest theologians that the world has ever seen⁵. Agree or disagree with Barth's theology, but expect to be challenged with clearly defined arguments, an obviously deep spirituality and an unparalleled understanding of Scripture.

Although Karl Barth is the author of over 30 000 pages of theology, one finds in his writing a personal journey of faith, a faith perhaps best described in the phrase coined by Anselm of Canterbury as “Faith seeking understanding”⁶. Barth certainly does not have all the answers, but moves one to think in dimensions previously unexplored. His own humility concerning his work is clearly indicated in statements such as the following: “...I am afraid I don’t understand some of the questions or, alternatively, understand some of them only too well and am afraid I may say something that might lead to new questions.” (Barth 1954a:94).

Asking questions is nevertheless at the heart of Barth’s theology. When reading his theological contributions, one is struck by the manner in which Barth asks questions about his God, the world he lives in and the Church in which he serves. Many of these questions will be used as focal points in this thesis.

⁵ This is my personal opinion.

⁶ See Migliore (1991:2).

We find in Karl Barth a theological genius, a theologian ahead of his time, but yet also an ordinary Christian struggling with the meaning of God in a volatile period of world-history. His struggle expands into the place of the Church in the context of human suffering and calls for a faith in God that hopes for the day when all creation will find completion and harmony in Christ.

I wish to focus on one aspect of Barth's theological struggle and debate, namely his personal wrestling with the meaning and function of the community of Christian believers, called the Church⁷.

In reading Barth, one soon determines that Barth did not construct or write his theology in isolation from the rest of the world, but that his theological views speak directly to the heart of human experience. His struggle with the church had to endure the torturous events of both the World Wars. He heard the church make statements in the Name of God to both align itself with, and to disassociate itself from, the rise of German National Socialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁸.

There is an underlying question in his work: "Where is the real Church?". One truth remained consistent in his thinking about the Church – that it is certainly not something constructed by human initiative, the human mind or human hands! Hart

⁷ Please see footnote 1.

⁸ The contextual application of faith is evident in the following quote: "Religious Righteousness! There seems to be no surer means of rescuing us from the alarm cry of conscience than religion and Christianity. Religion gives us the chance, beside and above all vexations of business, politics, and private and social life, to celebrate solemn hours of devotion – to take flight to Christianity as to an eternally green island in the grey sea of the everyday. There comes over us a wonderful sense of safety and security from the unrighteousness whose might we everywhere feel. It is a wonderful illusion, if we can comfort ourselves with it, that in our Europe – in the midst of capitalism, prostitution, the housing problem, alcoholism, tax evasion, and militarism – the church's preaching, the church's morality, and the 'religious life' go their uninterrupted way. And we are Christians! Our nation is a Christian nation! A wonderful illusion, but an illusion, a self-deception!" (Barth 1957:19-20).

(2000:49) summarizes Barth's theological understanding in a single sentence: "The Father sends the Son into the world and creates a community of response in the power of the Spirit".

Hart's view as quoted, proves that Barth's theology does not involve only the Person of Jesus Christ at the expense of the Persons of the Father and the Holy Spirit. As we journey through Barth's quest, trying to make sense of the phenomenon of the Church, the strong emphasis on Trinitarian participation in Barth's theology will become more evident.

Like a master-artist, Barth has the ability to convey deeper messages in the text that is presented. Taking into consideration that Barth's theological approach was in dialogue with world-history, in Barth's description of the Church, Barth offers an underlying definition of mission that describes, and possibly even prescribes, how the Church should interact with its context. It may seem as if Barth describes the Church and Context to be in a dynamic relationship where some truths are irreplaceable. Context will change, the Church's role will change, but the Revealed Truth to which the Church testifies must remain the same.

This thesis investigates the dynamic relationship between the Church and its context and seeks to determine the unchangeable Truth of Christ as perceived by Barth. This chapter will focus on Barth's general Ecclesiology, serving as a backdrop to the more detailed interactions between the Church and its context as described in the chapters to follow.

2. Who was Karl Barth?

Karl Barth was born in 1886 in Basel, Switzerland. His father, Johann Friederich (Fritz) Barth, was a theologian in his own right and lectured at the University of Berne (Mangina 2004:1).

From a very young age, Karl decided that he wanted to be a theologian. He entered the vocation of ordained ministry in the Reformed Church, but was to find very early in his ministry that parish-life was not his main calling. Although he had a high interest in academia, it is very surprising that Karl never completed a doctoral degree (Grenz and Olson 1992:66). His theological genius was a natural gift, but something that he nurtured and challenged by means of dedicated reading, disciplined writing and continuous debate with his contemporaries⁹.

The significance of his contribution to theology was not so much to be found in what he was taught in academic circles, but the way in which Barth applied theology to daily existence. Perhaps the greatest catalyst that sparked Barth's contribution came in his decisive break with the prominent Liberal Theology¹⁰ that existed in that day.

Barth found that Liberal Theology did not contribute to the theological journey of "normal Christians" who seek to meet with God. This truth became very apparent in

⁹ Barth engaged in serious theological discussion. Among others, he debated issues concerning interpretation of Scripture with Bultmann (Bromiley 1981), the nature of revelation with Schleiermacher (Barth 1982) and the problem of Catholicism with Przywara (Busch 1976:182). The list goes on.

¹⁰ "A trend in Protestant theology, dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that advocated rationality, disregarded those Orthodox opinions which were not compatible with rationality and a scientific outlook, fostered an optimistic view of man's inherent mortality, was inclined towards historicism and stressed God's direct indwelling in man rather than his objective existence." (Deist 1984:143).

his first appointment as minister in a small town called Safenwil (Grenz and Olson 1992:66).

In August of 1914 Barth read a document that was compiled by 93 German intellectuals, many of whom were his former teachers, supporting Kaiser Wilhelm's war policy, therefore promoting German imperialism (Grenz and Olson 1992:66). This was another factor that convinced the young Barth of the inaccurate witness proclaimed by Liberal Theology.

In response to this declaration, Barth engaged on a mammoth exegetical task, searching the truth for himself. The result of this work is to be found in what was to become one of his most profound works: "Der Römerbrief". Although "Der Römerbrief" was to be edited and revised later by Barth himself, this work carried a theological message that was to resound in Barth's work in the future. It was only after revising "Der Römerbrief" in the summer of 1921 (Busch 1976:117) that Barth's views rose to prominence in the academic world (Grenz and Olsen 1992:67).

The conclusion he came to is this: Liberal theology fell into the age-old trap of emphasizing the possibility of human perfection, using human means. Liberal Theology's focus was on the possibility of creating a process whereby the divinity of some can be recognized and celebrated while the obvious humanity of others was to be condemned, if not destroyed. This is stating the crux of Liberal Theology in very simplistic terms.

Although the theory of Liberal Theology is more complex, of importance in this chapter, is how Barth responded to this theology which was becoming more dominant in the world in which he lived. In fact, it became so dominant, that for a while it carried full political endorsement and itself became a driving force in the rise of National Socialism in Germany (Busch 1976:286-291)¹¹.

In short, Barth could not see either the logic, or the integrity of such an approach, hence his disagreement with theologians such as Brunner, Bultmann and Herrmann (Mangina 2004:4-5). Where Liberal Theology promoted the idea of the intimate and inseparable intrinsic nature of the beings of the divine and the created, Barth (1933:28) responded in “Der Römerbrief” with an understanding of the total “Otherness of God”, later to be labelled as "Dialectical theology" (Grenz and Olson 1992:67).

The initial reaction to the confrontation between sinful humanity and the perfection of God had to, in Barth's (1960:48) opinion, result in a “Divine No!”. If God is perfect (in every way) and the human condition is imperfect, then there is a natural tendency to move to the suggestion of a Platonic view (McGrath 2001:274) of the relationship between God and humanity. The theme in “Der Römerbrief” therefore carries the enquiry further: If there is such a distinct and significant difference between the nature of God and that of humanity, not even taking into account the difference in their existence, how is it logically possible for humanity to even think of itself as being capable of reaching the Divine through its own doing? Surely God should see the illogical approach of God's creation and respond with a definite “No!”. Creation

¹¹ Barth became involved in the anti-Nazi Confessing Church that opposed both Nazism and the underlying theology of Liberal theology (Grenz and Olson 1992:69).

cannot become God, even more so, creation cannot use its own devices to reveal any form of divinity within itself (Barth 1933:1).

It is for this very reason that Barth rejected Natural Theology¹² and proclaimed that the only revelation of God must come from Godself.

From this point, Barth ventured down a different road in the relationship between God and creation. The shift in theological approach may seem small, but it proved to have significant consequences in how Barth described the inevitable encounter between God and humanity. Liberal Theology had, as a response from Barth, a “Divine No!”. If the encounter between God and creation ended here, then surely the relationship between God and creation, specifically humanity, would have reached a stalemate? Logically, this stalemate implies that if humanity offered any attempt to become righteous and godly, God would simply respond with disapproval. If humanity is faced with this Divine rejection, then it finds itself in a place where righteousness is not an option. What is needed in this equation is the possibility for God to approve of humanity. The only way, in which this could then find realization would be through God’s own intervention in the human situation, establishing the possibility of reconciliation between the Creator and the created. This is where Barth’s theology made a significant contribution.

In 1930, possibly with Barth’s move from Münster University (where he served as professor of theology from 1925) to Bonn, Barth’s focus shifted and his theological position was moving away from being a response to Liberal Theology to a theology in

¹² “Reflecting on God independently of revelation...” (Deist 1984:167).

its own right, affirming the initiative by God for a restorative process in the relationship between God and God's creation. If God gave a "No!" to human attempts to become righteous, then where would the "Divine Yes" originate? Is it at all possible that God and humanity could be reconciled? The answer, to Barth came in the Person of Jesus Christ (CD IV/2:3-377; Grenz and Olson 1992:68). Jesus Christ was the full revelation of God, making it possible for God and creation to meet and have communion. In Jesus, we find God "humiliated" and humanity "exalted" to the point where communion and community is possible. It is important to note that both the acts of revelation and that of salvation were initiated by God and only possible through God's Freedom (Mangina 2004:64).

Theology still has to converse with context. Barth was very aware of this fact. During the 1930's Barth moved toward the anti-Nazi Confessing Church. With the rise of German National Socialism with its theologically endorsed agenda, the need arose for the Church to stand on its own and be able to speak objectively to the context in which it found itself. At this stage, it became very difficult to differentiate between the voice of the Church and the voice of the Reich. The Confessing Church was a reaction to this situation and sought to speak independently without being influenced by political will.

As a result, the Confessing Church produced a document called "The Barmen Declaration", professing its understanding of the Church, the relationship between Church and political power, but most of all the bond between the Church and its Lord. Karl Barth was the main contributor to this document, and although one cannot confine his theology by merely referring to the Barmen Declaration, it is easy to see

the Barthian influence in its expression. We will investigate Barth and Barmen in greater depth in a chapter 6.

After the fall of Germany at the end of World War 2, Barth continued to investigate the Scriptures, write profusely and debate vigorously. From his pen, one of the most monumental works of theology was produced under the series title: “Kirchliche Dogmatik”, a work that was never completed. Barth died in 1968 in Basel. It would be accurate to state that only his body ceased to live. Barth’s work and contribution to the Christian faith is undoubtedly one of the most profound in the modern era. It would take an enormous effort, dedicating one’s entire life to the scrutiny of Scripture, interaction with one’s context and dedication to God in order to provide a similar contribution.

3. What is the Church?

Considering the abovementioned points in the development of Barth’s theology, one could suggest that Barth’s theology focused on selected doctrines. Barth was concerned mainly with the Doctrine of God, Christology, Anthropology and Soteriology. A careful reading of Barth’s work will reveal an underlying theme where Barth attempts to define and redefine the Church so that the theology developed in his mind may not lie dormant on the shelves of academia, but that the Truth of God through theology may find life and expression in God’s created order.

What is the Church? There is one short answer that Barth offers: "...The body and society of believers whom God has predestined¹³ to eternal life." (Barth 1958:113). In one of Barth's earlier works, "The Church and the Political problem of our day" (1939), we find a definition that is more comprehensive and to which I chose to refer:

The Church is a people consisting of those who have found in Jesus Christ their own comfort and hope of the whole world, and who therefore have discovered their service in bearing witness before the world, which without Him is lost, to Jesus Christ in His offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. (1939:5).

From this definition, Barth extracts certain issues that need to be considered when defining the character and phenomenon of the Church. These will be used as a basis for discussing Barth's general Ecclesiology in this section of this chapter.

3.1 "The Church is at all events a people..." (Barth 1939:5).

Barth immediately differentiates between the Church as finite institution and the Church as community. Although there are those who are so devoted to a particular Christian denomination that they will consider themselves as God's sole community of faith, that is not the Church but a Christian sect.

¹³ Unfortunately the word "predestined" may be interpreted incorrectly. The assumption can be made that Barth refers to the predestination of individuals as reflected in Augustinian or Calvinist traditions. According to Augustine of Hippo, God has the right to grant the gift of grace to whomever God pleases (McGrath 2001:466). By default some may not receive the gift of grace and so not inherit eternal life. Calvin's double predestination drew the understanding further. Some would receive the gift of grace, while God would deliberately withhold grace from others (McGrath 2001:467). So what does Barth mean? Does he merely follow either an Augustinian or Calvinist approach? It is my understanding that Barth proposes a different route. Through Barth's doctrine of election, (CD II/2:3-508) the whole of creation is "predestined" to eternal life. The Kingdom of God concerns community and, according to Barth, the Church is the community whom God chooses to fulfil the aim of the Kingdom of God (CD II/2:205). Barth does not speak here of the Church as institution, but the Church as community. We will explore this relationship in the next chapter. Also see (Mangina 2004:73-75).

Barth's definition of Church stretches beyond the boundaries of denominationalism or sectarianism. The Church must be a people. In other words, a community.

What makes this community any different from existing communities that we find in the world today? Hartwell (1964:41) describes the essence of the Christian community in Barth's theology succinctly when he states that there are four characteristics that make this community unique. The first is that God calls this community into existence. This point is significant as it describes the community coming into being through God's initiative. This community is not formed through human genes, nor does it find its identity in human traditions and customs as shaped and defined in time. One clearly hears Barth's emphasis on anti-Liberal Theology in this point. How does God call this community into being? Hunsinger (2000b:178) states that the Church in Barth's understanding can only exist through two vital and inseparable Divine actions, namely Revelation and Reconciliation¹⁴.

The second point is that the Church is a community concerned with the relationship between God and humanity (Hartwell 1964:41). This relationship determines the Church's place regardless of the context. The third and fourth points go hand-in-hand: The Church finds its identity in Jesus Christ and then finds the expression of its life through the power of the Holy Spirit (Hartwell 1964:41).

Using Hartwell's points, it is then easy to understand why Barth urged his readers not to confuse the Community of Faith called the Church with the institution that claims to be the voice of the Church.

¹⁴ We will explore this notion in the next chapter.

The word 'community', rather than 'Church', is used advisedly, for from a theological point of view it is best to avoid the word 'Church' as much as possible, if not altogether... What may on occasion be called 'Church' is, as Luther liked to say, 'Christianity' (understood as a nation rather than a system of beliefs). (Barth 1963:37).

The human nature within the Church should nevertheless not be forgotten. Although the Church has its origin in Divine self-revelation and Reconciliation, it can never assume to be the manifestation of perfection. It consists of human individuals who are recipients and believers in God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ and no more than that. The Church is indeed called to be the Body of Christ (as we will see later), but cannot exist independently from these acts of Revelation and Reconciliation (Barth 1958:115).

3.2 “Furthermore, the Church is a continuation of Israel...” (Barth 1939:6).

Here we touch again on Barth's notion of predestination. The question may now be asked: “If the Church is God's predestined community to receive the gift of life, and if the Church exists through the acts of self-revelation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation which follows, did God not have any relationship with humanity before the Incarnation?”. If Barth answers “No”, then the consequences are severe. Barth would then have ignored the whole Old Testament.

In Barth's work, there is a relationship between Israel and the Church. Both of these entities on their own profess to be the elect people of God, but can we play the two realities presented down to a situation of either/or? No. There is no doubt in Barth's mind that when we speak of the election of people, that we must speak of the divine election of community (CD II/2:195). Mangina (2004:74) correctly states that Barth

sees the Divine predestination of Community even in the Old Testament. From Genesis, God enters into a Covenant with God's people. The Covenant becomes the means by which Israel becomes God's community and God becomes their God.

Surely then we can disregard the New Testament? Again, we must say no. Israel's journey builds up to the possibility of God's self-revelation to creation through Jesus Christ. The post-incarnation community, that is the community which responded to God's act of self-revelation in Jesus, is called the Church.

The Church and Israel are inseparably linked to the same focus: Jesus Christ. Without the Old Testament community of Israel, the Incarnation would not have been understood. Without the New Testament community of the Church, the Incarnation would have been meaningless and would have faded into the archives of history.

3.3 "...finding comfort in the history of Jesus as her Lord." (Barth 1939:7).

The logical difference between Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament is found in this statement. Israel of old found its identity in the Covenant, shaped by the Law of Moses. The Church as continuation of the community in Israel, finds its identity in the Person of Jesus Christ.

One point must be emphasized here: There must be a distinction between who the Church is and who Christ is. Although the Church is called the Body of Christ, it can never assume to be the Christ. The relationship between the Church and Christ continues in the idea that the Church, although not the Christ, cannot be bound. What

does this mean? As the Church reflects the love of God, the weight of the message it testifies carries an authority that cannot be undermined by any force. It must be said that Barth's point of view does not in any way link the Church to a particular denomination or theological line of thought, but refers to the notion of the true Church that spans beyond all confines.

In other words, if Christ is the ultimate Truth, then the Church is the witness to the Truth. The witness can never replace the event, but has a power/advantage/privilege above all others in that it can speak out of experience. This places the Church in a very precarious position. When situations arise that are in conflict with the “predestined” Will of God for the nature of Creation, then the Church must be the first to answer the questions of the World.

Here Barth issues a warning to the Church, specifically the institution, not to take matters into its own hands, striving to answer the questions of our world in its own strength. The Church in all situations should speak out as questions are raised, but the church does so, not necessarily to answer the question, but to bear witness to Christ (Barth 1939:15).

Barth (1939:16) goes on to say that the situation in question does not alter the nature or character of the Church. Since the Church is dedicated to bear witness to Christ, the situation needs to change and not the Church.

Priority number one for the Church is its confession that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Barth 1966:146). Keeping this perspective enables the Church to focus on

the questions at hand and guards it from acting independently of the self-revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. It therefore has the authority not to be swayed by political, social, or financial might. Its authority is found in its Lord.

3.4 “...and hoping for the consummation of the Kingdom of God.” (Barth 1939:7).

"The Church announces the Kingdom of God, she is not the Kingdom of God." (Barth 1958:118).

The Church as community is not only a community that reflects on the past, specifically the history of the Incarnation, in order for it to be relevant in the world it lives in. If it were only a community of remembrance, then its identity would remain in the past. This being the case, the Church could assume that it is the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is not the case. Hartwell (1964:143) is quick to remind us that Barth's understanding of the Church's identity, is found in the Person of Christ. Interestingly enough, Jesus Christ is not only found in the past, but is also in the Church's future. The Parousia is the consummation of the Kingdom of God. When the Kingdom of God is consummated, the perfect union between God and God's elect will exist and that will spell the end of the need for a separated community.

The Church may well be tempted to become a hidden community in the world, waiting for the return of its Lord. The Church that finds itself in this situation is simply not the true Church. As much as the Church bears testimony to the Christ of the New Testament, so it also carries the responsibility to witness to the Christ of the Parousia. Jesus is the Church's beginning and Jesus is its aim (Barth 1966:147).

3.5 “In order to achieve this, the Church is called to service” (Barth 1939:8).

The Church is the only witness of the divine self-revelation in the Person of Jesus Christ, both of the past and of the future. As we said before, the Church does not exist as an autonomous entity, but can only exist because of Divine initiative. This means that the Church is in essence a reactionary organism that must witness and answer to its Lord, who is the Church's cause and end.

The true Church can never be limited to the confines of an institution. Hartwell (1964:144) describes Barth's definition of the Church as being "an event", therefore breaking the boundaries of denominationalism and sectarianism. The Church is continuously called into existence by the self-revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. As individuals respond to this revelation, they are charged with the call to continue to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As the Body fulfils its role, so we find the cycle continues, and increasing numbers of people respond and become part of the Body of Christ called "The Church".

Mebust (1981:17) reflects on Barth's understanding of the Church's role in the world it lives in and emphasizes the fact that the only truth that can save the world from the deceit that poisons its life, is the Truth of God revealed in the testimony of the Church: "The community is under obligation to the world because the world objectively needs what the church can attest to. Therefore the community exists only as it actively reaches beyond itself into the world."

Chapter 5 focuses more on this aspect of Barth's ecclesiology. Without having to come to any revolutionary understanding of the Church's role in the world, common

logic would suggest that its task in the world is not to fulfil a role of oppressive or directive power, but to engage in humble servanthood. If the Church is brought into being by Christ and commits itself to follow in the paths of Christ, then it can do nothing else but serve the world in love.

The role of an agent of judgement is therefore not designated to the Church, for the Church itself is but a projection of the Kingdom of God to come, and is not in itself the fulfilment thereof.

If the Church is called to service, then is it not called to be an agent of transformation? Furthermore, should it not engage in transformative action with all its power and might, so to achieve the *telos* of the Kingdom of God in the created realm? Indeed, the Church is called to do so, but not in its own power. If it commits itself to transformation, using its own initiative, power and goals, then it falls back into the theology professed by Liberal Theology of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It can only engage in transformative work — therefore mission — if it is done in the power of the Spirit.

3.6 “...through the Power of the Spirit” (Barth 1939:9).

Before we go too far in Barth’s understanding of the Church, we might want to pause and reconsider what we have been told about the nature of God and the Church. If God reveals Godself to creation, how will creation be able to understand that revelation? Does God reveal Godself in a manner that creation can understand in the first place?

So far, Barth's Ecclesiology does not appear to be Trinitarian in nature at all. The Father sends the Son, the Son reveals the Father, but what is the role of the Holy Spirit? To Barth (CD IV/1:644), neither Revelation, nor Reconciliation can take place without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. This is why.

Barth states that when God reveals Godself, it is only in the power of the Spirit that humanity is able to behold the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and comprehend its meaning and significance (CD IV/2:323).

The Power behind the existence of the Church in its personal conviction, is the profound experience of coming face-to face with the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and being able to understand its significance. This is certainly not a new discovery in the life of the Church. We read, for instance in 2 Peter 1:3-12 of the significance of this epiphany.

When Barth speaks about the Spirit, it is interesting that he associates the outpouring of the Spirit upon people as an experience of salvation. Barth (1966:138) states that all of humanity is destined towards freedom. He goes on to say that not all of humanity experiences this freedom, but that the Spirit rests on those whom the Spirit wishes His presence (Barth 1966:138). This statement may be confusing to those who thought that Barth was a Universalist. Surely, this statement speaks of an Augustinian definition of predestination? The point of difference between Barth and Augustine of Hippo is a subtle one. Both would agree that Freedom is not a given right. Only God is totally free.

Barth's view goes further by endorsing the fact that God, in God's Freedom chooses the Church to be God's community of Freedom — a freedom only complete in the consummation of God's Kingdom. Being in the power of the Spirit and experiencing the journey towards freedom is a God-given gift (Barth 1966:138). This is the freedom of recognizing God's self-revelation and the hope based on the return of the Church's Lord. It is a gift that the Church has to pray for continuously. This prayer that Barth encourages the Church to make part of its life is the following: "Veni Creator Spiritus" (Barth 1966:138).

When challenged to rewrite Jefferson's "The Declaration of Independence", Barth (In Godsey 1963:77)¹⁵ makes the point that he cannot accept the use of the term "Liberty" as is stated in the mentioned document. Liberty promotes individualism without restriction — this being a false sense of freedom — that must not be confused with the Divine Freedom offered to the world in the testimony of the Church and in the Power of the Spirit. Barth (In Godsey 1963:78) nevertheless promoted the idea of the protection of an individual's freedom. Freedom implies responsibility and this responsibility can only be measured within the context of community.

This brings us to the next point: The power of the Holy Spirit is communal in nature — in Trinity, in Christ, and in the Church (Hunsinger 2000b:187). By the same notion that the Spirit is the bond of love between Father and Son as in the Augustinian tradition, so Barth continues the metaphor, placing the Spirit as the Bond of love between the Son and the Church (Hunsinger 2000b:179). Without the Spirit, the Church cannot recognize the Son, and in the same breath the Son will not be able to

¹⁵ Please note that Godsey was in conversation with Barth and recorded Barth's responses to questions he posed. I therefore treat this source as a primary source. See the Bibliography for the details of this source.

be the transforming power in this elected people called the Church. The Spirit is therefore the mediator of communion between the humanity and the divinity of Christ (2000b:179).

3.7 Mission.

When one takes all of these points into consideration, it is obvious that Barth could not see a Church of Christ sitting passively and allowing the world to pass it by. You can almost hear him shout — “The Church exists in mission!”.

The first part of the community's response to the Word of God is to travel the journey that Anselm of Canterbury coined as "Fides Quaerens Intellectum" — "Faith seeking understanding" (Barth 1963:42). The Church is not perfect and its knowledge is not perfect. It has to be part of the journey of discovery as it seeks to be an effective witness of Christ within the context that it exists. It does so in the practice of theology, which seeks to hear the Word of God within a context, and then to put it into practice. Theology is therefore not stagnant, but ever expanding our knowledge of God. Barth (1963:42) is therefore very critical of ministers, who after leaving the context of a seminary or a university, consider their theological debate to have ceased.

The existence of theology itself is largely dependant on the Church's ability to witness effectively in its situation. "There would be no theology if there should not exist a Church obliged to witness to the Word of God" (Hartwell 1964:42).

As the Church testifies to the reality of Christ in every situation, so it also bears witness to God's grace in situations that need it, but can also witness to God's judgment where it is needed (Barth 1958:122). All of this is to build the sense of community in creation that God intended at the Creation and will fulfil at the Kingdom's consummation.

The point can be raised that if the Church exists in order to promote community and so build a better society, it should have a divine mandate to resort to politics as a tool to achieve its goal. Barth (1958:124) states emphatically that the Church is not the State and that there is absolutely no need for the Church to replace it.

The task of the Church is not to maintain law and order. Its task is to give testimony concerning its Lord. This in itself may promote law and order, but its separation from State, will give it the opportunity even to speak to the State concerning the Lordship of Christ when it considers itself to be in a higher position than its subjects.

In order for the Church to be relevant, Barth (1958:124) proposes two preconditions. The first is that whatever the Church has to offer in terms of its testimony, it has to be in the intellectual realm. It will not assist the Church in any way to adopt a position of Divine authority at the expense of its ability to conduct meaningful discussions with those in the situations that the Church is addressing. The Church needs to be well informed, speaking in a way that its audience can understand. Without this tool, the Church's message will be a supernatural idealism that will not meet the needs of those to whom it testifies.

The second point is that the Church has to be visible at all times (Barth 1958:125). This does not mean that the Church needs to make statements on all issues concerning civil-society, but that the Church has a moral obligation to have an interest in the lives of those to whom it witnesses. There will, no doubt, be times and places when the Church has the opportunity, privilege, right or duty to make itself heard. It cannot do so if it is secluded and hidden. In the following chapters, we will explore how the Church fulfils this task of mission in its different relationships. This is vital as "...a Christianity with no mission to all the world would not be a Christianity." (CD IV/3:304)

4. Barth's problem with the church.

Barth's encounter with the institutional church of his day must have been one of great disillusionment and frustration.

If the Church is what we identified in Barth's theology, then the institutional church has a mammoth task of becoming the voice witnessing to the fact of God's self-revelation in this world. The church was and remains imperfect, was not a perfect community and when faced with the political call of the then German political powers, it could not speak with one voice.

On the one hand we find Liberal Theology with its support of Hitler's regime, whilst on the other, the Confessing Church spoke against what was taking place. Who, in this context is the real Church? Too many divergent voices were speaking and saying different things in the name of the Church.

The first dilemma is therefore identifying the true Church in the midst of denominational and politically divergent views. Furthermore, we find the institutional church not being able to be objective in any way, but having to become part and parcel of the historical context in order to justify its stance and exist with integrity. The Second dilemma is this: The church does not speak a universal truth, but it is changed by its context. As history progressed, we find all sides of the church becoming so politically engaged that the content of its proclamation seemed to contradict its reflection of Christ.

If politics shaped the character of the institutional Church, then it would be difficult to find the true Church within it, for "...at no time the Church is to be thought of apart from Jesus Christ if it is to be the true Church of Jesus Christ." (Hartwell 1964:142).

Christoph Schwöbel (2000:32) remarks that the Church must keep the perspective that it is a recipient of God's self-revelation and has not come to certain truths in its own strength. Liberal Theology, and the different denominations supporting Nazism, where obviously doing the opposite. How could the Church speak on behalf of God when the system it supports denies the basic truth of its faith: Creation is fallen and can only be saved by its God?

This is the reason why Barth consistently and annoyingly connects natural theology with the failure of the church in Germany to perceive the true character of Hitler's totalitarian regime, to recognize it for what it was and to act upon such a recognition (Schwöbel 2000:33).

It is a miracle that Barth did not give up on the institutional church. If he had, he would have lost very little, for in this dilemma it became evident that the institutional

church, being swayed by Liberal Theology, was nothing more but a wolf in sheep' clothing, therefore it could not be the real Church. Even the Confessing Church stood in constant danger of losing its integrity. Being so busy focusing on its duty to be a response to Liberal Theology and German National Socialism, the trap was set for it to succumb to the temptation of becoming a political party rather than the body proclaiming Christ.

How did Barth persevere with the Church? Perhaps the following words explain something of his ability to endure: "If we really hope for the Kingdom of God, then we can also endure the Church in its pettiness" (Barth 1966:148). To Barth, the Church is about the Kingdom of God. Humanity, some of whom belong to the Body of Christ, is part of a fallen Creation. It should therefore come as no surprise that the church should show imperfection.

Rather than being part of the problem, we find in Barth's work the eternal struggle of trying to identify the real Church in the church. As we journey through the different aspects of what Barth perceived to form part of the Church's life, we learn and so enable the institutional church today to become what God longs for it to be.

Conclusion.

If the Church's primary role is mission (its testimony to the world of its Lord), then it must be true that the church needs to exist in relationship with different groups in order to make mission possible.

If the Church is not in relationship with anyone or anything, then it cannot be an agent of mission, for it will then only exist for itself and within itself. In the following chapters, we will explore Barth's understanding of the church's different relationships within the created order. Barth's ecclesiology, focusing on mission, was not limited to Barth's context, but can be used as a model that will enrich the ministry of the Church in the 21st century.

Chapter 2.

The Church and God.

“Willing nothing other than to be God with us, God wills us to share in His eternal joy – the joy of the Father’s Yes to the Son in the koinonia of the Spirit” (Mangina 2004:193)

1. Introduction.

Barth’s understanding of the Church caused intense personal struggle within himself when he tried to find this eternal Body in the life and choices of the institutional church. Out of this conflict grew an understanding of God and Church that was to shape what we believe to be the church and how God relates to it.

In this chapter, the relationship between God and the Christian Community¹⁶ in Barth’s theology will be identified. This is a vital part of the investigation of Barth’s understanding of mission. The way we see and we understand God to be in relationship with the church, must influence the message the church proclaims as well as how this message is conveyed.

The following structure is used to aid this discussion:

1. As a frame of reference from Barth’s work, I used his basic structure of God’s interaction with the Christian community:
 - a. The Holy Spirit and the Gathering of the Christian Community (CD IV/1:643-780);

¹⁶ When I write the word “church”, I refer to the institutional church. “Church” therefore refers to the transcendent, universal Body of Christ. “Christian community” refers to both these groups.

- b. The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community (CD IV/2:614-726);
 - c. The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community (CD IV/3(2):681-901).
2. I will analyse the relationship between God and the Christian Community in the light of theological and ethical consequences of such a relationship.

Does Barth develop his concept of the Christian community purely out of his understanding of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit? No — his ecclesiology grows out of his discussion of various doctrines. Barth does not see theology as independent doctrines competing against each other for relevance. Theology is first about revelation. On receiving a divine revelation, creation is able to use theology as a tool that develops a spontaneous interaction between various doctrines, which leads to a greater understanding of a specific divine truth (CD I/2:797).

Besides the obvious development of Barth's ecclesiology in his understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit, Healy (1994:254) states that the other major developments occur in Barth's Doctrine of Election and in his Doctrine of Reconciliation. This is a testimony of the nature of the relationship between God and the Christian community. It describes the existence of the Church as an intentional decision by God. The Church cannot come into being by its own choices or actions, but is a community chosen to exist by God. There is also another dynamic involved as it is a relationship in the process of reconciliation, which implies that this relationship is not in complete peace. The act of reconciliation is not only between God and the Church, but the Church, through the work of God in the Son and Spirit, becomes an instrument of

reconciliation between God and the whole of creation. This notion in Barth's ecclesiology is clearly outlined in his doctrine of election as found in CD II/2.

Barth's ecclesiology nevertheless carries a very strong pneumatological focus. Even this natural emphasis in Barth's work needs to be seen in context. To call the emphasis exclusively pneumatological is an injustice to Barth's work. His approach to theology is Trinitarian — even in his pneumatology. In the previous chapter, we already noted that Barth sees the Person of the Son as the full self-revelation of God. The Son can only be this if there is a defined link between Himself and the Father. This is the Holy Spirit. By submitting to the will of the Father and in so doing revealing the person of the Father, so "...the 'power' of the Spirit is to universalize the particularity of the Son..." (Buckley 1994:93).

The first step of the relationship between God and the Christian community must therefore be God's self-disclosure to this Body.¹⁷

Let us now investigate what Professor Barth has to say about God's interaction with the Christian community.

¹⁷ The relationship between God and the Church is also described in Barth's further exploration of amongst other issues, the Church's existence in time (CD IV/1), Church order (CD IV/2) and Church law (CD IV/2). These different aspects of God's interaction with the Church are discussed in the following chapters. This chapter uses the basic framework of Barth's description of God's interaction with the Church. Following chapters will build on what is described here and should not constitute something totally different. These other aspects must not be ignored as it gives further insight into this description.

2. The Gathering of the Community.

2.1 It is God who speaks.

Church Dogmatics Volume I starts Barth's discussion on theology with the title "The Doctrine of the Word of God". In this volume, Barth gives a detailed explanation of God's self-revelation, specifically through what he determines as the "Word of God". Why does Barth start with the Doctrine of revelation? We need to keep in mind that Barth's theological framework is based on the premise of a dialectic relationship between God and God's creation (CD I/2:2).

If revelation did not take place, then it would be impossible for creation to know God, let alone be in a relationship with God. Relationship with a non-revealing God is not religion, but speculation. Religion is not creation's discovery of God's existence. If this were the case, we could ask whether God wanted to be found, and it presumes creation to be the dominant partner in such a relationship and makes nonsense out of what we believe to be God's acts of salvation throughout history.

God speaks. The act of revelation is both an act of grace and an act of love on God's part (CD I/2:1-24). The body, which receives this revelation and responds to it by faith, becomes a community, sharing their response to God's self-revelation as a common denominator (CD I/2:203-242). Even at this point we need to emphasise Barth's view that this community's response is not performed in its own power, but is able to receive that which is being revealed through the ability granted by the One who reveals (CD I/2:243). This, to Barth, is of the first manifestations of the Spirit in

the life of the Christian community. The Church is therefore not a human possibility, but is an act of creation by the Spirit of Jesus Christ (CD IV/1:644).

A point that we will raise later is the clear understanding in Barth's mind that the church is not the sole recipient, nor the sole dispensing agent of God's self-revelation. It is therefore implied in Barth's theology that when God speaks/reveals, God does so to the whole of creation.

The reality of God's self-revelation (CD I/2:249) for humanity within the confines of time and space is therefore not the responsibility of the Church, but is God's initiative and God's act of grace in God's freedom. For God to speak and for God to be understood, God needs to be at work.

Barth (CD I/2:249) describes it as follows:

Consciously or unconsciously, every hearer is necessarily faced with the question whether and how he can be a real hearer and doer of the Word. And true preaching will direct him rather 'rigidly' to something written, or to his baptism or to the Lord's Supper, instead of pointing him in the very slightest to his own or the preacher's or other people's experience. It will confront him with no other faith than faith in Christ, who died for him and rose again. But if we claim even for a moment that experiences are valid and can be passed on, we find that they are a marshy ground upon which neither the preacher nor the hearer can stand and walk. Therefore they are not the object of Christian proclamation. If it is really applied to man in a thoroughly practical way, Christian proclamation does not lead the listener to experiences. All the experiences to which it might lead are at best ambiguous. It leads them right back through all experiences to the source of all true and proper experience, i.e. to Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that the verbal proclamation of the Church's testimony is meaningless. In the Göttingen Dogmatics (Barth 1991:23), Barth nevertheless makes the point that preaching is the "...Starting Point and Goal of Dogmatics".

The proclamation of the Church's testimony therefore needs to be in full recognition of the following: God's self-revelation is not dependant upon human experience, or the human ability to make this revelation understandable through its own attempt to associate this event with experience. God's self-revelation, or God's act of "speaking" creates a new dimension in the created order and facilitates within the individual, as well as the community, a different form of experience.

2.2 How does God speak?

Barth goes to great lengths to emphasize the dialectical relationship between God and humanity, and indeed between God and Christian community. There are distinct differences between Creator and creation, which must form an almost impossible environment for relationship to take place between the two, never mind interacting in revelation and conversation. So, how does Barth make sense of revelation and conversation in this context? In a very simple illustration, Barth explains this very complex and dynamic relationship (CD IV/1:643)¹⁸:

Imagine a horizontal line. This line represents the created order. More specifically, it represents humanity from an objective perspective. Humanity, even though it thinks of itself as an objective being, is subjected to the influence of sin. This is the state of humanity without God. Now, imagine a vertical line cutting through the horizontal. This is descriptive of God's interaction in human history. God does so by becoming one of the created in the person of Jesus Christ. The horizontal line continues after the vertical intersected it, but it exists in a new dimension. It is no longer a line, which

¹⁸ Barth's illustration is now paraphrased.

exists on its own, but as an intersected line. In the same way, humanity is subjectively “changed” by God’s deliberate act of Incarnation. God’s revelation without a response from creation to change, would render the Incarnational act of revelation meaningless. Creation must respond, even if it is with contempt or rebellion, but God’s act of self-disclosure elicits a response. Thus justification is both God’s act for creation (objective) as what it needs to be the response from creation in faith (subjective justification). The Church is the community, who through the power of the Spirit, receives the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and becomes the Body that represents humanity in the light of the redemptive revelation in Jesus Christ.

The Christian Community is therefore the Body that not only receives God’s Word, but is also the Body that is able to interpret the Word and act as the testimony of the power of the Word in the world. By implication, the principle of this approach is that the Church is both involved in its interaction with God as it is in its dealings with the world. This nevertheless does not mean that the Church becomes the revelation of God to the world. It merely bears testimony to God’s revelation. In the same way, we cannot anticipate any event of justification taking place because of the Church working on its own. As it bears witness to the revelation of God, so the Spirit continues to reveal the Son and make Him known through the Church’s testimony. Furthermore, it is the work of the Spirit enabling the recipients of the testimony to recognise the revelation of Jesus Christ in it. By faith, in the power of the Spirit, the recipients respond, not to the Church, but to God.

The temptation to the Church is to see itself as the sole legitimate voice of God. Barth is aware of this and deliberately avoids ecclesiological Docetism. Another danger

Barth speaks out against is that of the church claiming the identity of being the complete manifestation of the Church: “No concrete form of the community can in itself and as such be the object of faith...the work magnifies the master” (CD. IV/1:658).

The nature of the relationship between God and the Church is based on the premise that God reveals and the Church receives. The Church reacts to the complete objective revelation in Jesus Christ (CD I/2:457), while being subjectively prompted and moved by the Spirit (CD I/2:1). As a record of God’s interaction and revelation to the world and to the Church, the Church places a great deal of trust in Scripture. To the Church, Scripture testifies to the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is the focal point of its relationship with God (CD I/2:457).

The way in which the Church interprets Scripture would obviously dictate the terms of its relationship with God. According to Barth (CD II/1:250), the Church must interpret Scripture knowing that in its understanding of Scripture and of revelation as a whole, it does not have the last word or the ultimate truth as “We can only repeat ourselves.” (CD II/1:250). Scripture itself is therefore not an object of revelation, but serves as the voice of the Covenant community, bearing testimony both to its anticipation and reflection on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. “The literally inspired Bible was not at all a revealed book of oracles, but a witness to revelation.” (CD I/2:521). This creates a dynamic relationship between the Church and Scripture. They are both bearers of the same testimony concerning the Lordship of Christ. For the Church then to use the Scriptures as a Word of revelation in itself, would cause the Church to deify the Scriptures and so place unnecessary pressure on the authority

of Scripture. Such an approach would leave Scripture beyond question and mostly out of reach, if not irrelevant to the reader.

The Church's task is therefore to interpret Scripture to the best of its ability, be guided subjectively through the Spirit, and respond to Scripture's testimony in faith. This idea of Biblical interpretation is very idealistic and opens itself to abuse. What is the method that one uses to interpret Scripture *responsibly*? If the Church and the world were indeed vastly different from God, then it would mean that even the best attempt by the Church to interpret Scripture would result in a half-truth revelation.

The Church, even in this practice, may be totally convinced that it is being guided by the power of the Spirit. History, and Barth himself, can testify to this abuse of the Word. The Biblical support of the Nazi-regime¹⁹, the use of Scripture to support Apartheid²⁰, the Biblical justification of the United State's war campaigns²¹, even the promotion of prosperity theology²², all find their beginning in the church's conviction that the Spirit of God is inspiring the church to follow these ideas.

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer (1959:236-244) goes to great lengths to separate the roles of Church and State. In the text, Bonhoeffer (1959:237) pays particular attention to the manner in which the State may distort this relationship by claiming a religious authority, which it does not possess. Bonhoeffer (1959:237) does not portray the State as the enemy of God, but calls it "... a minister". This implies that the State is subject to the revelation of God. It has a specific duty to fulfil, but has to fall under the Lordship of Christ as confessed by the Church.

²⁰ Nolan (1995:71) reflects on Apartheid as the product of distorted culture. He makes this point by referring to the strong sense of culture found among the Afrikaner-people. This culture is characterized by "... literature, its art and its music and songs, by its ways of preparing and preserving food, by its stories of the past (especially the Great Trek), by its romanticisation of the veld and the practice of *boekevat* (Bible reading in the family)" (Nolan 1995:71). He (Nolan 1995:71) then adds that the Afrikaner's culture, in an act of self-preservation, transformed itself into a system, using these elements to convey its belief of being a superior race.

²¹ MacArthur (2001:87-107) defends the United States of America's decision to go to war after the events that unfolded in New York on 11 September 2001 by citing passages of Scripture such as Numbers 35:33, calling for the death of those who defiled the land with blood. Lubbe (2002:237-253) describes how religious nationalism in the world, but specifically in the United States of America, leads entire nations to the inevitable end of complete war against religions, political systems and powers that stand in opposition to its beliefs.

²² Ponder's (1979) book serves as a good example. In this book Ponder (1979:11-15) argues that "Prayer is the path to instant good". The person who prays can then measure the level of their faith by

Even Barth is not consistent in his approach to interpreting Scripture. Healy (1994:258) describes two predominant approaches that Barth uses. The first method is to use Scripture as a source of concepts. In *Church Dogmatics* (II/1:118), we find an example of this in the way Barth speaks about Jesus Christ in the light of the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2. Creation, revelation, and justification are all seen as underlying motives in the message of the text, all deliberately pointing to the central figure of Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation.

Furthermore, we find Barth also employing another method whereby Scripture is seen as a source of narratives. *Church Dogmatics* (IV/2:154-264), for instance, here describes Jesus Christ as the Royal man and used existing Biblical references that speak directly about the person of the Messiah. In this use of Scripture, there does not appear to be any underlying theme or allegorical use, but serves as a direct and blatant proclamation of the person of the Messiah.

Healy (1994:258) is correct in stating that Barth tends to lean towards interpreting Scripture as a source of concepts. The main concept underlying the testimony of Scripture speaks of God's salvific acts in history, specifically focussing on the work of Jesus Christ. To Barth, if Scripture is read through these glasses, the Church would do well in journeying towards the ultimate truth of God's revelation. By doing this, it

the promptness of God's response in compliance to the request. When there is no apparent response in the affirmative to the person's request, the prayer is considered to be unanswered (Ponder 1979:23). The person then has to seek areas in their lives that may prevent these prayers from being answered. Ponder (1979:24-32) suggests that common "blocks" to prayer includes the lack of forgiveness, negativity, lack of concentration, rushed prayer and sin. All of these are supported by Biblical references. Prosperity does not only refer to financial wealth, but includes other aspects connected to well-being such as health and successful relationships.

would not be too concerned about Scripture's format, inconsistencies or even the historic errors it contains.

Engelbrecht sums up Barth's approach to Scripture very well when he writes:

Barth het die mens vergelyk met iemand in die uiters benarde omstandighede van 'n konsentrasiekamp. Nou kom daar 'n brief met 'n bevrydingsboodskap, of van so 'n gevangene se geliefdes. Dit is miskien vol spelfoute, verkreukeld, geskeur, miskien oorgeskrif deur 'n vriend om dit in te kan smokkel. Maar wie só 'n brief ontvang, rig sy aandag nie op die kreukels, vlekke, skeure, spelfoute, ens. nie; nee, dit gaan oor die inhoud van hierdie bevrydingsboodskap, om deur en agter alles die egte en gesaghebbende woord van God te hoor! (Engelbrecht:1986:4)²³

God speaking describes the relationship between God and the Church as one where God is totally free. In Barth's explanation, God is free of Scripture as God is beyond the limited testimony of the Biblical writers (CD I/2:662). Furthermore, God is free to be the Church's God (I/2:2), and cannot be bound by the description of God in the Church's testimony. God is the only one who is able to be in complete Freedom and Authority (I/2:538-743). Revelation is also subject to the Free being of God. God's self-revelation is dynamic as the Word of God, in its universal truth, is able to become relevant in every situation. Barth should not be misunderstood as implying that context determines the Being of God. As contexts differ, so the means of revelation may vary from context to context, to facilitate a clearer understanding of God's revelation through the Spirit. The Divine truth always remains constant.

²³ "Barth compared humanity to someone in the dire circumstances of a concentration camp. A letter arrives with a message of liberation, or from the prisoner's loved ones. It is perhaps filled with spelling errors, it may be wrinkled, or even re-written by a friend in order to smuggle it in. The person who receives such a letter, does not focus on the wrinkles, stains, tears, spelling mistakes et cetera. It concerns the content of this message of liberation. To, through and behind everything, hear the authoritative word of God." (My translation).

2.3 What does God speak about?

When God calls the Christian Community through “speaking” God’s self-revelation, what does God speak about? We already hinted in the previous section that the essence of God’s message to creation concerns redemption.

Redemption implies at least two different outcomes in the relationship between God and creation: The first is a harmonious restoration of a relationship already finding itself being damaged, or a sustained brokenness in the relationship that is irreconcilable. A dual possibility exists, creating either an outcome of reconciliation or of separation. This sounds like an equation heading towards a theology of double predestination. This is not far off as Barth builds on Calvin’s understanding of this doctrine in a very deliberate manner.

To Barth (CD IV/2:35), double predestination is not a concept that holds humanity as the object of its working. God is the centre of predestination. This is a point of deviance from Calvin’s understanding. In the previous chapter, we already described Barth’s understanding of God’s “No” and God’s “Yes”. In a sense God predestines Godself in Jesus Christ. Sin carries God’s “No”. Since sin has infiltrated God’s creation, this adds to the dialectic state between God and creation. The message of redemption is about Jesus on the cross bearing the full brunt of God’s “No” and so effects God’s “Yes” to creation.

Mangina (2004:72) asks the question “Why should there be the No at all?” The answer to that is quite simple: If there were no “No”, God would be in a state of denial. The mere existence of the possibility of sin cannot carry God’s consent, for it

represents all that is against what God would will to be possible. It is in this sense that Barth quite frankly labels sin as the “impossible possibility” (KD III/2:162)²⁴. If God did not say “No” to sin, taking an apathetic stance to it, God would not be able to speak with integrity into the situation of evil. This would also mean that God could not identify truly with the afflicted.

Creation with God’s blessing, God’s “Yes”, is creation in a perfect relationship with God. It is in this creation that the true value of humanity being created in the image of God can be known. Salvation is restoring humanity to the Image of God. What does this mean? If we were to assume that it means that sin is “a failure in self-realization” (Mangina 2004:130), then we can draw the assumption further that without sin there would be little to no difference between the images of either God or creation yet even without sin, humanity and God are not the same as they are still ontologically divergent in their status of Creator and creation. The limitations faced by creation bear testimony to this difference.

Jesus Christ, the Word, enables humanity, and so the Church, to be in relationship with God and to receive the Divine “Yes” (CD IV/1:646). As the Spirit gives life to the Church, or the community, those who belong to it engage on a journey towards sanctification. Once again the authority of God is emphasised:

The Holy Spirit, for whose work the community, and in and with the community the believing Christian, is thankful, is not the spirit of the world, nor is He the spirit of the community, nor is He the spirit of any individual Christian, but He is the Spirit of God, God Himself... (CD IV/1:646).

²⁴ As referred to by Von Balthasar (1992:230).

One has to wonder whether this Christology that Barth promotes does not rely too heavily on the concept of Christ and in so-doing does not give sufficient attention to the person of the historical Jesus. Rostagno (1985:343) argues this point in describing Barth's concept of Christ. Rostagno suggests that the incarnation does not present us with only one Word, but in fact, two Words manifested in the one person of Jesus:

“1. Das Wort Gottes wird erst wahr, wenn es Fleisch wird (vgl. Joh. 1:14).”

“2. Der fleishgewordene Logos bleibt Logos”²⁵

In Barth's theology, there cannot be two Words. Yes, in the Incarnation, the Logos remains the Logos and does not change, but the statement made by the Incarnation is not a separate Word of God, but the Word spoken in a language that creation can understand.

When creation receives this self-revelation, it is specifically humanity that is able to develop a Divine consciousness through the power of the Spirit (Engelbrecht 1986:7). This Divine Consciousness differs substantially from Schleiermacher's approach where the process of redemption places a greater responsibility on the part of the human recipient. In Barth's writing, Schleiermacher's theology is treated as nothing more than an anthropology (Engelbrecht 1986:9).

Mangina (2004:36) describes Barth's doctrine of God in the light of three convictions:

1. “God is prior” – God is Subject in relation to God's creation;
2. “The content of revelation is Christological” – Revelation of God and the Person of Jesus Christ are inseparable;

²⁵ “1. The Word of God becomes real when it becomes flesh (According to John 1:14).
2. The Incarnate Logos remains the Logos” (My translation).

3. “Revelation does not render human beings passive”.

“God gives the community his Word, sanctifies its profane language, and gives it power and freedom to speak of Him.” (Mebust 1981:17). The Word is therefore God’s presence in creation. The Church’s identity must therefore be recognized as being shaped by the speaking of God’s Word and the interpretation of that Word through the Spirit.

Roberts (1986:81) criticizes Barth’s description of the Spirit’s function of being the interpreter of the Word and the implementer of God’s work in the individual, as a dehumanizing act. By this, Roberts implies that the Spirit is therefore only obviously at work in the individuals who have shown a response to God’s self-revelation and who ask questions about the omnipresent nature of God. Is God’s Spirit therefore not at work, making the Word known to those who are obviously non-responsive?

Barth is misunderstood in this argument. Barth never implied that redemption is only an objective act of God, nor is it only an act in those willing to respond to God’s acts of self-revelation and salvation. As much as humanity is different from God in its status of being a created being, further separated by its sin, it does not remove the gift of freedom that God imparts in its existence (Barth 1960:78-80). The freedom to choose, or Free Will, is nevertheless not complete freedom. Complete freedom will only be experienced when humanity, or the individual, is completely reconciled to God.

3. Upbuilding the Community.

The Church, or shall we say the *telos* of the Church, is the ideal state of relationship between God and creation. It cannot presently be in its perfect state as the church is a community in process of becoming the Church. This does not mean that the Church does not exist, or that it is a solely futuristic notion. Inasmuch as God calls creation by the Word, God also partakes in the formation process of the church in the world. This section will focus on the sanctifying nature of the Spirit's work in the church.

3.1 Identity

The Church, as we noted before, finds its identity in the self-revelation of God. The Church is therefore a community who chooses to participate in the divine "Yes". This identity is in the process of developing into the Image of God in creation as the church is not yet the complete manifestation of the Church. If there is existence in the church that focuses on participating in the divine "Yes", then what is the alternative?

Mangina (2004:100) asks this question and asserts that Barth's answer would be "*Das Nichtige*"²⁶. The purpose of creation is to be in relationship with God in the reconciled state as being in the Image of God. God did not simply create, nor does God seem to will an alternative. If God did, it would nullify the whole notion of Divine judgement and Divine grace.

The formation work in the church is therefore a journey towards existence and perhaps what Jesus implied in John 10:10 as the experience of life in all its fullness.

²⁶ "Nothingness" (My translation).

The continuous growth in the church community can only be described in terms of God's participation in this journey through the Spirit. It is in the Spirit that the Gifts and Fruit of God can manifest in the life of the church. I deliberately term the Gifts and Fruit as God's, for the Spirit enables the church to make Imago Dei a reality in its conduct. The sanctifying journey is not an anthropological initiative, nor a humanistic search for meaning, but the Divine at work, re-establishing the gift of life in a creation that denies it through sin.

...if we fasten abstractly on the church as a human performance, we will encounter only a Scheinkirche, a mere 'apparent church'. Only through the Spirit's action does the sinful Scheinkirche become die wirkliche Kirche, the 'real' or 'actual church – an effective sign of Christ's sanctifying work. (Mangina 2004:156).

Does this mean that the church as institution is a false witness to the Good News revealed in and through the person of Jesus Christ? Barth would argue that this is not the case:

If the Divine occasioning and fashioning of this human action take place in spite of it, i.e., of its sinful tendency, this is not a quality of the Church in which it actualises its reality but the triumph of the power of Jesus Christ upbuilding it; an omnipotent act of the special divine mercy addressed to it, which makes use of the human and sinful action of the community but does not proceed from it and cannot be understood in terms of it. (CD VI/2:618).

The church is nevertheless neither perfect nor divine and is prone to sin and the misinterpretation of God's Word.

Out of this imperfect nature of the church, Barth asks insightful questions about the sacraments, especially Baptism. Floor (1986:15) describes his argument as follows: Baptism is by definition the sacrament that celebrates the individual's entry into the

Body of Christ. It does so in the presence of those who claim to belong to the Body of Christ and so receive those into their fellowship through the symbol of water. Barth's problem with this concept is that humanity simply does not have the authority to pronounce the individual a member of the Church. Seeing that God calls the Church into being, it would only be logical to deduce that God is the only one who is able to either receive the individual into the Church or not. The true sacrament of Baptism is therefore Baptism in the Spirit and not Baptism by water. We will explore this argument further in Chapter 6, but it would suffice to say that Barth would rather the human practice of Baptism be classified as a celebration of faith than a sacrament (KD IV/4:XI).

The Spirit nevertheless works in the life of the church and this is what Barth (CD II/2:196) sees as separating the church from any form of community initiated by human action. "The identity of the Church, according to Barth, precisely in God's freedom and faithfulness, which is nothing else than the identity of God's election in Christ, something the Church receives '*je und je*', something which in no way and to no degree subsist in the real existing communities of witness and service." (Hütter 2000:147).

McFarland (1996:302) poses an interesting question relating to the authority from which the church claims to speak. His argument is that the church stands between two very delicate places. On the first hand, the church has the responsibility to provide a credible testimony of its Lord to the rest of creation. This forces it to be critical and questioning of its own message, precisely because it knows that it is not the perfect manifestation of the Church. This leaves the Church in a place where it can be argued

that the church may question Divine Authority from a human perspective and choose to reject it. In so doing it will cease to be the Church-in-progress and revert to its state before redemption, or worse, become a voice speaking against the Word.

The other side of the dilemma is that if the Church does not question and follow what it believes to be Divine Authority without any critical position, it would leave it in a place where Free Will is no longer a possibility. It would then be the messenger of heresy and not the gospel. In his (McFarland's) opinion, Barth provides a well-formulated answer to this dilemma: "Karl Barth, for example, justifies the church's claim to speak with authority on the ground of Christ's commissioning of His community or disciples. But he is also quick to note that Jesus' identification with the community cannot be used to support the equation of the church's authority with Christ's..." (McFarland 1996:302)²⁷.

The church can therefore only be obedient in faith to the best of its ability, knowing that God's Spirit is still in control of its growth.

Smit (1986:38-40) sums up what he believes to be Barth's view of the church:

1. The origin of the congregation is found in Jesus Christ as her Lord;
2. The foundation of the congregation's life is based on the relationship between Jesus Christ and the *communio sanctorum*.
3. The local congregation is necessary for institutional life of the Church;
4. The congregation is itself a concept of law and order;

²⁷ I will discuss the issue of authority among different denominations in Chapter 3.

5. The congregation's law and order is founded and shaped by Christ;
6. Law and order in the Church, without Christ, is reduced to bureaucracy and the formation of such law;
7. Jesus Christ alone shapes the order and structure of the congregation to make it unique and different to any other social structure;
8. The world will see the Church in a very different light to the way the Church sees itself. To the world the Church is another form of social structure;
9. There is a difference between state-law and church-law. Although the church is subject to state-law, it is bound by its own law, which is based on Christ;
10. Church-law must be a servant;
11. Church-law finds its life in the worship-service. This is where Christ is present, being the living law of the Church;
12. Church-law must be living, dynamic and fluid;
13. Because church-law is made and must be known, it is human law and not divine law;
14. Church law does not replace state-law or any other law, but should serve as an example to other structures of what it means to live.

These points are very helpful as one questions whether the church with all its laws and by-laws truly represents the Church that God intends. A superficial reading of Barth would leave one thinking that the Spirit is only at work in the unseen and that the Church would suddenly miraculously appear, breaking through the "dead" church as a moth breaks through its cocoon. Barth's explanation is that the Spirit is even at work through church-law, drawing it closer to becoming the true and complete Church (CD IV/2:690-691).

This nevertheless does not explain the missionary role to which God has called it. In the next section this will be our focus.

4. Sending the Community.

The Church is not called to be a passive community of faith, but a community whose purpose it is to bear witness to her Lord. This is its mission, the task to which God has called it.

We may ask whether this is a new task, asked of the Church in response to the situation of sin. What would the Church (or whatever it may have been called) have done if sin never took place? Moltmann (1996:323), who is influenced by Barth, suggests that the eschatological point will be no different from what God intended to create in the beginning, and even in this situation, the community consummated in Divine eschatology will find its purpose in bringing glory to God.

Whether sin exists or not, the Church's role is to bear witness to her Lord (CD I/2:743). The most technical manner in which it does this is through doctrine. Barth sees doctrine as a tool which enables the Church to hear and to teach (CD I/2:797). Once again it must be said that the work of the Church in the development of such doctrine or law is not done by human initiative, but in faith being critically aware of the work of God's Spirit.

The most deliberate act of its witness is found in its preaching. The verbal proclamation of its testimony transforms the Church into a *creatura verbi*, which

implies that the Church's identity is not only found in its receiving the Word, but also in the act of being a public, verbal witness of the Word. At this point Mangina (2004:46) reminds us that although Barth's understanding of the Church's verbal role borders on a *sola scriptura* understanding, Barth does not fall into the trap of interpreting Scripture in a vacuum. The Church exists in a certain context, receives the Word in that same context and needs to bear testimony to the Word in which people are seeking God. A prime example of how this is done is found in the use of Scripture in the formulation of the Barmen Declaration²⁸.

The church's proclamation is not perfect. It strives to bear perfect witness to its Lord, but often fails. Barth recognises this trait and attributes it to the human element that exists in the Church. "Barth, of course, does not deny that the church is constituted by the proclamation of the gospel. What he cannot acknowledge is that the community called the church is constitutive of the gospel proclamation." (Hauerwas 2002:145). Hauerwas and Barth both call for more than a verbal proclamation of the Word. What is needed is a non-verbal testimony that brings credibility to the verbal proclamation that it offers.

Roberts (1986:99) quotes Taylor²⁹ when writing "The mission of the Church, therefore, is to live the ordinary life of men in that extraordinary awareness of the other and self-sacrifice for the other which the Spirit gives." This speaks volumes about the church's approach to mission. Mission is not about the multi-day crusades offered by Evangelical groups, scaring people to the point of conversion by

²⁸ In the Barmen Declaration, we find that each article is preceded by a reference from Scripture. This text is carefully chosen to speak to the point that the church makes. The Scripture does not change its meaning, as is the danger when it is lifted out of its own context and placed into another. The essential message of the text is then used to motivate the argument.

²⁹ Source not accessible.

threatening their eternal destinies with fire and brimstone. This is contradictory to the Word of grace, love and reconciliation found in Jesus Christ.

“We cannot argue someone else into faith. All we can do is bear witness, speaking the things of God in a language appropriate to the situation” (Mangina 2004:62). Barth could not have said this better himself. In the following chapters, we will explore defined situations in which the Church is called to bear witness, but perhaps we need to end this section with one more quote, which goes to the heart of the concept: “For Barth the best ministry that the church can provide to the civil community is to remain the church.” (Bolt 1983:9).