

The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology

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Abstract.

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As the church is moving towards its 21st century of existence, it is confronted by challenges it has never known before. Globalization, the rise of different socio-political orders and a growing tendency towards a post-modern understanding of the world are but some of the issues. This changing world demands self-reflection from the church. It has to consider its place, identity and function, thereby giving rise to the exploration of its mission.

In this thesis, the ecclesiology of Karl Barth is explored. By considering Barth's understanding of the church's relationship with different parties such as God, other religions, those outside the Christian faith, the State and its own inner dynamics, the church will be reminded of its missionary function in the world.

The church's relationships are important for they direct the way in which it fits into the world. When it considers that it exists purely because of God's self-revelation, and that its own existence is an act of faith in response to this divine self-disclosure, it becomes aware of defined parameters within which the church can operate under the banner of mission.

Mission is therefore much bigger than the notion of evangelism, which is one part of the church's role. Where evangelism concerns the physical activity of the church's

proclamation, its mission describes its identity and function in bearing testimony to its Lord. Identity and function are not self-generated characteristics and neither is mission.

Karl Barth has given a tremendous gift by exploring the Christian faith, the God whom it serves, the church within which it operates, and the world that it exists in. It is the author's belief that no other work is as comprehensive and descriptive of the church's place, both in relation to God and the world.

This thesis explores this gift and searches for answers concerning the church's mission that will be helpful and relevant in today's world. This is necessary if the church seeks to be relevant and effective, speaking to new challenges, and a new world¹²⁹.

¹²⁹ 356 words.

Key Words.

Christology

Church

Ecumenism

Election

Mission

Religion

Revelation

Salvation

State

Karl Barth

Summary.

The world in which we live is not static. It develops and evolves rapidly. It offers new opportunities, dilemmas and questions to a church that has existed for centuries.

The church is itself ever changing. It has to do so in order to remain relevant and to share its witness effectively. As the world mutates and as the church dwells within it, the church has to consider its mission in relation to its different relationships.

This thesis explores the ecclesiology of Karl Barth, one of the most prominent theologians of the 20th century. Barth describes the church's divergent relationships and suggests ways in which the church can engage with the different relational partners.

This thesis, explores Barth's relationship with the church. Barth's relationship was riddled with questions as he tried to understand what it means to be the church while Christians, especially in Nazi Germany, were using the name of the church to advance their own political motives.

The church does not exist because of its own doing. From Barth's relationship with the church, the church's relationship with God is described. Before the church can engage in mission, which it claims is ordained by God, it needs to acknowledge its own relationship with its Maker.

As the church bears testimony, it also discovers that it is conveying different messages due to its own diverse denominational structure. If the Church is to have a unified mission, speaking with one voice, then part of its mission must be towards itself, working towards its own unity.

Furthermore, the church is not the only body claiming to be a divine witness. Its relationship with other religions must therefore also be taken into consideration. Here, the thesis investigates Barth's understanding of revelation and the way it shapes the Christian and other religious communities.

This thesis further explores the church's relationship with those "outside" its community. The church's mission is deduced considering the nature of election in Barth's soteriology. It asks the question whether the church is the only elect people and how it should see itself when engaging with those who do not associate themselves with the Christian church.

Lastly, this thesis describes Barth's understanding of the church's relationship with the State. In recognising that both the State and the church are instruments of God's salvific work, the church can speak with confidence when it both supports and criticises the State.

Considering all of these relationships, the nature of the church's mission can be refined and the church will be relevant in its mission. It can do so without considering itself to be in a position of power. It will be down the road of servanthood and

obedience. This thesis therefore takes seriously the church's relationships and proposes characteristics that the church should employ in its approach to mission¹³⁰.

¹³⁰ 465 words.

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Introduction.

The Church¹ is entering its twenty-first century of existence. It has a history that tells the story of how time, politics, leadership and theological understanding have shaped the way in which it engaged with the world under the well-meaning banner of mission.

A great deal of both good and evil has come from this divinely instructed work. Testimony of the Church at work varies from it being an instrument of political and social liberation struggles to being the authority behind the slaughter of many, especially during the Middle Ages. The testimony of contradicting behaviour in the "universal church" is not over. In fact, the criticism of the church's inconsistency will only become harsher as secular society refuses to be intimidated by the church's claimed moral high ground.

I believe that one of the most relevant theological questions that should be asked of the church today be "What is mission?". What is the Church's mission? What is God calling the Church to be in the twenty-first century? Obviously we find many models emerging in the world today (specifically from so-called mega-churches²) attempting to make congregations bigger, stronger and more effective, but these may not answer the fundamental doctrinal questions relating to the Church's identity and its work.

¹ Please note that in this text I use "church" to refer to the church as institution and "Church" to refer to the theological concept of the Body of Believers.

² By using this term I refer to churches that have a great numerical membership compared to that of the traditional main-line churches. These churches mostly gather in auditorium-type venues and emphasise the place of small-groups. In small-groups, members receive specific pastoral care, teaching and guidance. Examples of such churches in South Africa are Rhema Bible Church and Hatfield Christian Church.

We need to look at history and determine the Church's origins. More importantly, we should examine the relationship between the Church and the One who created and steers it.

This study aims to do exactly this. By investigating the identity and role of the Church, we may be able to present a clear understanding of what it means to be part of the church, the church at work and the church in mission.

1. Theoretical framework.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate an understanding of mission without an historical perspective. It would be irresponsible to do so, because the Church belongs to history and therefore has assumed certain definitions regarding its identity and role.

I have decided to focus on the ecclesiology of Karl Barth. I have chosen Barth, because it is my opinion that the ecclesiology Barth offers is one of the most relevant concerning the questions that are asked of the church today. During Barth's lifetime we find a dynamic understanding and implementation of different definitions of mission. The rise of the Reich in the early 20th century, using its support of a significant section of German churches, tabled its agenda not merely as a political one, but as an agenda devoted to its obedience to God's will. Needless to say, all Christians did not accept this definition of mission and Church identity. So, German Christians found themselves divided in their faith, and practice of this faith in a world which was slowly breaking apart.

In search of unity, we find a monumental attempt to define the Church's role in society in the Barmen Declaration. This declaration was indeed the turning point in Church history as it was a consensus document between different denominations and paved the way for the Church's response to the historical-political era it was about to face (Busch 1976:236). Karl Barth undoubtedly played a major role in the formulation of the Barmen Declaration (Busch 1976:236)³. It was his opinion that the Church's sole responsibility was to be engaged in mission (Mebust 1981:15-17) and had a responsibility to find the true meaning of this concept.

The Barmen Declaration cannot be seen as a complete description or summary of Barth's theological mind, but it does give us an indication of a true and authentic struggle to make sense of the identity and role of the church. Barth wrote many papers and books, referring directly or partially to the mission that God has called the Church to, so this may show that this question was important in the formulation of his theological understanding. It is refreshing to see that Barth's theology was not born out of solely academic research, but that Barth's theology developed primarily as a response to real theological questions posed by both the Church and the world.

The twenty-first century holds many parallels with Barth's world. Superpowers in the world today, such as the United States of America, rely on the support of conservative, fundamentalist Christian understandings in order to push their agenda. Once again, the Church finds itself divided and does not portray unity in the

³ Krötke (2006:271) affirms this point. The Barmen Declaration, in his (Krötke 2006:271) opinion, also displays classic traits of Barth's theology. The way in which the Word is emphasised as the decisive form of God's self-disclosure, therefore downplaying the notion of Natural Theology, is a good example.

understanding of its identity and/or role on issues, such as the war in Iraq, stem-cell research or abortion on demand. The list goes on.

In this thesis, it is my quest to identify Mission-themes in Barth's ecclesiology, to describe the relevance in modern theological discussions and then to formulate an understanding of mission that would describe the church's identity and role in the times in which we live.

2. Research problem and objectives.

The research problem is posed as: “Does Barth’s understanding of the church’s relationships propose a defined missionary focus?”

The hypothesis is therefore that Barth’s understanding of the Church’s relationships to different entities will give us clear guidelines in understanding the Church’s mission. It may seem as if it should be the other way around: that the church’s mission comes first and then shapes the nature of its relationships, but I suggest that this is not the case.

Although the argument follows Barth’s ecclesiological understanding from a very specific context, it would only be proper to question the validity of using Barth’s understanding to teach us something in the 21st century. Here are questions and proposed answers:

2.1. Is nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany a valid era for comparison with the current Ecclesiastical dilemma?

These two eras are almost a century apart. The historical-, social-, and political contexts vary greatly. From an objective perspective it hardly seems fair to compare these two contexts. Despite their differences, I aim to prove that the ecclesiological concepts Barth suggests are relevant to the church today. The gift of Dogmatics is that it aims to find truth. The greater the doctrinal contribution, the more one will find that glimpses of universal truth appear in their discussion.

It is therefore implied that there exists a difference between divine truth and truth perceived and expressed in creation. The assumption is that the former constitutes universal truth. Karl Barth is aware of this difference and therefore describes truth as being analogous (CD II/1:238). If the divine perspective acts as the *analogans* and the human perspective as the *analogate* (Hunsinger 2000b:218), then creation can at best reflect a truth that exists beyond itself, while not being able to lay claim to this truth as its own making. The more creation, and in this case Dogmatics, opens itself to receiving divine truth, the closer its expression of truth will be to that which is revealed.

Barth's theology has certainly stood the test of time, as one finds continuing research into his theology on an annual basis. It is my view that Barth's ecclesiological proposals will do the same, offering us new insights into the church's position before God and in the world. As stated in the hypothesis, the Church's relationships speak the loudest concerning the church's missionary function.

2.2. How significant is Barth's contribution to the modern debate?

I believe that there is a resurgence in Barth's theology in modern theological debate. Although Barth was greatly influenced by the history that he formed part of, we find aspects of his theological understanding that are relevant to situations and contexts that differ from his own. It is the task of this thesis to identify these and to measure them against present theological thinking.

3. Research design.

This thesis is a literary conceptual analysis as it studies the concepts conveyed in Barth's work on the Church. This thesis is divided into seven chapters, each of which will focus on a specific aspect of the church's relationship both with God and with different structures in the world.

By investigating Barth's description of each of these relationships, this thesis will then deduce the missionary responsibility of the church to each of these.

Chapter 1 serves as an introductory chapter, posing the question concerning the Church's role and identity. A brief description of Karl Barth will be given as well as reasons for the focus on his thinking. This chapter will also give a general structure for the rest of the thesis, so that the reader will be able to follow the progression in theological thinking towards formulating an understanding of mission.

Chapters 2 to 6 will individually focus on Barth's understanding of the relationship between the Church and its "partners". It is from these relationships that we will be able to establish an understanding of the Church's identity and role.

Chapter 2 will look at the relationship between the Church and God. The way in which the Church relates to God must determine the way in which it understands itself and implements its faith. We believe that God has called the Church into existence and therefore can be described as the author of the Church's identity. To neglect the Church's relationship to God would omit the foundational structure of both the Church's identity and its purpose.

Chapter 3 will focus on the relationships within the Church itself. To what extent is the Church universal and catholic? How does one find a common identity and role in a body with such diverse ideas and ideals? Barth's description of the ecumenical nature of the Church must therefore also give guidance for understanding the dynamics of mission-concepts in a denominationally diverse body.

Chapter 4 describes the relationship between the Church and other religions. Does the Church have the sole divine mandate to be God's instrument of revelation and salvation? In an increasingly secular world where post-modern philosophy seems to suggest that all different views carry equal weighting in terms of truth, the Church is challenged in finding its missionary purpose. Is the Church but one voice among many speaking the same truth, from divergent perspectives?

Barth's view in this regard is extremely valuable as history is important to him. He is anti-modern in a sense that he did not allow "...post-modern methodological criteria, or the content of any of the modern academic disciplines, to influence the substance of theology." (Hodgson 1989:25).

Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between the Church and the "lost", or as are termed later, the "faithless". What is the Church's role in the lives of those who do not identify with the divine? Here aspects such as Barth's understanding of election and salvation are examined.

Chapter 6 searches for answers in the relationship between the Church and the State. Does the Church have a responsibility towards the State? What is the responsibility of the Church and what is the responsibility of the State? Perhaps the most important question lies in the nature in which God is in relationship with both the Church and the State.

Chapter 7 then serves as a concluding chapter, weighing all of the research above and formulating a description of the identity and role of the Church in mission in a meaningful way.

This thesis makes a unique contribution to the body of knowledge by researching the notion of mission in Barth's ecclesiology using Barth's understanding of the Church's relationships as a backdrop. By defining the relational character of Barth's ecclesiology, the way in which the church engages with its context becomes clear. This relational perspective gives insight, not only into the doctrinal understanding of mission, but also into the implications of mission when the church takes these relationships seriously.

4. Research methodology.

My primary source of input will come from theological books and journals. Barth wrote a substantial amount. Not only did he write academic theology, but his theology is a response to several philosophical, political and social contexts. The main source that I have used, written by Barth, is his Church Dogmatics⁴. Using Barth's Church Dogmatics as the main reference has an advantage. Church Dogmatics offers a very mature Barthian ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that is the result of inter-disciplinary and socio-political debates.

To use Barth's earlier works exclusively without referring to Church Dogmatics would have been confusing as Barth changed his theological opinion at least three times. There are thoughts that remained significantly consistent in his work and these are explored as far as possible. Where reference is made to Barth's understanding, if he had a change of mind, this will then be indicated in the text.

Because of the large volume of work, I have had to refer to numerous secondary sources that have focussed on specific aspects of Barth's ecclesiology. I have always verified claims made by secondary sources by referring to the primary texts and by comparing them to perspectives from other secondary sources. By dedicating myself to this project, I am also aware of the time constraints within which this project needs to be completed. It is therefore not possible to consult all the material pertaining to Barth's ecclesiology. The sources that I have consulted and the time I have dedicated to this project will, in my view, add to the body of knowledge concerning this topic.

⁴ Referred to as CD or KD. See bibliography.

Using these sources and the structure described in the previous section, I am convinced that a meaningful understanding of mission will emerge.

Lastly, it is necessary to note my own context as the writer. I am a South African, serving as an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This has allowed me to be in conversation with lay-Christians and to hear their questions and frustrations concerning the church's role and identity. I am also a part-time lecturer in Systematic Theology at John Wesley College – Kilnerton. This privilege has given me the opportunity to reflect on and engage in academic theological conversations concerning these issues.

This thesis contributes to both these contexts. In the academic context, this thesis raises critical questions concerning the Church's dogmatic understanding of mission by suggesting that mission must be understood from the premise that the church exists within relationships and cannot speak about God without taking these seriously. This thesis also encourages the local congregation to understand its role as both a church in relationship and a church in mission. When the church understands its place in relationship with the world, then the church will be able to testify effectively concerning its Lord.

Effective communication is one of the prerequisites for the church to be relevant and accessible in the world. I believe that the model of mission proposed in this thesis will promote the church's awareness of its relationships, thereby improving the way it engages with different parties in the world.

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).

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.

Chapter 5

The Church's mission to the "faithless"⁷²

The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man's own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual man consists in this: that this choice of the godless man is void; that he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elect by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision (CD II/2:306).

1. Introduction.

Following on from the previous chapter, the deduction can be made that where God is revealed through Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, there is already a point of contact between God and those who do not subscribe to the Christian faith. This intersection between God and creation is therefore not dependant upon creation's ability or willingness to understand or receive the divine revelation, but is an act of God that depends solely upon the Free Will and grace of this Creator. This point of contact, where the Creator reveals openly and freely to all, includes those who do not subscribe to any religious system at all. This chapter explores the church's relationship with those who do not subscribe to the Christian faith, but also those who do not adhere to any religious system at all. The question that religion, even the Christian religion has to struggle with concerns that consequences for those who deem themselves to be "outside" the parameters of what institutional religion believes to be a healthy relationship with God.

⁷² In Church Dogmatics (I/2:297) Barth's term "Unglaube" is translated as "Unbelief". Di Noia (2000:249-250) contests that this translation does not do justice to the meaning intended by Barth. Di Noia (2000:249) then draws on Green's interpretation of the word and suggests that "faithlessness" would serve Barth's usage. It is from this definition that I prefer to use "faithless" and "faithlessness" instead of "Unbelief".

For this purpose, *Church Dogmatics Volumes II and IV* are of particular significance as they focus specifically on Barth's understanding of salvation. Notes have also been taken from Barth's sermons to those in correctional institutions. Using these sources, a description of the church's interaction with those "outside" the faith can be observed which in turn, leads us to a more specific understanding of church-mission.

The first question that needs to be asked is: "How do we define 'faithless'?" The title already suggests that it is possible to define and separate two groups of people, namely those who belong to the church and those who are "faithless". Two admissions must therefore be made before we proceed. The first is that the term "faithless" is an inaccurate definition, for it has to be interpreted within a very specific understanding. All people have faith, whether religious or irreligious. It may be a faith in a deity, in the self and abilities or in a system. Life and faith co-exist. Even the most hardened atheistic scientist⁷³ exhibits faith when conducting an experiment, in his/her abilities, reasoning and logic to obtain a certain specified result. "Faithless" in this context refers to the absence of evidence of the Lordship of Christ within the individual. This point leads naturally to the second admission. This is that a person can adhere to a belief-system, even the Christian religion, but be "faithless" in their day-to-day expression of life.

This understanding is very ambiguous, for how does one measure the extent of the Lordship of Christ in a person's life? The best that we can do, therefore is to give thanks that we are not burdened with the task of judging. Our task is to try to

⁷³ The word "Atheistic" is intentionally used because it would be unfair to juxtapose science and religion.

understand the church's role in mission to a world that is a mixed blend of faith and faithlessness, characteristics that can manifest even inside the institutional church.

A wonderful aspect of Barth's soteriology is in the premise that every person can be placed in the category of the "faithless. All need salvation and no person is born with the inherit gift of not having to be saved. Personal salvation, like all the other encounters with God as described in previous chapters, is greatly dependant on God's initiative to be in relationship with God's creation. This intent is manifest in God's self-revelation to creation through Jesus Christ.

Despite wanting to understand the human condition, ecclesial condition included, as a mixture of faith and faithlessness, one is nevertheless challenged by one word that arises in discussion concerning salvation: Election.

2. Election.

Barth is not immune to this challenge and a great deal of his soteriological approach is governed by his understanding of divine election. The best place to find Barth's understanding of election is in CD II/2. Graafland (1987:509) agrees with this point. He adds (1987:509) that Barth's understanding of Election, as described in CD II/2 (written in about 1944), was not a new development in his theology. Barth already developed a basic understanding of this theology in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*. We find further evidence of Barth's thinking around this subject in addresses to universities in Hungary and Romania in 1936, which appeared later in the series *Theologische Existenz heute* (Graafland 1987:509).

Graafland raises another point: “Die verkiezingsleer is voor Barth van het begin af aan het hart geweest van zijn theologie, waarin tevens de diepste motieven van zijn theologie tot uiting komen”⁷⁴ (1987:509). Barth placed the Doctrine of Election before his discussion of the Doctrine of God. To Graafland (1987:509), this is an intentional move. By placing the Doctrine of Election before the Doctrine of God in *Church Dogmatics*, Barth describes the nature of God’s relationship with humanity before investigating who God is.

By placing the doctrines in this order, Barth manages to give sufficient emphasis to the Doctrine of Election, while sketching the scene for the doctrines to come. God’s revealing Word described in CD I establishes the point that God does not remain hidden. The Doctrine of Election follows this doctrine, giving the reason for God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Only when humanity stands before the revealed God, receiving God’s Word of grace, can it start to speak about who it understands God to be.

By giving the Doctrine of Election such prominence in his theology, the reader is forced to hold onto this notion when reading the rest of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. The Doctrine of Election is the reason God reveals Godself, reaches out to humanity and offers a restored relationship, thereby establishing the Kingdom of God.

Deze keus van God voor de mens is so diep in het Godzijn van God gegrond, dat ‘Gott wirklich in diese seine Urtat eingeht’. Hij wendt zich tot de mens geheel van binnenuit, zodat er geen neutrale, causale afstand bleeft, die te vergelijken zou zijn met die van een pottenbakker en zijn vat, het beeld uit Rom. 9, dat in die klassieke, causaal gestructureerde predestinatieleer zozeer geliefd was. Nee, God komt in zijn genade zo dicht by de mens, dat deze een plaats krijgt in het binneste van zijn zijn en zijn willen. God wil met de mens

⁷⁴ “From early on, the Doctrine of Election was at the heart of Barth’s theology, giving expression to the deepest motives in his theology.” (My translation).

samen zijn op de meest innige wijze. God als subject der verkiezing end de mens als object ervan sluiten zich hier samen tot een diepe eenheid (Graafland 1987:510)⁷⁵.

The breakdown of the sections in this volume already gives a clear outline of how Barth interprets election. Barth (CD II/2:3-76) starts his conversation by describing the doctrine of election as one of Grace. This already sets a positive tone for further discussion, where one might be tempted to view an Augustinian or early Calvinist definitions as sources for great anxiety and fear.

To Barth, speaking about election as a doctrine of grace can only be adequately defined in the portrayal of the election of Jesus Christ (CD II/2:77-194). This will be made clearer later in this chapter. As Jesus becomes the possibility of election in creation, so we find the election of the community (CD II/2:195-258). Jesus becomes the instrument, the point of contact between Creator and the created whereby God can freely and openly express God's intentions for the created realm. By revealing Godself through Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, the receivers of this revelation are bound together by one common point: Jesus Christ. So, the whole creation forms part of a community formed by God in grace. Individuals in the created realm then have the freedom to either respond to this self-revelation of God in Christ, or to ignore it. Either way, the bond of God's self-expression still forms part of their lives and identity. This may become a conscious factor in their existential experience by

⁷⁵ "The choice of God for humanity is grounded so deep in God's God-ness, that 'God indeed expresses it in God's original acts'. God identifies with humanity from the inside-out, so that no neutral, causal distance exists like that described in the image of a Potter in Romans 9. This image of a classic causal predestination is very popular. No. God, in God's, grace comes so close to humanity, that the latter finds a place in God and God's Will. God wants to be with humanity in the most intimate way. God as subject of Election and humanity as the object thereof, creates a relationship where God and humanity are joined together in a deep unity." (My translation).

accepting this gift in faith. It is only here that the focus turns to the election of the individual (CD II/2:306-507).

It may not seem greatly significant, but this “order of salvation” speaks volumes in terms of God’s approach, not only to the individual, but also to the church. From the onset, Barth’s definition of election differs from the traditional understanding of predestination. When Barth speaks of election of the individual he gives a sobering perspective. It is bound in the understanding that election does not begin with the election of the individual, but starts with the choice for grace, the expression of grace in Jesus Christ, the election of the community of Israel and the Church (CD II/2:308)⁷⁶ and then only can we speak of the election of the individual.

To Barth (CD II/2:309), the thesis of double predestination does not do justice to the testimony of Holy Scripture and therefore proposes an altered understanding of this doctrine. In double predestination, Scriptural testimony would demand an answer to the following question: If God had already pre-ordained some to salvation and others to eternal damnation, then why do we have such an extensive recorded history of God being involved in the realm of creation, obviously working towards the restoration of creation to its intended glory and reflecting a coherent relationship with its Maker?

The *telos* of double predestination suggests a neo-Platonic duality which places God

⁷⁶ Later theologians like Jürgen Moltmann continue this understanding of salvation. Moltmann (1996:1-340) speaks about eschatology, but defines salvation in the light of this doctrine. The chapter headings Personal eschatology (1996:47), Historical eschatology (1996:129), Cosmic eschatology (1996:257) and Divine eschatology (1996:321) suggest a traditional understanding of salvation and eschatology. This professes that God’s work starts with the individual’s salvation. As individuals experience salvation, so God is able to work in history, in the cosmos and so fulfil God’s own expectations of relationship with creation. Such a reading of Moltmann is incorrect. Moltmann starts from the opposite side. Personal eschatology (and salvation) is dependant on Historical eschatology (and salvation). That, in turn, is dependant on God’s Cosmic work, which in turn hinges on God’s initial choice and commitment to embark on this eschatological and salvific journey. Moltmann’s theology is perfectly summed up in the following statement “*So the Kingdom of God is a more integral symbol of the eschatological hope than eternal life*” (Moltmann 1996:133).

in the position of having to physically re-create creation if God wishes to be in full relationship with it. Those who have received the gift of election to eternal life, can then form part of the Divine reality, while those who are the recipients of eternal damnation, can only experience eternal Divine abandonment.

Salvation history does not seem to fit into this picture. Neither does the reasoning behind God calling a specific people. Holy Scripture testifies to God calling two different sets of people. God first creates the community of Israel under the Covenant relationship between God and the Patriarchs and then, later, the Church is called to be both “the Body of Christ” and tasked to share the news of God’s grace to the whole of creation.

At first, there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with this reasoning, but the problem arises when one considers the following: Why does God first call a people, Israel, and then forms an extended community called the Church? In double predestination there are only two groups of people, namely those who have been elected to eternal life and those who have been elected to eternal damnation. If God calls a specific community to be in relationship with God, then we can safely assume that this community would form part of God’s elect.

Nevertheless Holy Scripture does not stop at the election of Israel. The post-exilic prophets suggested a community beyond Israel. The New Testament, in turn, gives rise to another community called the Church. Before proceeding with this argument, certain observations need to be made. If double predestination were the full testimony of God’s relationship with creation, then it would suggest the following. First, we

would assume that the community of Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament, consisted of those elected for eternal salvation, while those who did not form part of this community would be excluded from salvation. God's election would therefore be ethnically based. This argument can be countered as Israel comprised many different ethnic groups (especially after the settlement in the Promised Land), only is bound by the Covenant between God and the people.

What happens now with the rise of the Church? As stated in the previous chapter, the Church is both the continuation of Israel, yet is a distinct entity from it. The Church is both linked with- and independent of Israel. What would double predestination then make of the Church? Who is then the elect? Israel or the Church? Can it be Israel and the Church? If this change from "only Israel" to "Israel and the Church" took place, or if it moved from "Only Israel" to "Only Church" then it would mean that there was a change in God's criteria for election. Double predestination in the context of Israel and the Church thus does not seem to be a viable explanation for a soteriological approach. If it were, then double predestination has no way of being able to reconcile the election of the community with its proposal of the election of the individual.

Barth's understanding of election is more inclusive and is not dependant on God's differentiation between those whom God elected to eternal life or eternal damnation. In the manner which God forms the community, by the choice for grace, it seems as if the Covenant pre-empts the formation of the community as where the traditional interpretation of the formation of Israel suggests a process that is the other way around. Barth's (CD II/2:306-507) approach to election in the form of God's election of the community therefore includes all individuals by default. To use the term "by

default” is nevertheless incorrect for this would imply that God is obligated to include certain individuals into the group of elect, using a specific set of criteria. This leads us to a situation where the criteria for election then supersede God’s grace and God’s Free Will. Barth’s alternative understanding is then portrayed in God’s choice to elect all, therefore creating the possibility of the existence and continuation of Israel and/or the Church in every individual.

In Barth’s understanding of election, there is nevertheless an order of salvation that sounds like that proposed by Catholicism. “Protestant Christianity...makes the individual’s relation to the church dependant on his relation to Christ, whereas Catholicism makes the individual’s relation to Christ dependant on his relation to the church” (Mangina 1999:269)⁷⁷. The Catholic position as revealed in this statement sounds similar to Barth’s approach. However, it is somewhat different to what Barth was trying to convey.

The difference lies in the major issue Barth has with Catholic theology, namely that of *analogia entis* vs. *analogia fidei* (Mangina 1999:272). The order of salvation in Barth’s soteriology, namely the election of Christ, the election of the community and then the election of the individual, may seem to suggest that the individual’s election and salvation is dependant on the individual’s relationship to the church only. This can only be the case in an indirect, figurative way. As we have noted in earlier chapters, the church as institution cannot replace, or be a progression, or a substitute for the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Barth’s “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (CD II/2:197) is therefore different to the same statement made by the Catholic tradition.

⁷⁷ Mangina is partly quoting Schleiermacher, F. 1928. *The Christian Faith*. Translated by H.R. Mackintosh. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. p. 103.

The church can at best only be a reflection of the Saviour, therefore making the church the bearer of a testimony concerning her Saviour. This is an act of faith.

The act of salvation is therefore not captured in the individual's ability to identify or belong to what is believed to be God's chosen community, but is fully dependant upon the Free Will of God to show grace. God's grace is an act of God's Free Will. In as much as we are redeemed by God's grace, a fact that we receive and hold onto in faith, so God too has the freedom, despite our faith, to reject us (Barth 1991:454). The Church as God's elect is therefore not a responsive consequence of human faith, but is the underlying work of God's grace in every individual that may only find fulfilment in the individual's faithful recognition and submission to this Divine act.

The concept that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all humanity has become part of a new creation and has been blessed by being included in the Divine community called by God, "revokes" the freedom of a human response to God as a pivotal point for the possibility of individual salvation. This is what Barth would call "Brutal grace": where humanity is "doomed to salvation" (Bosch 1980:215). "The centrality of the Atonement is thus not the centrality of a doctrine of the Atonement, but the centrality of the act of Atonement in which God is God" (Sykes 1979:40).

For God to be able to pronounce God's grace over creation, thereby creating the possibility for salvation to take place, Barth (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123) finds the full expression of God's denial of human sinfulness, and God's acceptance of humankind in the person of Jesus Christ, specifically in the Cross: "Man can be saved only by God through man's complete ruin: That is why the Cross stands at the center

of the life of Christ” (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123). Election as grace therefore finds completion in the election of Jesus Christ first before the act of election can find full expression in both the community and the individual.

Even in the case of classic double-predestination, the church has no means of knowing what criteria can be used to assess whether a particular individual has been elected or rejected by God. It can make no claim on Divine justice and is certainly not in the place to make a pronouncement on whether God rejects or for that matter, accepts a particular person and/or community. This description of double predestination creates little space for understanding the grace of God, particularly as displayed in the life of Jesus Christ. Barth’s view of election seems to be congruent with the story of God’s involvement in human history as reflected by the testimony shared in Holy Scripture. Barth therefore cannot be described as an unbiblical theologian, proposing something so totally revolutionary that it may as well constitute a new religion.

Barth’s struggle with double predestination is perhaps the same one most people have with the concept, namely that it seems neither just nor grace-centred. Barth (1991:468-469) expresses this frustration, quite humorously, while reflecting on Lutheran cartoons of Calvinists, which have been in existence from as early as the 16th century. From these cartoons, Barth describes a picture where a man is lying on his deathbed accompanied by a Reformed pastor who then advises the dying man that Christ did not die for all, but has already decided who will be elected and rejected for all eternity. One can imagine the man’s response. Although a simplistic way of describing the Reformed notion of double predestination, it cuts to the heart of every

person's struggle with their relationship with God and their projection of what is to come in the here-after. It asks the question of assurance.

In the situation described in the cartoon there is no assurance of salvation. It creates the classic picture that the church is the bearer of bad news, testifying to a God who will not disclose the status of God's relationship with God's created beings. The only assurance that can be given is that God stands in relation to creation as the judge who alone decides the fate of God's creation.

Barth's understanding creates a different picture altogether. To Barth, the only way in which a person can understand predestination is in the notion that it refers to the "...divine attitude to all people at all times." (Barth 1991:469). Judgement therefore does not take place on the basis of a predestined verdict delivered at the end of time, but that through election, God has already made a pronouncement on all of God's creation before all time. Barth takes a Supralapsarian position, declaring, "...predestination is set at the *beginning* of God's ways." (Barth 1991:468). God is serious about God's relationship with creation and therefore does not naturally choose for creation to be segregated into two different entities that will either live in close relationship to God or experience eternal separation from God.

Election therefore stands even before creation, finding its pinnacle in God's acceptance of creation and creation's experience of complete harmony within itself and with God⁷⁸ as celebrated in the Sabbath. In this understanding of it, Election is not a reactive measure to counter the effect of humanity's choice to sin. If Election

⁷⁸ This point is argued in more detail by Moltmann (1985:276-296).

were a reaction to creation, and more specifically, creation's engaging in sinful activity, then the nature of grace would move from being a primary relational attitude that God shows to creation, to a sympathetic reaction to another's fallen state. Sin is a result of humanity using the Free Will that God has given as a gift. It is therefore impossible to think that God's Free Will to choose grace and the Election of humankind as a reactionary act. This form of Infralapsarianism⁷⁹ nullifies the nature of humanity's Free Will by suggesting that in the giving of this gift, God did not count into the equation the consequence of the negative impact sin would have on relationships. It also suggests that God's plan for creation was poorly defined and that God's interaction with creation is restricted to the way humanity uses Free Will.

Creation would therefore only be able to experience life in all its fullness if it plays according to God's rules. If it chooses to do otherwise, God would refuse to participate. It also suggests a healthy dose of pre-determinism.

This is where Barth's position is extremely helpful. If God has already chosen, before creation began, that the nature of God's relationship with creation would be governed by grace, electing creation to be in full relationship with God, then God's acts of revelation and salvation cannot merely be reactive approaches by God to reconcile the world to Godself, but that in God's revelation and salvific acts God declares a respect for Free Will whilst at the same time declaring God's "No!" to sin and God's "Yes!" to creation.

⁷⁹ "A doctrine on the Fall of creation and on election (predestination) that argues from a historical point of view, i.e. from man's point of view, or from a point of view from 'below' (*infra*) or 'on this side of' the fall (*lapsus*), e.g. in holding that election of individual believers did not begin until after the fall, that sin must have been included in God's decision to create man, and that election serves to reveal God's mercy to a fallen human race" (Deist 1984:125).

The point and goal of predestination is not therefore rejection, but rather election. (Barth 1991:460). The focus of Free Will is not creation's ability to rebel against God, but to freely respond to God's gift of Election in grace by faith, nurturing a natural and mutually loving relationship. Anything else would suggest that God is the indirect author of sin, responsible for human rebellion and, by extension of the argument, an unjust judge.

The possibility for Assurance now becomes feasible. Assurance, from the human perspective can only be a reflective- and relative understanding (Barth 1991:469). It is reflective in the sense that creation is only able to look back at God's revelation of grace in Jesus Christ and so become aware of the work of restoration done in self through the power of the Spirit. Assurance is relative, because only God has the absolute perspective on the issue of Election. One could argue that this precise point calls Assurance into question once again, but Barth holds to the idea that Assurance is more concerned with the individual's and community's sense of the unchangeable Will of God (Barth 1991:454) than the destination of their eternal state of being. To have it the other way around would cause humanity to have a false sense of confidence in itself, depending on the Assurance of eternal life and neglecting its own transformation to righteousness.

To summarize: As much as a person is not born with the gift of "not having to be saved", so according to Barth's understanding of salvation, a person is not born with the curse of being beyond God's salvific ability and/or purpose.

To describe the process of the individual's Election, we have to go back to Barth's understanding of election and review the role and importance of Jesus Christ.

3. The personal nature of the Incarnation.

God's personal decision to bring to realization a relationship with creation that is determined by grace requires that God is also personally involved in the unfolding of salvation within the restrictions of the created dimensions of time and space. Even if God determines that grace is the standard for God's relationship with creation, God cannot leave it to the created order to recognize this gift, nor is creation able to implement the order of grace in its own strength, for it has fallen to sin. The focal point of God's salvific act for Barth is therefore captured in the idea that God took it upon Godself to deliver the world (CD IV/1:215). This is done completely and perfectly in the Incarnation.

Incarnational theology has to have as a starting point the notion that God's motive is one of reconciliation with creation and not an act of wrath. In his sermon entitled "Jesus and Judas", Barth (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123) gives a clear, but concise, definition of the Incarnation by stating "He did not come to announce the ruin of mankind. He came to reveal God and save men". This is the crucial point in Barth's understanding of Incarnational theology.

Jesus Christ is first the revelation of God. Although creation may not be able to grasp this tremendous gift and miracle in time and space, Jesus' presence is God's presence in the world in a way that God has never been revealed before. The very nature of Christ in His lifestyle and interaction with people gives a clear revelation of God's

gracious dealing with creation. God, in Jesus, is equally accessible to shepherds and wise men, to a Samaritan woman and Pilate alike. A God of wrath is not an accessible God and such a god's nature would not allow for gracious dealings, but would be much closer to the Messianic expectation of a great warrior who would destroy all Israel's enemies and re-establish the monarchic line of David.

God's first choice is to be in relationship with creation, despite its ability and constant will to rebel against God. This Supralapsarian⁸⁰ position is further supported by Barth's exposition on 1 Timothy 4:4-5⁸¹ (Barth 1961:94-95). In this sermon, the primal announcement of God's view of creation becomes the premise for all God's dealings with the created realm. God calls creation "Good", displaying God's belief in the goodness of creation. God works towards the eternal establishment of this "Good" reality. For God to call creation, and every creature in creation, "Good" is a significant statement on God's chosen relationship with each creature. It expresses the beauty of God's creation in the light of God's personal interest in creation. Nowhere is this beauty and interest better portrayed than in the Incarnation (Barth 1961:95). The belief that "Each creature of God is wholly and unreservedly good" (Barth 1961:94) is not only portrayed in the person of Jesus Christ, but it is also the basis of the annunciation of this revelation.

The annunciation of the Birth of Christ serves as the proclamation of the personal nature of the Incarnation and God's belief in creation's potential for good. Barth

⁸⁰ "The view that those who would be saved had been elected by God *from eternity*, and were not (as is maintained in infralapsarianism) elected after the Fall only (referred to also as antelapsarianism)" (Deist 1984:248).

⁸¹ A sermon preached to prisoners on 6 October 1957.

(1961:23)⁸², reflecting on the Angel's words "To you is born, this day a Saviour..." (Luke 2:1-14), explains that the Incarnation is not so much the start of a universal blanket-amnesty offered by God, but in the general Will for salvation of creation. The Incarnation is a personal act of revelation to each and every person. As much as Barth emphasises the point that the Incarnation is personal, both to God and to the individual, so the Incarnation in Barth's theology is portrayed as an event that is in time, but that simultaneously transcends the limitations of time (Barth 1961:24-25). If salvation were up to creation, one could expect an attitude causing continuous postponement of the reconciliation between creation and God. Vlijm (1956:60) makes this point when stating: "Juist de glovige zal de eerste zijn om te erkennen, dat deze poging niet een aanloop was om tot geloof te komen, maar dat zijn religieuziteit een weerstand tegen de openbaring vormde"⁸³ Vlijm says this, adding to the idea that God's self-revelation does not reach a human recipient who remains neutral to the experience.

It is like a person thinking that salvation and the process of making peace with one's Maker is an issue for the deathbed, an event still distant and in the future. Barth's (1961:25) notion of the soteriological aspect of the Incarnation suggests that the work of God is neither locked in the past, as if the Incarnation is a past event that we merely have to remember, nor is salvation delayed to a future pronouncement of acceptance at the Last Judgment, but is secured in each and every moment. Each moment is therefore also an Incarnational moment.

⁸² A sermon preached to prisoners on Christmas Day 1954.

⁸³ "The believer will be the first to admit that such an attempt did not result in a 'coming to faith', but that religiosity acts as a resistance against revelation" (My translation).

The Incarnation is part of a greater process. If salvation were complete in the Incarnation alone, then we could assume that if Herod managed to find the Christ-child and killed Him, that the salvific process would not have been compromised. The Incarnation leads Christ down a further path, namely that of humility and obedience. It is in His obedience and humility that the revelation of God's grace becomes clearer to the created realm. Hans Küng explains:

...the secret of the true Godhead of Jesus Christ consists in Christ's being true God at the same identical time that He is man, in that His obedience is as Son and that in His obedience He humbles Himself even unto death on the cross. In His humiliation He is Reconciler and thus is true God (1964:37).

The Incarnation and life of Jesus Christ then lead to the pinnacle of God's salvific act. This is found in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Mangina (1999:275) describes Barth's view of the act of reconciliation in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as two distinct divine actions. The first is found in the Cross, where Jesus becomes the "Judge judged in our place" (Mangina 1999:275). In this event, Christ takes upon Himself the godforsaken state the world finds itself in. This event therefore becomes "the end of the world".⁸⁴ The second is found in the Resurrection, which serves both as a vindication of Jesus' life and death, but also as the proclamation of a new possibility for humanity — the ability to live in grace rather than in the shadow of sin. This is a new creation — the new world has started. The Incarnation deserves special recognition, as it is a distinct event giving full account of the extent of God's grace to the world.

⁸⁴ Mangina argues using the following quote: "If God in Jesus Christ has reconciled the world with himself, this also means that in him he has made an end, a radical end, of the world which contradicts and opposes him, that an old aeon, our world-time (the one we know and have ourselves) with all that counts and is great in it, has been brought to an end. The humility in which God willed to make himself like us, the obedience of Jesus Christ in which this self-humiliation of God and in it the demonstration of his divine majesty became a temporal event, does mean, in fact, that our hour has struck, our time has run its course, and it is all up with us." (CD IV/1:294).

4. Salvation.

Justification and Sanctification are the end products of the work of God in the process of the Incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Barth (CD IV/2:523) is quick to add that both the processes of justification and sanctification are Trinitarian works. One may be tempted to think that Barth's emphasis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ comes at the expense of the rest of the Trinity's involvement in the salvific process. This is nevertheless unfounded. The Son stands as example, in the full revelation, support and will of the Father, empowered by the Spirit as one person who is truly righteous and displays the life of the sanctified person.

It is by the same Son that this justification and sanctification of the individual is possible by the power of the Spirit, and so receives God's "Yes" of justification and sanctification. The process of justification and sanctification therefore bring to reality the essence of the Covenantal relationship between God and creation.

One of the most apt depictions of sanctification Barth offers is found in a sermon entitled "Nevertheless I am continually with thee", preached to prisoners on 1 August 1954 (Barth 1961:13-19). The text used is Psalm 73:23. Focussing on the text's expression of God holding our right hands, Barth explains that a person's right hand is usually the strong hand, the hand used for writing, working and, if necessary, defending oneself⁸⁵. The right hand is symbolic of ourselves. It symbolizes the notion in human living of having to control and shape one's own life. This text expresses that God holds our right hand, which means that our right hand is not free – He is holding

⁸⁵ Assuming a person is right-handed.

it, meaning that ultimate control and direction of one's life is not in one's own hands, but that humanity depends largely on the direction and control of God's hand.

This is the essence of the Christian gospel. God holds the hand of the one professing a particular creedal faith in God, but also, by God's grace, the assurance of God's presence and positive Will for all people is given in the testimony of Holy Scripture (Barth 1961:51). This demands a great sense of humility not only from God, but from creation as well. Creation needs to acknowledge that it holds no rights to salvation, but that its reconciled state with God is an act of God's grace, something that creation itself is unable to achieve.

The space for personal sanctification becomes a possibility in the resurrection of Christ. This is what completes the possibility of reconciliation between God and creation (CD IV/1:351). The resurrection of Christ announces the possibility for each individual to experience the full extent of a reconciled state with God. This possibility is open to all people equally and does not discriminate. It is as if this relational state lies dormant in the individual until the person willingly acknowledges the work done for him/her in the Christ-event. Barth (CD II/2:458) describes the process as follows: "It is that from being a reluctant and indirect witness he should become a willing and direct witness to the election of Jesus Christ and His community".

The human effort to make itself righteous and holy is an impossible task. Barth (1957:14-15) describes the human effort to become righteous. He compares this drive to be holy to the event of the building of the Tower of Babel. The moral of the story is

that the more we try to achieve something that is clearly not dependant on our own doing, the more the goal will evade us. The attempt is nothing but an act of pride.

Sanctification, although initiated by justification is the process of a new creation (CD IV/2:514) taking shape. It is not new in the sense that the original creation will be destroyed or that it is deemed to be redundant. Such a suggestion would imply that God did not create perfectly and renders salvation to a divine effort to make something that is broken, somewhat acceptable. The alteration that takes place in the person is in a change of direction. The same is true for the salvation of a community as well as the whole of creation. Sanctification, and the change that it brings, is bound in the words of Jesus to the disciples: “Follow me” (CD IV/2:533).

In grace, God chooses to save, brings about the possibility of salvation for each person and then calls each individual to discipleship. This is a calling to discipline. The discipline of being a person justified and sanctified by God, carries two responsibilities. Barth (CD IV/2:526) suggests that the person is called into fellowship, but also called to witness.

What about the church? This is the point of contact between the church and individuals, those who are faithful and faithless. The fellowship of those who have submitted themselves to the justifying and sanctifying work of God form the core of the Christian community, called the Church. It is therefore evident that the Church’s first responsibility to the faithful and the faithless is to merely exist. The presence of the Church in the world creates the place for the Body to join together and offer

opportunities for corporate worship, communal prayer, participation in the Sacraments and assistance for those in its midst who find themselves in need.

The existence of the Church is itself a witness. Witnessing inside the Church, among those dedicated to the process of justification and sanctification, carries the same characteristics as the witness to those who have not responded to the gift of grace. Witnessing, in this sense, involves self-denial and the professing of the act of love generously revealed in grace by Jesus Christ (CD IV/2:546).

The struggle in the church⁸⁶ is that its practices do not always relay the message of God's grace that goes before the world, that it portrays a community that consists of people who have been able to meet certain criteria of righteousness, that it assumes the power to deny access to worship, the sacraments and therefore the acceptance of God. One can safely say that any of these flaws border on heresy.

5. Teaching on the Sacrament of Baptism.

With this understanding of salvation and the description of the extent of God's grace to the world, one would not blame the church for responding to Barth by either being speechless or by objecting vehemently.

The church could object to this liberal view by stating that it devalues certain church practices, such as baptism and limiting its meaning. This objection is justified, because baptism is widely celebrated as a Sacrament of entry into the Body of Christ. Barth's view of election demands that the church gives a very specific explanation of

⁸⁶ Note that here we refer to the Institutional church.

what it means by celebrating entry into the community of faith using this sacrament. There is an interesting dynamic. On reading Barth, the assumption can be made that Barth had very little regard for the Sacraments. The contrary is true and is clearly reflected in, for instance, the Göttingen Dogmatics (Barth 1991:26-27). Here we find three instruments that cultivate faith. They are preaching (proclamation), the sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

One nevertheless has to ask the following questions concerning the sacrament of baptism: Does it imply that one is not part of the Christian community if one has not been baptized? Is baptism a license to live as a Christ-follower, without which a person is regarded as a mere spectator of the Christian faith? All of these questions suggest that the church is able to use certain practices to measure whether a person is part of the community of faith. This is incongruent with Barth's understanding of salvation. It is for this reason that Barth raised certain objections to the church's understanding of, specifically, the sacrament of baptism.

In "The Teaching of the church regarding baptism" (Yocum 2004:97) delivered in 1943, Barth rejected the concept that Baptism had any salvific power of its own, but claimed it served as a symbolic gesture celebrating the salvation of the one being baptized. It is for this reason that infant baptism does not make sense in Barth's Ecclesiology or soteriology. If baptism is a celebration of something greater than itself, then it means that the salvific act of God in the person's life had already taken place. The celebration of the sacrament of baptism can therefore be compared to a child blowing out their birthday candle in the midst of their friends. A child may look forward to his/her birthday party, more specifically when he/she gets the opportunity

to blow-out the candle and hears his/her friend's appreciation of the moment by singing "Happy Birthday". That is the moment when the child's birthday may seem more real than any other moment. The fact is that it had been their birthday the whole day. It would have been their birthday irrespective whether they had the opportunity to blow out the candle or not. It would have been their birthday even if they didn't have a party. Their friends would have been their friends, whether there was a party or not.

Similarly, the grace of God extends to all people whether they acknowledge it or not. The church should be present and open to all people whether they are "faithful" or "faithless". But what a special occasion it is when a person professes their faith in God's act of grace and is afforded an opportunity to celebrate this divine act in the midst of friends. Baptism has no salvific power in itself, just as a birthday candle does not have the ability to make it someone's birthday. Yet both are powerful symbols. Baptism is therefore an outward symbol of an inner truth. The emphasis being on the word "symbol".

"And the meaning of Baptism is just this — that we have this promise of participation in this inconceivable life of God. God's life for us in Christ – in us through the Holy Spirit – that is the Christian life" (Barth 1962:14). Baptism implies a new way of living, a new moral-code that suggests a new set of standards that are raised in the person. Baptism is therefore also the celebration of discipline. Barth (1982:128) suggests that this principle of God's discipline is clearly portrayed in the case of raising of children. When children grow, they do so in an environment where there are, amongst other influences, issues of discipline and punishment. Discipline is not

the same as punishment, and cannot be held equally as a means to effect obedience. Correct discipline creates moral boundaries and therefore becomes a measure in life of right and wrong. Where an offence has occurred, a child is brought to discipline, reminded of the difference between right and wrong. Punishment, on the other hand, has no pre-emptive moral-code. Logic tells us that a child who grows in a home where s/he learns from being punished, can only find a place of acceptance where punishment is absent. “Acceptance” is therefore measured by the absence of punishment. Where discipline is used, “Acceptance” is a reality that is not dependant on the absence of discipline, but re-enforced by its presence.

Discipline therefore has a twofold character. It is first directed towards the establishment of certain principles in the life of the individual and the community that shapes the way in which we understand the morality of humanity. Second, it is a word of grace, calling back from the wilderness, those who have strayed from its path.

Barth (KD IV/4:112)⁸⁷ illustrates the nature of baptism well in the following quote:

*Die Taufe... ist nicht Gnadenträger, nicht Gnadenmittel, nicht Instrument der Gnade. Die Taufe antwortet auf das eine ‘Mysterium’, das eine ‘Sakrament’, der Geschichte Jesu, seiner Auferstehung, der Ausgiessung des Heiligen Geistes: sie selbst ist kein Mysterium, kein Sakrament*⁸⁸

To make baptism anything more than the celebration of God’s “Yes!” to the individual, would be an error by falling into the trap of turning a symbol into that which it symbolizes. The act of baptism cannot, in itself, be the instrument of God’s grace to either the individual or the community. It can at best be the celebration of God’s grace in the individual and in the community. In infant Baptism, too much

⁸⁷ As quoted in (Floor 1986:11-12).

⁸⁸ “Baptism... is not a conveyor of grace, means nor instrument of grace. Baptism is a response to the ‘mystery’, the ‘Sacrament’ of the story of Jesus, His resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: it is itself neither a mystery, nor a Sacrament” (My translation).

value is placed on baptism where families are pressured by their peers or other family members to baptize their children, thereby conforming to social expectations. This cannot be regarded as a sacrament, but as a religious act — a practise that we have already defined in Barthian terms as unbelief.

How do we then understand the Great Commission⁸⁹? In this light, the baptism of the nations has two significant implications. The first is to attest to the fact that their salvation is not won by themselves, but is a Trinitarian act of grace. The focus of the Great Commission is not on the practice of baptism, but more specifically on the duty of Christian disciples to be present in the world and to be bearers of the news of God's grace. The second, is that it is a joyful celebration of the new converts' freedom from the burden of sin. If baptism were to be a militant church-practice, then the consequence would be a message that salvation is only possible in and through the church, and the occasion is robbed of joy and negates the freedom of the one being baptized. The Sacraments, but very specifically that of Baptism, must then be seen as "...grateful responses to, and attestations for, the divine act of election and reconciliation" (Yocum 2004:97).

The Great Commission then becomes a helpful tool to give direction to the church in its mission to the "faithless". It first recognizes that it consists of disciples itself. This implies that those who form part of the church are not born without the need for redemption, but that individuals in the church have experienced, and are experiencing the grace of God within their lives. This grace is not earned, but has been the decision for each person before the world began. It is by grace, through Jesus Christ (in the

⁸⁹ Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus explicitly states that Baptism is part of the disciples' ministry.

power of the Spirit), that a community is formed — a community of both those who have and those who have not responded to God’s salvific act. The church’s responsibility through its presence in the world is to share its own testimony of its experience of God in Jesus Christ to the rest of the world.

It cannot do more than that. This work is sufficient in itself. Through the Sacraments, especially Baptism, the church is able to facilitate the celebration of God’s work in each person. Through fellowship, each individual, irrespective of how far they have travelled down the road of faith, is encouraged to grow in their relationship with God and with those around them.

6. Universalism.

Does Barth not advocate a case for universalism using this view of election and salvation? According to Busch (1976:302), Barth’s view of election should not be misunderstood as being an argument for universalism. He argues this point in the following way:

He guarded against that by making the ‘open multiplicity of those who are elect in Jesus Christ into a closed group’ – whether the elect were a particular group of people or the totality of mankind. In view of this ‘open multiplicity’ the ‘elect community’ has no more urgent task than proclaim the gospel of the grace of God (Busch 1976:302).

Barth himself speaks about the Universalist tendency in his understanding in the following way: “...it can only be a matter of the unexpected work of grace.” (CD IV/3:477). An understanding of universal salvation as a form of blanket amnesty, is to Barth nothing but a tendency where humanity waits expectantly on a form of “cheap

grace” (CD IV/2:505).⁹⁰ This is simply not a possibility. Universal salvation is nevertheless a possibility in the sense that all people are offered the gift of grace and therefore have the opportunity to respond in faith. To deny this possibility would lead us down the road of a definite double-outcome eschatology.

Looking back in history, one might argue that a double-outcome is already assured as history testifies to the lives of tyrants, such as Adolf Hitler. Are people like this, who by human judgment, have broken the parameters of righteous living, not guaranteed the existence of eternal damnation?

The church should respond with the testimony that it is not there to judge, but simply to witness to God’s gift of grace. “It is not for fallen sinners to deduce what God ‘must’ do in consummating his work of salvation” (Hunsinger 2000b:244). The church simply does not have the means to determine whether God’s grace only extends to those who are physically alive. How far does God’s grace then extend? Is it possible that God’s grace extends beyond the parameters of life and death?

There are no definite answers to these questions. So, what happens to those who perpetually deny the work done for them in Jesus Christ? Do they have the freedom to remain outside God’s grace? This, in terms of Barth’s understanding of election, is a totally illogical proposal (CD II/2:454-455). Rejection of the work done on their behalf, a work by God for creation, is completely possible. Denial nevertheless does not undo the work done by God in Jesus Christ. If the individual can choose to be outside of God’s gracious act of redemption, thereby negating salvation, then the

⁹⁰ Barth uses this term “Cheap Grace”, recognising that the term was first used in this context by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

following assumptions are made. First, that God's work in Christ is not done for the whole of creation, but that God's work is merely an offer which can be accepted or declined by individual created beings (CD II/2:454). Second, that the individual can take back the "godforsaken" state that Christ carried on behalf of the entire created order. For a person therefore to deny, or ignore, the work of God does not force that person out of God's line-of-sight. It does not classify the person as "rejected", for this category has been removed from the created order by God's divine act in the Cross. All that it can say about the individual, is that, despite their denial of the Divine work done for them, that this is the "worst" they can do as a response to God. It is precisely for this person that the Incarnation, Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ become necessary and eternally valid (CD II/2:455).

"Barth leaves the question of universalism open, yet keeping it as an object of the church's continual prayer and hope" (Hunsinger 2000b:12). For this reason, the church has a responsibility to exist in the world. To neglect its own existence and to surrender hope for those whom humankind has judged as unworthy is not a true reflection of its calling.

Another argument against Barth's universalistic tendency is "...the supposed impact it would have on weakening the church's mission of evangelism" (Hunsinger 2000b:12). This, too, is a misinterpretation of what Barth is proposing. In the light of God's universal revelation, the church has the responsibility to share the Good News of God's grace to the world. The church is furthermore not tasked to convince the world of this truth. Barth does not seem to be interested in apologetics — proving or convincing non-believers of the relevance of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, he

seeks a way to communicate the message of the gospel effectively to those who do not form part of the Christian faith.

The purpose of the church is therefore: “The positive will of God is that this loving-kindness should be revealed to us in proclamation and faith, that we might live by and with it” (CD II/2:458). Although it cannot be deduced, universal salvation must be held as a possibility, for the nature of God’s salvific work points in that direction (CD IV/3:478).

Perhaps the following words of Barth can shape the way in which the church understands its mission to those who do not form part of its fellowship: “First, I have to recognize that I can meet others only in God’s name. Certainly my I must be the Thou that binds them. But it must bind them, not to me, but through me to Christ.” (Barth 1981:371).

Chapter 6

Barth's definition of Church in politics and culture.

“Fürchtet Gott, ehret den König!” (1 Petr. 2:17)⁹¹

1. Introduction.

This chapter provides a description of Barth's views on Church, its role in politics and its relationship to culture. This is done by identifying the way in which the church participates in the social-realm through its relationship with the State. The historic religious question asks whether there is a natural mutually determining relationship between church and State. The church may ask whether faith and politics should mix, while a secular state may question the authority from which the church claims to speak. Culture determines the bias in this relationship to a large extent.

History has shown that Church-state dynamics is not an either/or relationship, where either the authority of the Church or that of the State should function as the ruling norm. Karl Barth describes the dynamics of this relationship, within the context of culture, in the way his faith engages with the political status quo. Once we understand this relationship better, Barth's definition of the church will prove to be more effective in its evangelical voice, speaking to those who guide its citizens through political power.

⁹¹ 1 Peter 2:17 is quoted as the substantive text of the fifth article of the Barmen Declaration.

2. Karl Barth's political activity and theology.

On reading Karl Barth's theology and then looking at his engagement with the political world, one is left asking the question whether Barth struggled with the question of the church-State relationship, or whether he knew the answer and acted on it. Some key moments in Barth's life where his political awareness shaped the way he viewed Church-State relationship are examined. This is not an exclusive list of events, but that it reveals how seriously Barth took political activity in his faith.

From an early age, Barth displayed a deep sense of social awareness and acted on it while fulfilling his pastoral role in Safenwil. It is here that Barth was an active lecturer in the Continuing Education programme of the Safenwil Arbeiterverein (Hood 1984:33). It was also no secret that Barth joined the Social Democrats, and even in this political role, he advanced with great strides through its ranks.

In 1916, Barth became the president of the Social Democrat's conference, a position that would give him opportunities to speak boldly against socio-economic, and political injustices. Barth was known for the way he was able to speak honestly about issues, which he believed concerned not only the church, but also society at large (Busch 1976:88). An example was Barth's open opposition to the institution of the office of the Reichsbischof⁹² (Erler 1984:182-183). Barth was convinced that the church could never be a mouthpiece for the State, and that this office would undermine the independence and critical stance of the church in relation to the State. A year later, Barth participated in the formation of the Barmen Declaration; a

⁹² "State (Kingdom) Bishop" (My translation). Krötke (2006:268) cites this event as one of the reasons for the German Christians' adherence to the religious-ideological principles of the Reichskirche. The Barmen Theological Confession serves as a response to this relationship between Church and State.

document that to this day is widely used to describe the responsibility of the State as seen through the eyes of the church.

Barth's outspokenness and refusal to pledge his allegiance to the Führer did not come without a price. In 1935, Barth was forbidden to speak in public and was subsequently relieved of his post at the University of Bonn. This nevertheless did not stop him from teaching as he immediately took up a post at the University of Basel.

The question that arises out of observing Barth's political interaction is: How does Barth understand the relationship between church and State that would drive him to act in the described manner? This question is open to debate. Many have also tried to answer this question from different angles. Jüngel (1992), attempts to answer this question from a purely doctrinal point of view, while an author like Marquardt (1972) maintains that Barth's political affiliation tended to colour his theology. Three documents are important in this critique – The Barmen Declaration, the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* and the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*. Let us look at both Jüngel and Marquardt's views:

2.1 A Doctrinal argument.

Jüngel presents an argument, using as his premise the fifth thesis of the Barmen Declaration⁹³. From the start it has to be acknowledged that it is risky to use the

⁹³ “Fear God, honour the King!” (1 Peter. 2:17)

Scripture tells us that by divine appointment the State, in this still unredeemed world in which also the Church is situated, has the task of maintaining justice and peace, so far as human discernment and human ability make this possible, by means of the threat and use of force. The Church acknowledges with gratitude and reverence toward God the benefit of this, his appointment. It draws attention to God's Kingdom.

Barmen Declaration to prove something about Barth's theological stance as Barth was not the sole author of the Declaration, but was certainly one of the main contributors⁹⁴.

Jüngel (1992:37) is able to use Thesis 5 as he views this part of the Declaration to be word for word Barth's handiwork. According to Jüngel (1992:37-38), Barth – who is a staunch opponent of the Luther's Two-Kingdom theory, here displays something of a contradiction by reworking this classic doctrine. Although subtle, the Thesis indeed creates the impression that church and State are two opposing forces which will never be able to speak from the same side. Hood comes to the same conclusion, but adds that the *telos* of Thesis 5 is different from that of the classic Two-Kingdom theory. Thesis 5 gives the impression that, although different, church and State can operate in God's Kingdom on earth, if the State recognises that its authority is not self-driven, but a God-given gift. If this is true, then the State should be subject to God and therefore accept the voice of the church as a testimony of what God is revealing (Hood 1984:168). Jüngel (1992:45) agrees with this point of view, but continues to argue for a dualistic relationship between the two: "Barmen V does not speak of the state in the abstract and outside of its relations, but formulates the state's own original and particular function as opposed to the church's own original and particular function" (Jüngel 1992:40-41).

(Reich), *God's commandment and justice, and with these the responsibility of those who rule and those who are ruled, It trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God upholds all things.*

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well.

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, task and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State."

(Jüngel 1992:xxvii)

⁹⁴ See also Busch (1975:258-260).

Not only does the content of the fifth thesis imply this dualism, but so does its structure:

The first sentence formulates the task which belongs to the state according to divine ordering. The second sentence formulates the grateful affirmation by the church of the divine ordering in accordance with which the state exists and has to act. The third sentence formulates the particular task of the church with respect to the existence and task of the state. The fourth sentence once again binds the insights of the fifth thesis back to the insight of the first thesis (Jüngel 1992:45).

It is interesting that Barth should describe both the church and State as necessary agents in the process of God's Kingdom becoming a reality in ordinary living, as will be described later. At the same time, they should not see themselves as indispensable. The *telos* that Hood referred to, is simply this: that in Barth's view, the consummated Kingdom of God on earth will render both these institutions meaningless. Their existence depends on the Kingdom of God not being a consummated reality. The State functions as a humanly defined — yet God granted authority — structure that acts in a way that ensures the responsible co-habitation of human beings within specific borders. The State therefore has the responsibility to direct, take care of and maintain society. This is the meaning of social order. "In the redeemed world, however, it would no longer be necessary for the life of the human community to be represented politically on the one hand and ecclesially on the other, or, secularly on the one hand and spiritually on the other. Neither the state as such nor the church as such are created for eternity" (Jüngel 1992:45-46).

So what then is the role of the church? This depends entirely on which of Barth's works one reads. In both editions of *Der Römerbrief*, church and State are part of a dualistic relationship. In the first edition, Barth places God and the church over and against the world and therefore also in opposition to the State. If this is the case, then

the church can claim a moral high ground, and therefore can refuse to co-operate or negotiate with the State. The church therefore belongs to the Kingdom of God and the State to the Kingdom of the World. The tension here is for the church to transform the State into something that would be nothing less than ecclesiastic rule.

In the second edition, Barth draws the dialectic line between the Creator and that which is created. This places God on the one side, and since both church and State comprise of human beings (the institutional church therefore being humanity's best attempt to respond to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, representing what should be the Church), this will make them the other part of this relationship. A similar description of this relationship is given in Barth's "Ethics, Volume II" (Barth 1981:444).

It will be closer to the truth to describe the first edition as a reworking of the Two-Kingdom theory, whereas the second edition implies that although the world, including church and State, are fallen, it is not beyond salvation. It is for this reason that one must believe that there is still some of the goodness of God hidden in both the church and State (Hood 1984:57). The premise of both church and State is to work for the well-being of humanity. This is both honourable and noble, but practice will define the morality and ethics within which both these bodies operate. Jüngel describes the different approaches of church and State well when he writes:

The church has the spiritual task of proclaiming the sin-forgiving justice of God and therefore to forgive the sin of the sinner in the Name of God, in order thus to urge one to a sinless life. The state, however, has to work in worldly ways against sin in its worldly forms, and that means: within the context of threat and, if necessary, also within the context of the use of force (Jüngel 1992:50).

Before we draw any conclusions about Barth's theological approach to the relationship between church and State, let us look at how his political involvement seems to have shaped his theology.

2.2 A Political argument.

Barth hat gesagt, daß die Aufnahme marxistischer Elemente noch keinen Marxisten mache. So hüten wir uns, ihn gegen seine Selbstzeugnisse dazu zu stempeln. Unsere Arbeit heißt darum nicht »Theologie und Marxismus«, sondern »Theologie und Sozialismus«. Sozialismus mit unübersehbaren »marxistischen Elementen« ist die zutreffende Charakterisierung der hier vorgeführten politischen Position Barths (Marquardt 1972:33-34)⁹⁵.

Was Karl Barth a Christian first, finding the practice of his faith through what can be described as Marxist or Socialist ideologies or was Barth a Socialist who believed that God demands this socio-political orientation of the human race whom God had created? This question cannot be answered in terms of either/or logic, but reflects the different dynamics at work in both Barth's political- and religious life. Barth was human and cannot be defined as belonging solely to either of these worlds. As we see in the quote above, there may well be a great political influence on Barth's theology, but it does not make him exclusively Marxist. The following anecdote illustrates this:

Barth delivered a speech addressing the Arbeiterverein⁹⁶ in Safenwil entitled "Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung"⁹⁷. In this address, he said the following: "Jesus is the movement for social justice and the movement for social justice is Jesus in the present..." (Hunsinger 1976:19). Considering the context, it is tempting to label Barth

⁹⁵ "Barth said that the decline of the Marxist element, does not produce Marxists. So we guard ourselves, and it gives it's own stamped testimony. Our work is therefore not a 'Marxist Theology' without a 'Socialist Theology'. Socialism with incalculable 'Marxists elements' is the correct characterizing of what is proposed in Barth's political position." (My translation).

⁹⁶ "Labour union" (My translation).

⁹⁷ "Jesus Christ and the Social Movement" (My translation).

as a Christian Socialist, or a Socialist Christian. We already noted that Barth became a member of the Social Democrats, and there is a fine line between Barth's political and religious convictions. How far did Barth go in making these two worlds meet and how did they converge considering his Dialectic method?

Brouwer (1988:18) comments on Dannemann's (1977) detailed explanation of Marquardt's (1972) description of Marxist tendencies in Barth's writings, especially *Der Römerbrief*. Brouwer agrees with Dannemann when he correctly states that Marquardt is overemphasising the point of this political influence. Barth indeed uses words that are generally associated with Marxism, but when Barth speaks of "revolution", for instance, he is not using the same definition and ideological constructs as Marxist philosophy. What Barth refers to is social revolution, but this concept is not uniquely Marxist. Barth's definition of "revolution" will be explored later. To describe Barth as a pure Marxist is to misunderstand Barth completely and to do an injustice to what Barth was trying to achieve in his emphasis on social religious participation in the political realm.

Brouwer (1988:18) describes Barth's perspective on the political significance of the Gospel well by saying that the Gospel of Jesus Christ tended towards a socialism that was democratised or a democracy that was socialized. To pin Barth's strong Biblical theology to one political stance is impossible and it is equally unjust to describe it as democratic, theocratic, anthropocentric, or legalistic. Neither of the systems that Brouwer mentioned could manufacture a society that would be the equal of God's Kingdom on earth on their own. For all practical purposes, Barth displays the thinking of a social democrat. The young Barth, as we saw in the description of the first edition

of *Der Römerbrief*, would have put the church above the influence of this movement. Later on, as in the second edition of this book, he would realise that the church is indeed influenced by its political *Sitz im Leben*.

This path leads us back to the place where both the church and the political authority of the day are instruments, necessary for what politicians would call tranquillity and what Christians would call “The Kingdom of God”. It can however be debated that such a Christian perspective, equating God’s Kingdom with human tranquillity would result in nothing less than a post-millenarianist Christendom.

Barth is aware of this dilemma and draws a very sharp distinction between church and State by reflecting on the motive of each in its “mission”. The State, for instance will address issues either out of a sincere desire to act on needs within society that present themselves, or will act for the sake of obtaining more power within society. These two motives in the State are not mutually exclusive. When the Church declares its confession as an act of addressing certain issues present in society, Barth states that the Church does not do so for the sake of meeting needs or answering questions, but to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the world at that particular moment (Barth 1939:15).

An excellent book describing the growth in Barth’s theology and political stance is Robert E. Hood’s “Contemporary political orders and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and political praxis”. Although it is largely a biographical description of Barth’s theological and political involvement, from some ideas presented in this book can be used to substantiate the claim of the delicate balance between Barth’s political and theological views.

The first point that comes to mind is the question of absolute truth. Is it possible for both the church and the State to form part of and present an absolute truth for its people? We already know from Barth's Dialectic method that the answer is "No!" "...the Christian cannot identify any nation or party of the existing structures with absolute truth for the state" (Hood 1984:48). This does not mean that no truth exists within these structures. The church acts as the witness of the Divine Truth. It is the witness of Christ, the risen Christ, that brings significance to the way we live. The resurrection of Christ brings into being a new form of society that has authority over any humanly created order, whether economical or political. This is called the Church⁹⁸. The institutional church can and should be representative of the Church, but it cannot be equated to the Church as it consists of fallen human beings, who claim for themselves — whether by ordination or by election — positions of power within this structure.

When the church speaks to the State or society, the best it can do is testify about her experience with her Lord, and her interpretation of her Lord's will. The church, in the same breath, must not be rendered helpless, for the church is the best human attempt to respond to God's self-revelation. The Church — a creation of the Spirit — may indeed find opportunities and words to speak through the church, but that depends on the obedience and interpretation of the church.

Barth places a greater emphasis on the existence of the Church in the life of the individual Christian (CD I(2):704-705). It is in the individual that the Church

⁹⁸ This is different to "church".

happens, but it is not an individualistic movement. The Church finds expression and authority in the community of saints, which is not necessarily the church. This creates an inverse reaction from what is normally expected by modern Christians concerning the church's involvement in the political realm. Christians seem to wait for the church to respond to a particular ethical, social, or political situation. Christians then evaluate the response, and then either join in with the church in its response, or move to a denomination where their particular views are supported. Barth's theology does not allow the Christian individual to wait for the church in order to act in faith. Such a pathos implies that the church is something more than it is and that individuals are not able to hear God for themselves, but depend on the church in order to find God. "Because of his freedom which is grounded in this Word, a member of the Church cannot retain a passive, indifferent and merely waiting role in face of this will of the divine Word, as though anyway, in its own time what has to happen will happen" (CD I(2):711).

The Church, through the Community of Saints, becomes the voice of authority for the Christian. The church is where these people worship together under the guidance of specific denominational emphases, liturgy and doctrine. So, if the Church is the voice, speaking about God to and in the individual, does this mean that Christians should take it upon themselves to overthrow all governments, only to replace them with what is perceived to be a theocratic rule? The answer to this is "No". Christians need to support the State, but not necessarily agree with it. Where there are sound policies, the church needs to show support, but to be open to the idea of being prophetic when political policies go against what Christians deem to be the "Word of God". This has ethical and practical limitations, one of which is determining which strain of the

Christian belief system determines or most accurately reflects the true Word of God. The modern church, or should we say denominations, are faced with this dilemma, not only in the political sphere, but concerning social and moral issues. Abortion, euthanasia, people with homosexual orientation and/or practice wanting recognition as members and leaders in the church – these are all issues which elicit a variety of opinions and beliefs.

How can the church speak to the State with authority when there are such great divergences in opinion between different denominations? Is this a weakness in Barth's ecclesiology? Rather, it is proof of the true Church at work. If the church maintains that it holds the final and undisputed truth about any subject, it ceases to be the church. The church in discussion with itself represents a body searching for the truth. When the situation arises where the church is convinced of a certain truth and stands by it, it does so with the knowledge that the truth it maintains may only be the truth for that moment, subject to change through the Word of God or through contextual changes. It may appear that this plunges Barth's theology into the mainstream of religious relativism but it does not, as in Barth's theology the only thing that is relative is that which is created as well as creation's perception of something that is eternal and beyond its control. God is not relative and neither is God's Word or God's truth.

The second point asks the same question of absolute truth, but in relation to the State. Barth cautioned people not to fall into the trap of believing that politics is able to produce a society that is equal to that of the Kingdom of God, especially when that political power hints at being able to function without the church. After World War II,

Barth did not oppose communism in eastern-Europe with the same tenacity as he did National Socialism in Germany. After being criticized, he warned his critics not to elevate western democracy as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth (Hood 1984:30).

It may be argued that National Socialism indeed had the support of the church, even though communism was blatant in its position on church-state relationships and democracy cheapened the influence of religious input by diluting its voice in its attempt to give all perspectives, whether faith-based or not, an equal standing in society. With respect to the church-State relationship in Nazi-Germany, Barth had the following to say:

From Romans 13 it is quite clear that love is not one of the duties which we owe to the State. When the State begins to claim “love”, it is in the process of becoming a Church, the Church of a false God, and thus an unjust State. The State requires, not love, but a simple, resolute, and responsible attitude on the part of its citizens. It is this attitude which the Church, based on justification, commends to its members (Barth 1960:144).

In Barth’s theology, we find different ethical roles, those practiced by the church and that by the State. In further exploration of this dynamic relationship requires a closer look at these expressions.

3. Politics, ethics and theology.

In summary, Barth views both the church and the State as divine instruments, but summoned for different purposes. The church is “...summoned to repentance before God” (Barth 1981:442) while the State is “...summoned to serve our neighbour.” (Barth 1981:445). This does not mean that the church has no business in serving its neighbour, nor that the State should not come before God in repentance.

Palma (1983) finds a helpful tool to link the church to the State in the life of the community: This is called “culture”. Does Barth have a theology of culture? The answer is “Yes”. To Barth, culture is the highest form of human achievement, the characteristic that sets us apart from the rest of creation (Palma 1983:9). Palma claims that all culture is theologically determined and conditioned (1983:12). Culture, then predisposes the individual to very specific political orientations. Cultures that are community-centred tend to implement community-based political structures, while individualistic cultures opt for political structures that cater for the individual.

If culture were the stepping-stone between faith and politics, church and State, then we would need to find a culture that is Christ-centred. Palma (1983:31) describes Barth’s Christology as presenting Jesus Christ as the prime example of living in free culture. The concept does not mean that Jesus was free from cultural influence. Jesus was, in his culture, free to express the revelation of God without fearing that culture would hinder or distort His message. As Christians, we are called to bear testimony to the Word, which means that although we cannot be the revelation of the Word, the church is charged with the mission of bearing witness to the Word without culture and tradition distorting the message. It is a goal and not an existential reality.

The church’s goal is to grow towards free culture as revealed in Jesus Christ. How does Jesus’ free culture interact with politics? Perhaps the best description is found in Jesus’ response to Pilate as found in Jn. 19:11. Jesus acknowledges the authority of the State, but sees it in the context of the State being nothing more than an institution, permitted to exercise power but without divine authority. Although the State is

granted power by God, it does not mean that the State is beyond error or that the State cannot become corrupted by the power which it claims.

Is there a form of State that best illustrates free culture and the ability to become the most righteous form of governance? To Barth this freedom and obedience was best illustrated in democracy and in socialism. For this reason, he affiliated himself with the Social Democrats (Palma 1983:38) and opposed communism (Palma 1983:39).

“Wie Jesus Christus die Krisis und Hoffnung des Menschen ist, so ist er auch die Krisis und Hoffnung der Gesellschaft”⁹⁹ (Dannemann 1977:184). Dannemann marks the delicate tension between God as the “Crisis”¹⁰⁰ and as the Hope of humanity, not only of individuals, but as the quote marks, also of society¹⁰¹. If God confronts humanity, including the State, effecting not only a religious, but also a social transformation, then God is also introducing a set of ethics that directs society, including its culture.

Hood (1984:xiv) sums up Barth’s description of ethics in CD II(2), which introduces divine ethics even in the political sphere:

First, ethical action means that we confess an ignorance of being able to apprehend or decide about God’s command without the aid of God’s grace...

Secondly, ethical action means that man’s obedience is to a command, which transcends his actions...

Thirdly, ethical action means that it is communal, not individualistic...

⁹⁹ “As Jesus Christ is the Crisis and Hope of people, in the same way he is also the Crisis and Hope of the community” (My translation).

¹⁰⁰ The term is used for lack of a better translation for the German word “Krisis”, “Crisis” is apt, because it captures the deep sense in which humanity is challenged when God confronts it. No other word describes the dialectic tension between Creator and creation better.

¹⁰¹ See also Rostagno (1985:347) about the radical portrayal of Jesus being the only true revelation of Divine Truth and so influencing a “revolution” in society.

Fourthly, ethical action means that it is concrete, not abstract...

Political ethics and Christian ethics, at the best of times, are not synonymous. It is therefore the church's duty, even, its mission, to act when ethics existing in the political realm are inconsistent with that of the Gospel-message (Dijkstra 1986:21). The church has an added responsibility to speak against state-ethics when the State professes to act from a Christian standpoint, as was the case in Nazi-Germany.

Although a good example of the church's response in such a situation is in the Barmen-declaration, it has not been without criticism: It said nothing about the fate of the Jews after the announcement of the Aryan-paragraph of 7 April 1933. This legislation stated that Aryans, not Jews, were able to be leaders in the German Evangelical Church. All Jews were subsequently relieved of their posts and debarred from citizenship (Barth 1965:16).

Barth's "Ethics thus seeks, not to translate the will of God into the situation of the believer, but rather to translate or move the person and community of faith into a position to hear and to be able to obey the commandment of God as it is concretely spoken." (Osborn 1983:320). Osborn (1983:321) sees Barth's definition of Ethics as a tool that is used to understand and implement the will of God, very much like a tennis racquet is used to hit a ball. All parts of a situational reality need to meet at a certain point in order for truth to become a reality. The player, the extension of his arm, the racquet, the ball, all need to be in the right place at the right time, meeting together and only then can a proper and deliberate action be performed. In Barth, ethics, context, God, civil community, and Christian community need to meet at a specific

point in order for God's deliberate will to find realisation. Therefore, to speak of a specific will of God, real for all situations and all times manifest in a world that is constantly in flux, would therefore be speaking into nothingness. The only specific will of God, manifest in human time and space, is the proclamation of God's Divine "Yes" through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ therefore becomes the proclamation, not only of the existence of God, but also God's Ethics.

Bonhoeffer (1965:20) criticized Barth as he could not see how Barth could come to any political decision from his theological speech. He claimed Barth to be too vague, idealistic, and imprecise (Osborn 1983:313). Barth works from the premise that our relationship with God is one with a living God. If God were a mere concept, then his approach could well be described as vague and idealistic. But as God lives, and is able to meet people in different times, places and contexts, God's Ethics must be broader than the legalistic definitions that limited human beings can produce. Does this justify his vagueness nevertheless? Osborn comes to the following conclusion:

Barth's so-called 'idealism' is a means of talking about the Lordship of God in Jesus Christ and recognizing that Christian ethics is a matter of obedient acknowledgement of this lordship, 'from above' of the living God incarnate in Jesus Christ. His 'actualism' is a way of speaking about the personal dimension of this lordship as it bears upon human existence in the only way it can and yet remain in any meaningful fashion an event of true lordship—namely, as it actually, concretely determines particular and ever free human decisions (Osborn 1983:316).

God's ethics, in other words, are too great to be formulated in a human code of ethics, or even Christian ethics. Ethics is an important part of theology, but it cannot be termed as 'the Ethic'.

The Ethics that form the relationship between God and humanity is not one founded on the principle of metaphysics. Dannemann (1977:97) correctly states that in essence, the dialectic relationship that exists between God and creation in Barth's theology, bodes well for a metaphysical approach. If this were the case, then we could assume that there should be two divergent states of ethics, as the two dimensions of existence would require two different guidelines to determine and separate that which is fundamentally correct or righteous from that which is in essence evil or corrupt.

Als Aufhebung der Negativität der menschlichen Existenz wartet die in Gott selbst ursprüngliche und vorausgesetzte und dann in der Auferstehung Jesu Christi von den Toten neu angekündigte »Synthese« von Gott und Mensch, neuer und alter Welt¹⁰² (Dannemann 1977:98).

From this intervention, the negative aspect of the dialectic existence between God and humanity is transformed into something positive and unifying. Divine ethics therefore becomes a possibility, something to be practiced by humanity.

It is interesting that Barth does not refer to the State as requiring redemption. Society needs to be redeemed (Godsey 1963:75). Only when society is redeemed will the State be able to execute its responsibility with a firm ethical and divine responsibility. The State is formed by society; it is not ontologically independent, even if it believes it is. The outcome of such thinking would result in revolution. A sign of a society that is in the process of redemption is a society which views "work" as communal. Nothing exists solely to meet the individual's needs. Individual independence, according to Barth, gives rise to capitalism and alienates community (CD III/4:537-538). Redeemed society must be community-based.

¹⁰² "By relinquishing the negativity of the human existence, it (humanity) awaits God's original and intended (world) and then in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is a new pronounced synthesis between God and humanity, the new and the old world" (My translation. Words in brackets added to clarify meaning).

The church has as a central responsibility, the task of praying for the state (Barth 1960:135), being an agent of God, communicating what it believes God to be saying to the authorities. The church does so, being constantly reminded of the chaos that threatens the world's existence as manifest in the signs of war, oppression and lawlessness (Hood 1984:74).

And so, the church becomes the vehicle of giving testimony in the political realm to Divine ethics as found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

4. State-focussed Mission in South Africa.

Barth did not write an ecclesiology specifically for the South African context. Instead, being a South African Methodist, I would like to interpret what Barth had to say and then to place it in this context. How does the Church witness concerning the Word in a political world?

Barth's ecclesiology and understanding of the relationship between church and State finds specific expression in something like the Kairos document. It may be argued that there is a similarity between the Barmen declaration and the Kairos document, but I believe that the different approaches used in the formation of these declarations provide for more differences than similarities. I would like to suggest that there is a greater correlation between Barth's view of church-State relationship and the thoughts that are conveyed in the Kairos Document.

First, a short description of the Kairos document. As a response to the political situation in South Africa under the Apartheid regime, theologians from various

Christian denominations gathered in 1985 to discern the Will of God. The meeting realized that the church was not so much opposed to a diabolic State, as it was opposing several church-State relationship perspectives that existed at the time. The church found itself deeply divided (Kairos 1985:4).

Three different church-State relationships were identified. The first two were descriptions of existing definitions, while the third was a goal. The first perspective was called “State Theology”. This theology described the perspective where the State was a direct instrument of God and could define its actions as ordained by God (Kairos 1985:6-10). The second, “Church theology”, described a theology that acknowledged a distinct difference between the roles of the State and those of the church. It, by definition, implied that the church had no political voice and should concern itself with the facilitation of liturgical worship for its members (Kairos 1985:11-17).

The third, “Prophetic theology” could be seen as a compromise position between the two previous perspectives, but it is not. What it offers, is a theology which clearly indicates that the State cannot act as if it were the church, nor that the church finds itself completely isolated from the social affairs of its context. What does this imply? This theology does not ask the church to become an opposition party. If the church were to respond to political views, using political tools, then an oppositional stance would be inevitable. “Prophetic theology” asked the church to respond to issues concerning the Kingdom of God. Instead of directly attacking the existing government, it sought to address the issue of oppression. No Christian, irrespective of political conviction, could agree that oppression is part of God’s divine will for

humanity. This only causes a division, creating a social order where there are those who oppress and those who are oppressed.

Barth was calling for what, in Kairos-terms, is called the church engaged in Prophetic theology. The Confessing Church, of which Barth was part, is proof of this. It is interesting that the Kairos Document does not deny the importance or place of a theology of (belonging to) State. It does take issue with “State theology” which questions the independent role of the church. It also sees the place of Church theology, but objects to it being disengaged from society. It therefore does not discredit either of these institutions as something that God is unable to use. Instead, it calls for a church, which is neither bound by political alliance, nor ecclesiastical tradition, but which is able to speak what it interprets to be the Truth, in love and in real terms. In the same breath, it calls for a State that sees itself as an instrument of God, but not the exclusive voice of God in society.

An important action by the church is to ensure the distinct difference between itself and the State. This can be done by constituting a *Status Confessionis*. There are similarities between what the church has done in South Africa and what the church did in Germany during the Nazi-era. Constituting a *Status Confessionis* was important in both contexts. In Germany, we find the Confessing Church, under great influence from Barth, drawing up the Barmen Declaration. In South Africa, the church compiled several documents, the most prominent speaking to the local context being the Belhar Confession and the Kairos document.

4.1 A short history of the Belhar Confession.

The Belhar Confession finds its beginning in the political situation of South Africa in the mid-twentieth century (Adonis 2006:234). In this period, the political system, later to be known as “Apartheid”, shaped all aspects of South African community-life, including the expression of faith. In this system, people were classed and grouped according to their race. Different groups were then settled in distinct areas with the intention of promoting “separate development”. The South African government of the time acted from, what they professed to be a Christian premise and even went as far as declaring Apartheid a “church policy” (Adonis 2006:234).

With the institution of separate development came the splitting of churches along racial lines. The Dutch Reformed Church led in this regard. The first form of objection to the prevalent system came in the form a letter to the moderamen of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) by some of its members in 1950 (Adonis 2006:235). In this letter, the concern was raised that Apartheid did not comply with Christian teaching and should therefore not be applied in either the church or in the country (Adonis 2006:235). This issue was not given proper attention and was not taken any further.

Only in the 1970’s was a similar position presented to the DRMC and was accepted. In 1978 The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) restated this position and declared that Apartheid was in contradiction to Christian teaching (Adonis 2006:237). By 1982, the WARC took action against two reformed churches that did not comply with this position by suspending their membership. This matter now came before the synod of the DRMC in 1982, whereupon the synod formulated a *Status*

Confessionis. This would later develop into the writing of the Belhar Confession, and accepted in 1986. The crux of the Confession lay in its declaration of the church's wrongful support of Apartheid and its flaw in allowing its structures to be shaped by this system. The conclusion of the Confession called for the unification of the Reformed churches (Adonis 2006:237), a call that still awaits full realization to this day.

Moving from this point, the observation is made that a new Confession is highly contextual and seldom has the ability to serve the church beyond its specific *Sitz im Leben*. A Confession therefore needs to be formulated with a specific theological focus. Barmen, for instance, carried a very Barthian perspective in its approach, denouncing Natural Theology and so defining the different roles of church and State.

The Synod of Barmen used as its premise a methodological approach that is very characteristic of the way Barth does his theology. Speaking to its context, the Barmen Declaration is a document that places an emphasis on Scripture as the testimony of God's Word at work in the world (Weth 1984:9). This use of Scripture is not achieved through the irresponsible allocation of certain passages of Scripture to statements in order to support the mind of the meeting, but is used as a primary source of what the synod believed to be the voice of God. Although Scripture is not itself the Word of God, it bears testimony to the Word of God, and in the context of the Barmen Declaration, is the basis of the argument against the Church-State relationship that prevailed at the time.

The Kairos document, on the other hand, used as its premise the following: the “...first task of a prophetic theology for our times would be an attempt at social analysis or what Jesus would call ‘reading the signs of the time’ (Mt.16:3) or ‘interpreting this Kairos’ (Lk. 12:56)” (Kairos 1985:18)¹⁰³. This is clearly leaning towards interpreting revelation in what Barth would perceive as natural theology.

Such a Confession cannot be done only from the perspective of one Christian denomination, but needs the co-operation of as many denominations as possible. An ecumenical work, in this instance, has two functions. Firstly, it becomes a united witness and speaks with greater authority¹⁰⁴. Secondly, it breaks the State’s illusion that it operates either as a Divinely authorised entity, or even that it is able to be just without being a Divine instrument. Ecumenical prophecy exposes the State’s true nature when it chooses to function outside its relationship with both God and the church (Barth 1981:447).

This radical act by the church, to state its own individual role in society, will at the same time counter the great disillusionment, which people have with the church when the State speaks on behalf of the church. Appropriate here is the criticism that Steve Biko¹⁰⁵ levies at the church. Biko (1978:217-218) states that it is not difficult to believe or become deeply passionate about the teachings of Christ. What discredited the Christian movement was, firstly, the Christian condoning of State injustice and, secondly, the broader church’s (initial) apathy in condemning this heresy.

¹⁰³ Also quoted in (Horn 1988:119).

¹⁰⁴ Jn. 17:23.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Bantu Biko was an anti-Apartheid activist in South Africa, who lived from 1946 to 1977. He was killed while detained by the South African Police. He is affectionately known by South Africans as Steve Biko.

How does the church perform its Divine mission to the State, besides seeking ecumenical relationships and drawing up confessions? The church's mission to the State is essentially, in Barthian terms, a question of reconciliation. In this instance, reconciliation between God and humanity in the structures of the State and church. On commenting on the work of reconciliation in South Africa, Graf proposes in the first of 9 propositions that when we speak of reconciliation between God and humanity and between human beings, we must make use of two different logical structures. The one presumes that humanity approaches a merciful and gracious God, and so can depend on a consistent response from God when it approaches God in repentance. Secondly, we find that reconciliation between human beings has no guarantee of mercy or grace (Graf 2005:378) and so has to trust in a communicative process, which is nothing more but brokering for reconciliation.

The message of the church offers a third dimension of reconciliation: that of humanity being reconciled both to itself and to God, through the Person of Jesus Christ. By this definition, it is therefore implied that a new community comes into being under this form of reconciliation. This is called the Church. The church is therefore, together with the State, but above the State, the human voice, bearing witness to the Word of God in the world. The church needs to recognise the difference between itself and the State, and, as stated earlier, is able to do this through Confessions. The State is still a human work. It needs to be monitored and guided. It is not the final authority, nor is it the saviour of humanity. The constant proclamation of these facts is the task of the church.

An interesting way in which one denomination (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa) has ensured for itself to be independent from the State is to prevent its ministers from practicing as members of any political party.

A Minister (see para. 4.1) who takes up a party-political post or any other appointment which Conference or the Connexional Executive considers will compromise the necessary independence of the Church in its witness to the Gospel in society, shall resign from the ministry failing which shall be deemed to have resigned (L&D 2000:4.91).

It would be interesting to hypothesize how Barth would respond to such an approach.

If the church spoke to the State in South Africa today, what would it say? Although the church has been vocal on the issues to be mentioned on many occasions, the following list highlights some of the most important issues for which the church is pressuring the State for a response.

- The key issue is undoubtedly that of HIV/AIDS¹⁰⁶. The South African government's slow, and sometimes, bizarre approaches¹⁰⁷ to this issue has drawn criticism from across the world. The question may be asked: Why should the church add its voice when the international community is already placing pressure on the South African government? The simple answer is that this problem is not only a political problem — it is a people-problem. As long as the church believes that humanity is created in the image of God, it has a duty to bear

¹⁰⁶ “There is probably no greater challenge facing the religious community in South Africa since the demise of Apartheid than the AIDS pandemic. South Africa is the leading country in the world in terms of infection rate, and KwaZulu-Natal is the leading province. At the point of writing this article about five million people are infected in this country. By 2010 this figure would have doubled.” (Balcomb 2006:104). Cannell (2006:21) adds that “Between 1997 and 2001, the adult mortality rate doubled in South Africa, rising from 100 000 to over 200 000 deaths per year, and there is no indication that the death rate has slackened since”.

¹⁰⁷ Balcomb (2006:107) describes the South African President, Thabo Mbeki's blatant denial of the link between HIV and AIDS as an irrational approach to this disease. He further asserts (2006:107) that the West now pictures Mbeki and the South African government in these terms, leading them on a path of self-destruction.

witness to the Word and expose government policies that are in violation of treating people with the dignity God intended when God created humanity, as Christians believe, *Imago Dei*.

- It will speak about the abuse of creation and the exploitation of natural resources¹⁰⁸, because this is God's creation and humanity has been mandated as stewards of it. This is not just an environmental-political problem, but a theological and social problem.
- It will speak to the authorities about the dangers of power-seeking, status-symbols, justice to the poor. It will speak about capitalist exploitation, materialism and individualism¹⁰⁹.
- It will speak about poverty, because poor people matter¹¹⁰.
- It will speak about community-building, because community is God's gift to creation¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁸ Loader (1987:8) maintains that Christianity has to bear a great deal of responsibility for the ecological crisis facing the world today. In its modern history, the church relegated nature to the sciences and failed to connect the human attitude toward creation to the "salvation of the soul" (Loader 1987:9).

¹⁰⁹ Despite having negative effects on natural resources (Nünberger 1987:48-49), these attitudes towards life also have negative effects on social cohesion (Nünberger 1987:58-60).

¹¹⁰ Alana (2003:305) calls capitalism a form of "economic gangsterism". Alana (2003:305) argues that Jesus' command to give to the poor is not about self-improvement, but about the justice found in the redistribution of wealth.

¹¹¹ Govender (1995:142-145) argues that the image of community in the world and in post-Apartheid South Africa is distorted by fear, suspicion and distrust. By raising this point, Govender (1995:143) suggests that the secularization of the Kingdom of God has contributed towards this downward spiral in our understanding of community. To "belong" in South Africa requires the individual's sense of belonging to a community. This therefore requires a Christian understanding of community that is different to the community shaped by "Christian Apartheid" (Govender 1995:143).

- It will speak more about community-participation than personal salvation. “Belonging” in South Africa is a theological problem. It speaks of harmony, humaneness, tolerance and acceptance¹¹².
- It will speak against the danger of democracy becoming a god. God is God¹¹³.
- It will speak about the ownership of land (de Gruchy 2004:231). On this issue, Barth was quite adamant in his opposition to a capitalist system, which linked the idea of human freedom to the private ownership of property (Petersen 1988:61), but I believe that in this context, private and communal landownership is fundamental to the harmony of South African society¹¹⁴.

Conclusion.

Barth’s view on church-State relationship creates within the church the awareness that it is not the sole community of God. It forms part of a dynamic relationship with the State in order to realise the vision of the Church in any society.

¹¹² See Footnote 111.

¹¹³ De Gruchy (1995:276-277) differentiates between the sense of community as a product of democracy and the *koinonia* and *shalom* offered by the Kingdom of God. He argues that although a just form of democracy can be instrumental in establishing a deep sense of community, that it does not replace the form of community proclaimed by the church. “Christianity...cannot be equated with any political order even though it may express a strong preference for democracy today as the best way of structuring equality, freedom and justice. The prophetic vision itself, however, demands critical solidarity, and that means a creative and constructive tension expressing the dialectic between Christian faith and culture, between the reign of the triune God and the sovereignty of the people” (De Gruchy 1995:276-277).

¹¹⁴ The ownership of land is not only a social issue, but has been a pivotal discussion point in theological circles. The South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee hosted a conference in November 1997 on the issue of the church’s ownership of land (De Gruchy 2004:232). This “...issue predates Apartheid, and yet now outlives the death of Apartheid” (De Gruchy 2004:233).

The State is taught that its secular authority does not derive its power from its own “goodness”, but has to exercise that role in full recognition that all authority is “permitted” by God. The church’s mission is to remind the State of this and to evaluate whether the State is exercising its power in accordance with what the church believes to be “the Will of God”.

The church is therefore not powerless, but becomes the best way through which humanity can respond to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This makes its mission vitally powerful — a power, which is constantly under the scrutiny of the Spirit.

Chapter 7

The end of the church or the Church's end?

1. Introduction.

A recent cartoon¹¹⁵ attempted to express the dilemma in the church concerning same-sex relationships. It showed an ancient Roman citizen standing outside the Coliseum, reading the notice on its outside wall advertising the upcoming events. The first event reads “Christians thrown to lions”, the second, “Gay Christians thrown to Christians”. The expression on the citizen’s face reflects his confusion, as if there is something abnormal in what his society deems to be entertainment.

This cartoon pokes fun at Christians. It is a light-hearted moment in the midst of a struggle within the church. The difficulty is not only one concerning same-sex relationships, but a struggle in the church to find its place and message in a world that is filled with controversial issues. It is also a world that, like the citizen, observes with great confusion the church’s struggle to be meaningful and relevant.

As much as we would like to laugh at this cartoon, and perhaps at ourselves, it carries a message concerning the world’s perception of the church and its mission. It asks the following questions: Is the church’s mission out-dated, perhaps belonging to the era of gladiators and a bloodthirsty Roman Empire? Perhaps the world would have been a better place if Christianity ended in that era? But what about the threatening and

¹¹⁵ Source unknown.

sometimes violent way in which the church has gone about doing its business of mission?

Perhaps the world has found a place of entertainment – the church – watching it from a distance, amused by the way in which it finds ways to contradict its message of love and dignity?

Considering these questions, one might describe this cartoon as an extremely valid critique on church mission. The matters that it raises are certainly points that the church must consider if it is to bear testimony to its Lord in a meaningful and effective manner. In this thesis we have, so far, grappled with Barth's understanding of the church's relationships in the world and sought to identify the missionary undertones that exist in these relationships.

If the church is to responsibly engage with the world, then it has to consider the nature of its mission, which is therefore a relational work, and is also a seminal point in its discovery of identity and function in the world. Barth brings all of these points together and is one of the foremost theologians to study when ecclesiology is discussed.

So, one question lies before us: What does Barth's church look like and what is its mission?

2. What does Barth's church look like?

Before discussing Barth's definition of the church as it exists in relationship with the different entities described in this thesis, attention needs to be given to Barth's description of the mission of the Church as found in *Church Dogmatics*.

2.1 The Mission and Function of the Church.

Barth starts to define the Mission and Function of the Church in *Church Dogmatics Volume 1* (I/2:743-884). This teaching follows on from his teaching on the Doctrine of Revelation (CD I/2:1-456) and the Doctrine of Holy Scripture (CD I/2:457-742). It is evident in the progression found in *Church Dogmatics Volume 1, Part 2* that the Church's identity is founded on the premise that it exists as a response to the work that God has done. God reveals Godself, and so the revelation is received and appreciated by humanity in and through the power of the Spirit and, as a result, a community is established that continues the witness of those who have testified to God's self-revelation as attested in Holy Scripture. The crucial question remains: If the Church is a testifying response to the revelation of God, how do we understand the mission of the Church in the light of its testimony? In order to address this question, a summary of Barth's position on the Church's function and mission is now given.

2.1.1 The Mission of the Church.

Barth (CD I/2:743) describes the Church's mission as "proclamation". The way in which the Church fulfils this role in its different relationships has been the

investigative point of this thesis. The conclusions drawn will be discussed later. In this section of Church Dogmatics, Volume 1 Part 2, Barth does not explore the nature of the Church's missionary proclamation in the different relational contexts, but describes the fundamental tensions that exist in the Church's definitive role.

The first tension Barth points to in the Church's mission of proclamation is the Church's recognition that there is a distinct difference between what he calls "The Word of God and the Word of Man" (CD I/2:743). By this is meant that when the Church engages in the practice of proclamation, it has to contend with the problem that its proclamation serves as a secondary process of communication that is subject to the initial act of God's self-disclosure. This leads Barth (CD I/2:743) to ask the following questions: "Is the Church's preaching also God's Word, and to what extent? Is God's Word also the preaching of the Church, and, if so, is it valid?"

With the distinction between the Word of God and the Word of Man [sic.], the Church's proclamation can only be the Word of God in that it is a testimony about the Word, speaking about the self-revelation of God in God's Word. The testimony of the Church is therefore imperfect, because it is a proclamation based on the receipt and interpretation of revelation. Would it then not be better for God not to rely on the witness of the Church and rather to depend upon God's own revelation in the "proclamation" of the Word? To Barth (CD I/2:745-755), God must be aware of this fundamental flaw in the Church's proclamation, but God must also resign Godself to the fact that this flawed testimony is the basis on which the Church communicates its understanding of, and relationship with God to the world. Revelation and proclamation are both therefore dependant on God's grace, for the Church (which consists of people) is confronted by the self-disclosure of a God who is beyond all

creation's limitations. The Church is, at the same time charged to testify in human language, symbolism and rituals, to a God who it can logically not define or restrict in human communication.

The Church must therefore make certain admissions. The first is that the revelation of God is already complete outside its proclamation (CD I/2:749). God's self-disclosure is therefore not solely dependant on the Church's testimony, but is itself a proclamation before the Church can respond with its own testimony. This to Barth (CD I/2:749) has already been achieved in Jesus Christ.

The second is the recognition that it is humanly impossible to speak about God using human language, reasoning and symbols (CD I/2:750). The Church's testimony therefore cannot be engaged in the practise of defining God. If it were tempted to limit the person of God to the expression of its own interpretation, the Church would be treating God as an object. By treating God as an object, the Church would be undermining the "otherness" of God and making God subject to its own biases.

The third is the recognition that "God...makes good what we do badly" (CD I/2:751). The Church's proclamation can be, and is used by God, while the Spirit of God works within the recipients of this proclaimed message and gives the gift of faith, enabling the hearers of the testimony to respond to the Word of God.

To Barth (CD I/2:763), Christian proclamation is concerned with the teaching of doctrine. By this is meant that doctrine is an instrument in the life of the Church, which directs its teaching and edifies the Church's ministerial task in the world. By subjecting its teaching to the direction of doctrine, the Church continues the Apostolic nature of its testimony, which is based on its understanding of God as revealed in

Jesus Christ and testified to in Holy Scripture. The question resulting from this view then asks whether Barth's understanding of proclamation falls prey to Biblical interpretation, or at the other extreme, whether it becomes subject to positions held by the tradition involved in the proclamation of the Word. Barth (CD I/2:770) is very particular on the place and usage of doctrine. Doctrine is not shaped by the interests or the interpretation of what is perceived to be the revelation of God by a person or people. Pure doctrine is subject to certain conditions.

It first requires the Church to measure its ability to speak about God (CD I/2:270) truthfully. This requires self-examination, the form of self-examination which forces the Church (in its formulation of doctrine and proclamation through preaching) to express itself in ways that indicate that it does not contain the Word of God in full. This forces the Church into a position where dogmatics is not only subject to the practices and duties of the Church, but that responsible God-talk (doctrine) is also possible outside the Church's life (CD I/2:770). The purity of doctrine comes into question when we consider that the Church's proclamation is done in a sinful human environment, using communicative mechanisms that are not designed to speak about a God who cannot be defined within the limitations of the created order (CD I/2:778-779). "Dogmatics tests the Church's speech about God" (CD I/2:781). This implies that the Church's use of dogmatics becomes the basis of the Church's ethics (CD I/2:782,793). It is therefore the contextual proclamation of the Word of God in situations of human existence, subject to self-reflection and the continued evaluation of the validity of its proclamation to represent the Word of God. The relationships investigated in this thesis describe these situations and therefore the Church's mission.

2.1.2 The Function of Dogmatics in the Church.

In the light of the Church's mission, Barth (CD I/2:797-884) goes on to describe the two-fold function of dogmatics in the Church. The first requires the Church to be a hearing¹¹⁶ Church (CD I/2:797). Barth (CD I/2:797) describes this function in the following way:

Dogmatics invites the teaching Church to listen again to the Word of God in the revelation to which Scripture testifies. It can do this only if for its own part it adopts the attitude of the hearing Church and therefore itself listens to the Word of God as the norm to which the hearing Church knows itself to be subject.

Dogmatics therefore informs the Church that God has spoken and that God continues to speak. The Church's existence and proclamation are not the initial announcement of God's self-revelation. As much as the Church proclaims its testimony to the hearers of the Word, so it is also the recipient of God's self-disclosure (CD I/2:800-801). What gives authority to the Church's testimony when it proclaims a Word that exists beyond itself? Barth (CD I/2:802) answers this question:

That Church proclamation is the Word of God means that God speaks as much for Himself in Church proclamation as He has spoken, speaks and will speak for Himself in Jesus Christ and in the prophets and apostles as witnesses to Jesus Christ. Therefore the formal task of dogmatics in regard to Church proclamation consists in confronting it with its own law in all its transcendence, in reminding it that it is the Word of God because Jesus Christ and He alone speaks in the prophetic and apostolic witness.

¹¹⁶ The question has to be asked whether the Church should rather be described as the listening Church. In CD (I/2:844) the word "listening" is used instead of "hearing". "Hearing" implies a passive attitude in the receiving of communication, while "listening" implies a much more active approach in the communicative process. I will continue to use the word "hearing" as this is the word used in Church Dogmatics (I/2:797-843).

For this reason the Church falls victim to heresy when it fails in its hearing role and when it speaks about God from the basis of conclusions drawn, relying on its own strength and tradition and not on revelation (CD I/2:807). The Church has to live with the expectation that it hears the Word of God afresh (CD I/2:810) on a continuous basis. This prohibits tradition to take the place of God's self-revelation and will prevent the Christian Church's proclamation from being reduced to speculation.

At the disposal of the Church are two sources that test its listening: Scripture (CD I/2:816) and tradition (CD I/2:822). Both are historic testimonies of God speaking in the realm of creation and by subjecting its testimony to the scrutiny of these sources, it opens the way for the continuing apostolic nature of the Church's witness. It also forms the basis for the unified nature of the Church proclamation, which from an outside perspective seems to be inconsistent as different traditions emphasise their respective doctrinal points of view. The hearing of the Church becomes impaired when sections of the Church allow divergent Biblical interpretations and different historic traditions to take preference over the Church's witness. The nature of this dynamic is explored in Chapter 3.

True dogmatics and pure doctrine therefore do not belong to any one strain of the Christian tradition (CD I/2:823), for this would imply that God says different things to different parts of the Body. To speak of a particular tradition's dogmatics must be done with the understanding that it belongs and is subject to universal Church dogmatics (CD I/2:823).

The second function of dogmatics relates to the teaching Church. Barth (CD I/2:844) describes it in the following way:

Dogmatics summons the listening Church to address itself anew to the task of teaching the Word of God in the revelation attested in Scripture. It can do this only as it accepts itself the position of the teaching Church and is therefore claimed by the Word of God as the object to which the teaching Church as such has devoted itself.

As the relationship between the Word of God and the Church has an origin as described in revelation, so it has a *telos* (CD I/2:845) that finds expression in the Church's teaching. The Church that hears the Word of God passively and does not actively respond to this self-disclosure ceases to be the Church (CD I/2:845). The task of dogmatics is therefore to commit the Church to strive towards a teaching that is defined by doctrine which is as pure as is possible, using human language and symbolism as its means of communication (CD I/2:853). The measuring tools at the disposal of dogmatics are again Holy Scripture and tradition. The Church's testimony should not be presented in a way that renders the testimony of the self-revelation of God in Christ through Scripture and tradition meaningless (CD I/2:856). Dogmatic method also exists in the context of freedom and therefore requires the Church's obedience (CD I/2:861). By this is meant that dogmatics in the Church is not static, but the Church itself adds to tradition and contributes to the testimony of the Church in the future. Dogmatics as a system can only exist when it admits that the system itself does not contain the Word of God (CD I/2:866). It requires openness within the Church to receive truth (CD I/2:867).

Let us now consider how these points relate to the relationships discussed in this thesis.

2.2 A church in relationship with God.

In order to discover the identity and mission of the church, Barth (1981:442) makes the following statement: “The church is not the Kingdom of God” — a sobering thought indeed.

Describing something *via negativa* is not always helpful, for it may leave a person in a place of ambiguity. It creates an environment for speculation, assumption and an opportunity to identify the entity at hand using subjective expectations. This is as far as we will take the *via negativa* argument, that the church is not the Kingdom of God. This statement is important, for it forces the church to step down from its place of power and “untouchability” and become subject to scrutiny. From this point, Barth is able to build an image of the church which gives justice both to the Scriptural interpretation of the *Ecclesia* and the church’s existence in history.

The first building block is then the acknowledgement that the church (and Church) does not exist because of its own initiative or planning, but that the church exists because of God’s work. The human element in history simultaneously cannot be denied. When we speak of humanity in this context, it refers solely to the church’s composition. The church therefore exists with a human membership, but did not come into existence because of it. The church exists within a finely balanced framework: It is first the work of God, but also exists in history as a human activity (CD IV/1:650). This creates a natural tension in the church’s identity. On the one hand, it celebrates the divine activity in its formation. The Church, according to Barth (CD IV/1:644), is a direct result of God’s revelation to creation through Jesus Christ, but is given life by the same Spirit that was part of the Incarnation. Although it has a human

“membership”, the church’s first responsibility is to acknowledge and exist within the fact that it is a product, an outcome of something done by God, not by itself.

This tension in the church’s identity beacons it to be extremely cautious in the way it approaches mission. In its existence as a divinely inspired and created community, the temptation exists to see itself as the sole voice of God. This implies that the church occupies a place of power. Indeed, if we were to use a hierarchical structure to represent prominence and importance, the church would be placed near the top, only to be superseded by God.

To Barth (CD IV/1:658) this is a nonsensical assumption on the church’s part. It would make perfect sense if the church were nothing but a human achievement on behalf of creation in its relationship with God. It would further make sense if God created the church as an entity with little or no relational links with the world, but this is not where the church finds itself. The church cannot see itself in this place, for the Lord whom she acknowledges and worships advocated a life of service and obedience¹¹⁷. Being the church in the world therefore does not call for a mission that is driven by its own importance or its own search for longevity. The church in the world, representing the Church universal has the sole responsibility to point beyond itself and to point towards its Maker (CD IV/1:658). The mission of the church is therefore not locked in an unapproachable point, which separates the church and the world, but is defined in the church’s ability to exist in every level of reality and pointing to its Lord from those places. This is nevertheless the gospel the church refers to: Concerning a Saviour that was, and is approachable and accessible to all.

¹¹⁷ See texts such as Matthew 5:3-11, 18:1-5, Luke 14:25-33.

Leading from this acknowledgment, the church's identity and message is underscored by its and the world's recognition that the church (and Church) is not God. It is neither the full revelation of God, nor is it the sole mouthpiece of God in the world. An existential reality is that the church is not divine itself, but is a point of contact between the Divine work and sinful people. Although the church can claim that it comprises redeemed people, it has to do so in the full recognition that these same people are still sinners and in constant need of God's grace and redemption. From a missional position, the church is in as much need of salvation as those to whom it witnesses.

If, as Barth maintains, ecclesiology must take account of the ecclesia peccatrix (CD IV/1:659), then it would seem the 'true Church' must be identified as both the Church whose sinfulness is overcome by the action of Jesus Christ, and the Church which still sins (CD IV/2:618). It would seem that within Barth's account, the eschatological dimension of the Church's existence might too easily be interpreted as an oscillation between a realized telos, rather than a telos which is never fully reached in this age, but may be glimpsed in a glass, darkly (Yocum 2004:118).

The church can therefore not depend upon itself to be successfully involved in mission-activity, but it is its primary mission to look away from itself and to seek its Maker and Redeemer. It does so, noting that the church's existence is dependant on the recognition of God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ. The primary source that the church can use to know about the Incarnation and self-revelation of God is in Holy Scripture (CD IV/2:682-683). The way the church engages with Scripture and uses Scripture is of utmost importance. Barth's use of Scripture is a helpful guideline¹¹⁸. This method is referred to in chapter 2.

¹¹⁸ As recorded earlier, Engelbrecht (1986:4) describes Barth's view of Scripture by comparing the recipient of Scripture to a person in a concentration camp receiving a letter of love and encouragement.

If the church views Scripture as a message of love, an age-old record of people's testimonies of God's dealings with them, then the mission of the church is to be an extension of the message of love revealed in Jesus Christ as anticipated by and reflected upon by the Biblical authors. This interpretation guards against a legalistic- and fundamentalist approach to Scripture, while allowing questioning of obvious contradictions and of that which seems, in our context, to be completely out of character to what we believe in the Christian life. In this open state, the church is approachable to even the hardest critic without having to engage in apologetics.

The second tool at the disposal of the church is Dogmatics (CD I/2:797), which must be the meeting point between what the church believes and how it engages with the world. In essence it asks from various contexts the question of the church: "Why do we believe what we believe and how does it impact on our perceived environment?"

The church is therefore not to be an uninformed Body – one only concerned with metaphysics¹¹⁹. This is not to imply that metaphysics is uninformed, but the message of the church, in comparison to metaphysics, leans much more towards existentialism as it seeks to understand both its physical relationship with God and its relationship with the world. In saying this, it would also be unfair to label Barth's understanding of the church in existentialist terms. The church is the recipient of God's self-revelation as much as the world is the recipient thereof. Out of this act of grace, the

The letter may be torn, contain spelling mistakes, it may even have been intercepted and re-written, but the essence of the message is one declaring love.

¹¹⁹ By using the word "metaphysics", the view is expressed that Christianity is tempted to view God as being beyond the physical realm and to focus its relationship on this "removed" God — to the extent that it does not give sufficient attention to concepts such as the Incarnation and immanent nature of God.

church comes into existence as an act of faith. In this faith, it therefore pledges allegiance to God, while being painfully aware of its attachment to the world.

2.3 A diverse response to God and the world.

Perhaps the most confusing aspect of the church's testimony is the manner in which the church has responded with so many diverse perspectives, which have mainly found expression through the existence of different denominations within the church. These different confessional movements within the church have not always dealt with each other in grace, but here is where the church has the most bloody history. The last line of the cartoon may just as well have read "Eastern Christians thrown to Western Christians", "Reformers thrown to the Roman Church", "Protestants thrown to Catholics", or even more recently "Orthodox Christians thrown to Post-modern Christians". The picture of this form of diversity is not a pretty one and certainly not one of which the church can feel proud.

It is nevertheless a reality in the existence of the church that both the church and the world will need to understand. The church more particularly, because the way it engaged with this specific issue is largely the measure of credibility that it carries. If the church is not able to understand and work with its inner-diversity, then how can the world take its message of love, tolerance and reconciliation seriously?

So, the fact stands that in the church's existence, we witness several different expressions of faith. This means that the church is engaged in mission-activity within itself. To be in mission to itself means that the church must consider it more important to see the self as a bearer of testimony concerning its Lord than to find the complete

description of its identity in doctrine, confession or history (CD I/2:829). The testimony of the church is nothing else but its witness of the risen Christ. Barth's ecclesiology emphasises this point and becomes the foundation of how the church is to engage in any other doctrine.

From the publication of his Epistle to the Romans in 1919 to the very end of his life, Barth did not waver on this fundamental point: the reality to which theology refers is the eschatological reality of the risen Christ and the new life into which we are drawn by the Spirit (Dalferth 1989:21).

To be the church, and more specifically, to be the church in mission requires the church's primary confession of faith in its allegiance to God and the profession of a community that finds its existence in the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The way the church understands this is obviously influenced by the church's existence in time and space. History, culture and experience all have a valuable contribution to make in the church's response to this revealed truth. This leads us back to the previous point concerning the church's creation and composition. In testifying to its Lord, and in the search for some form of orthodoxy in its proclamation and expression, the church has to be aware of its relationship with itself in the sense that different groups of Christians who are exposed to divergent influence may interpret, understand and express their faith to God in unique ways. Orthodoxy is therefore a goal and not a realistic claim by one group of Christians over another.

This does not mean that the church's mission to itself must be coloured by a sense of denial. From the acknowledgement of the church's own lack in finding the One truth within itself, it may be tempted to adopt a complacent attitude and become slack in

engaging with different perspectives within itself. The church needs to be aware of doctrinal differences that exist in itself and embrace it in its identity.

Barth (CD I/2:834) finds this practice of active engagement within the church of utmost importance. To be the church means to be in constant conversation with itself. Mission within the church means to engage with itself concerning issues that seem insurmountable, especially when these issues are raised and carried by various denominational confessions.

One confession cannot see itself as being closer to the truth than another. This form of schism does not speak of the one Body of Christ, but is actively engaged in a form of amputation (CD IV/I:675). If we were to adhere to the picture of the Church as Body, then it is obvious that diversity and different opinions is not something that the church should be ashamed of, nor is it something that the church should seek to destroy. The church, with its various perspectives and unique expressions is still the church. It represents a Body that transcends space and time, these dimensions compounding the diversity to that which already exists in the church today. The Church is therefore a “coloured” community, one that holds onto one truth concerning its acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as its Lord. To perceive any difference in perception, interpretation and/or expression of this truth as being definitive in making one confession greater than another, is counterproductive and not helpful to the church’s mission in the world.

Does this mean that different movements within the church should refrain from expressing their disapproval of practices in either the global church or in other

confessional movements? The obvious answer is “No!”. What it should refrain from doing is allowing its objection to overshadow, or as in situations to be discussed shortly, to cause the church to forget its mission-responsibility to the world around itself.

The greatest objection in church history is found in the Reformation. This is a good example and one that Barth considered most in his discussion on work between the Catholic and Protestant traditions. To Barth (CD III/3:64), both the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have ultimately failed their mission. These movements were extremely influential and successful in “protesting” against the practices of the Catholic tradition. This “Protesting” by this movement was vital. There is no reason for anyone to suggest that the Reformation was ungodly or a waste of time. Many injustices were revealed, the Bible was made accessible to normal laity and the Catholic Church was reminded, as in our first premise, that it was not God, nor the sole expression of God’s self-revelation to the world. Its failings, to Barth (CD III/3:64), lies in these traditions’ over-emphasis on protesting against the Catholic tradition, while not offering models of mission that are either more effective or necessarily more accessible. Although history will label the period of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions’ protest against the Catholic tradition as the Reformation, very little reform took place in the Catholic strand of Christianity. Instead, we find schism, the breaking away of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions from Catholicism. This schism has proven to be a long-term relational break between these traditions, adding to the history of the Christian faith another episode of division and bloodshed. Only in recent history, such as Vatican II and the signing of the joint agreement

between Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists (World Methodist Council 2006)¹²⁰ of an understanding regarding justification do we find points of contact between these movements that are conducive to denominational engagement on further issues.

To be “protest-ant” means to reform and not to destroy, a concept close to Barth’s (CD III/3: 64-65) heart. To be protest-ant¹²¹, means to have the ability in faith to protest against practices in the church that limit or hinder the proclamation of the Church’s testimony. Where the church freely and openly engages with itself, recognising that different voices in the church have equal rights and opportunities for expression, there the church has the best opportunity for reform to take place, while it simultaneously respects different perspectives. The church’s mission to itself is therefore to facilitate the open and frank discussion between different Christian views, while ensuring the respect and dignified treatment of each tradition. Where reform takes place, it will be the result of the moving of God’s Spirit in the church and not because of human achievement.

The church in South Africa is not immune to disagreements. A new protest has emerged in the Reformed tradition, calling itself “Die Nuwe Hervorming”. In a book published under the same title, authors¹²² protest against certain current church practices that seem to be outdated and irrelevant, especially to those who are inclined to post-modern thinking.

Muller (2002:19-37), for instance, argues that the church’s doctrine and teaching is out of touch with modern questions. From this point, it is argued that the traditional

¹²⁰ See Bibliography.

¹²¹ See footnote 38.

¹²² Special reference is made to Muller (2002:19-37) and Craffert (2002:67-87).

interpretation in the Reformed tradition of Scripture does not seem to measure up to modern dilemmas. By this, the writer implies that the current Reformed perspective lends itself to a pious position where issues such as same-sex relationships and abortion are not openly received, nor dealt with in a manner that gives equal opportunity to “liberally-minded” Christians. Muller (2002:37) then calls for a revisiting of the church’s use of Scripture, to rethink its doctrine and become accessible to Christians who experience life in a much more complex manner than the old tradition would allow. Its use of Scripture and the standard of its doctrine is then labelled as “pre-modern” (Muller 2002:37). The danger that Muller perceives is that the church could possibly be split between those using Scripture in the traditional fashion and a separate body of intellectuals and thinkers who interpret Scripture in a post-modern way. The interpretation of Scripture will therefore shape the doctrine of the church. Craffert (2002:79) adds to this argument suggesting that the church’s current message cannot be understood by the post-modern world and that the church needs to find ways in which to re-work the Christian message into a more relevant and understandable manner.

If we were to use Barth’s understanding of how the church is required to engage with itself, then we would need to pose questions. First, is equal opportunity given to all perspectives involved to voice their objections? Does either of these perspectives hold a moral high ground over the other? What is the motive of the protest – to reform or to destroy?

Taking the tone of the public discussion in local newspapers as a guideline, it does not seem as if these questions can be answered satisfactorily. The academic response has

nevertheless been more accommodating, while at the same time being open and frank in its questioning. My main objection to “Die Nuwe Hervorming” is whether it is asking the Reformed tradition, and Christian faith in general to move into the field of apologetics. It seems as if the nature of the protest calls for a church that needs to prove its relevance and voice in a world that experiences diverse issues and complex questions. Does the church need to prove anything? By asking this question, I am not suggesting that the church is beyond question. Where questions concerning life and faith arise, the church must certainly be accessible, approachable and open to debate. A problem arises when the church is defined according to popular culture and shaped, not by its identity in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, but by external issues. This negates the church’s need for doctrine and orthodoxy altogether.

Wethmar (2003:644) notes this movement’s negative stance towards orthodoxy, especially the way in which the Nuwe Hervorming describes orthodoxy as being motivated by ideological constructs (2003:647). The conclusions that we can come to in such an argument is that orthodoxy becomes irrelevant when faced with a Post-Modern worldview.

A relevant and understandable Christian response to issues in the world nevertheless is not the equivalent to Post-Modern Christianity, or vice versa. If Post-Modern Christianity were the only form of relevant Christianity to issues in the world then it would suggest that Post-Modern Christianity has always existed or that the church before Post-Modernity was not relevant or understandable.

Orthodoxy is not only important in the Church's testimony, but it is necessary. Of course, the church needs to be relevant and understandable, but it cannot come at the expense of orthodoxy. A pliable Christian message, that is formed and shaped with little regard for orthodoxy cannot sufficiently answer Jesus' question as posed in Matthew 16:15 (Wethmar 2003:649). To Wethmar (2003:649), in response to the Nuwe Hervorming, the foundational proclamation of the Christian faith in Matthew 16:17 does not suggest that orthodoxy limits the Christian faith to a stringent set of rules and regulations that bind the expression of the church's testimony, but instead is an expression of freedom.

It is interesting that none of the authors of "Die Nuwe Hervorming" refer to Barth's work. This observation is not meant in a derogatory or patronising sense. I am nevertheless convinced that if Barth's ecclesiological model were used, taking particular note of the church's mission to itself in engaging positively where disputes arise, that the general discussion around the issues raised would have been less emotionally driven. Constructive critique is possible, as Wethmar¹²³ (2003) has shown, but can only be done where there is an underlying understanding of the validity of each Christian's expression of faith.

To Barth the church is the context in which theology arises, the source of the content of theology and its purpose (CD I/1:17). Theology, the speaking about God, lends itself to different opinions. It cannot be otherwise. If theology were able to voice the ultimate truth without any sense of divergent views or controversies, then it would assume that the church has gained the ability to understand fully the self-revelation of

¹²³ If the author of this article were anybody else, the comment would have been the same.

God. Not only would the church then show its comprehension of the “person” of God, but it would also be able to make sense of God in the midst of its environment and experiences.

For one group in the Church to negate fellowship for the sake of being right, goes against the nature of the Church’s existence (CD II/2:529). This has been proven in history by, for example, the relationship between the Catholic and Protestant traditions. No wonder Barth objected to *Analogia Entis* so passionately, proposing in its place an *Analogia Fidei*¹²⁴.

2.4 One faith among many.

The Church’s mission therefore originates out of God’s act of self-revelation to creation through which creation is able to respond in faith and so become a community. The nature of this community is one shaped by a total reliance on God’s acts of revelation and salvation, while it is fully aware of its connection to the created realm. In this state of being, the church also experiences different interpretations of its response to God and its interaction with its surroundings.

A further tension compounds the problem. The church is not the only body claiming devotion to God, nor is it the only movement that claims to be a response to divine revelation. As much as differing opinions in the church vie for a high-ground over each other, so the church’s primary reaction is naturally to claim that it is the only true and faithful response to God.

¹²⁴ This argument is proven in, among many other sources, (CD II/2:141).

From an objective perspective, the realms of religion may therefore seem to be in competition with each other, each attempting to convert and persuade members of other faiths to change and follow what it claims to be a “correct” interpretation of divine truth and the truest reflection of life as God intended it to be.

Barth was aware of the tension between the church and other expressions of faith. To follow the progression of Barth’s ecclesiology, it would become clear that the question that needs to be asked prior to asking “Which religion is right?” is the question “What is religion?” Posing the former question before interrogating the nature of religion, leads us down a road carrying many assumptions concerning religion which render the investigation ineffective.

The first premise concerning religion in Barthian theology states that true religion is not about what we as human beings are able to achieve in terms of our relationship with God (Barth 1962:17). It can only exist because of God’s self-revelation (CD I/2:302).

This definition automatically creates two different categories of religion. True religion is a result and response to God’s self-revelation. False religion is the consequence of humanity’s initiated attempt to be in relationship with God. By using these constructs, different religions can be classified as either leaning towards the one approach or the other. “False religion” is therefore evident in many of the primal-religions where the main focus is not a positive relationship with God (as a result of God’s self-disclosure), but a human attempt to appease the gods by means of deeds or practices,

aimed at ensuring the community's safety, prosperity and in a sense, tolerance on the gods' behalf.

Similarly an element of False religion is also present in the practice of what Barth describes as True Religion (CD I/2:284). This was obvious in the way Barth engaged with Liberal Theology of the 19th and 20th centuries. To Barth (CD III/1:48), the central focus of True religion is found in its understanding that it exists and is bound by God's covenant of love with creation, initially manifest in God's history with Israel, through which the intension of God's restorative relationship with creation is made clear. God's self-revelation therefore fulfils two roles. The first is to reveal God-self to creation while, simultaneously God's self-disclosure is the first redemptive act in creation.

As the church responds to God's self-revelation by faith, specifically finding its identity in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, so the Christian religion moves from being a religion of revelation to being the revelation of religion (CD I/2:284).

In Jesus Christ, we find both the self-disclosure of God, as well as the revelation of human response to God. Jesus Christ is therefore the perfect expression of religion — displaying a natural relationship between God and creation. If Christianity, and more specifically the church, exists purely for itself, trying to ensure its own identity and place in the midst of other religions, then Christianity can be denounced as a False Religion. The Church's mission is not to point to itself, not to ensure its own growth and existence. Its mission is to point to its Lord.

By bearing testimony to Jesus Christ, and by being Christ-followers, the church therefore bears testimony to True Religion. It is not the perfect example of True Religion itself, but its mission is to point to the Christ-event. If this is the case, then the church does not need to be in competition with any other religion. It ceases to be in competition, not out of an arrogant belief that it is right, but because the truth of religion is not found in the Church itself, but in the Church's Lord.

The church therefore has a duty to exist in a world with diverse expressions of faith. It has a responsibility to exist in the context of different religions. Antagonism towards other religions and competition in quantitative terms have never won the church many friends. The church is an expression of faith as a result of God's self-revelation. The best it can do in terms of mission towards other religions is to point to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and bear testimony to the revelation of religion in the Christ-event. The church is thus a celebration of faith, and not the champion of it. Its faith is assured of the victory and eternal righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ. It does not need to be in competition. It is not caught in arrogance, which thinks of itself as better than anything else, but is called to be in service to its Lord. Its motive is therefore not to convert, but to witness the Lordship of Christ and so be an instrument of transformation and healing. It is concerned with reconciliation. Where conversion takes place, it must be said that it is not a result of the church "winning another soul", but can at best on the church's behalf be an individual's response in faith to God's grace as testified to by the Church.

2.5 A community with a testimony concerning election.

Note that here Barth's understanding of church is not described as "An elect community with a testimony", but the focus has shifted. It removes from the church the responsibility to prove itself to be something more than it really is.

If the church is a response to God's self-revelation, but is also created because of it, then the church finds itself in natural relationship with both other religions and those who do not adhere to any religion at all. The common factor is that they are all recipients of exactly the same self-disclosure by God in Jesus Christ. Barth explores the nature of this relationship even further. Not only is the church a joint-recipient of God's self-revelation, but the church with the rest of creation has become a community of the elect in Jesus Christ (CD II/2:35).

Election and revelation describe both the church's relationship with God and with the rest of creation. It emphasises the nature of the church being involved in True Religion, for it depends solely upon God's initiative for it to find existence and expression. Barth (CD II/2:19) maintains that God's election is not a decision made in response to the human condition of sin, but must be understood in terms of God's free decision to live in community with creation, even before the Fall.

The election of creation then finds its full expression in the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the expression of God's election (CD II/2:12), but is also the point in which God's election of creation becomes a reality. Christ is the full expression of God in creation and similarly of human obedience and faithfulness to God so confirming the Covenantal relationship between God and

creation. With the Incarnation, the revelation of discipline and ethics required in the Kingdom of God are revealed (CD II/2:12-13).

As Christ reveals God, the full meaning of humanity in relationship with God and the norms of the Kingdom, so Christ paves the way for the realisation of a community that can respond to God in faith. This implies that the revelation of God's relationship is not only revealed to those who are prone to religious practices, but to all.

The church is therefore also in direct relationship with those who do not confess faith in religious terms. As election takes place in the election of Christ, so the election of the community takes place (CD II/2:94). The church is in this definition not the complete manifestation of God's elect (CD II/2:94), but is the expression of the elect who have responded to God's acts of grace in faith (CD II/2:196).

The election of the individual is therefore subsumed in the election of the community, which in turn is only possible through the election of Christ. The news to the church in mission is therefore that all people are already elect in Jesus Christ, and so find their redemption in the work of God and not in the work of the church. Bosch (1980:166-167) describes the dynamics of this relationship well:

Our missionary activities, Barth argued, remained mere human efforts, unless it pleased God to incorporate them into the service of his revelation. For this reason our missionary motives would never be adequate. In our missionary reporting we should rather say too little than too much. After all, we could never establish the real need of the pagan; only God could know that. Similarly, we should not be too garrulous about the aim of mission; what we regarded as the main purpose could not remotely express what God's purpose was.

The possibility of the church existing in the person of faith and the person “without” faith is equal. The church’s mission is therefore not to differentiate between its mission to those of faith and those who do not adhere to a religious faith. It is not called to judge, but is called to witness.

To the devout Christian, this possibility hardly seems fair. How is it possible for God to love the person who does not respond to God’s grace equally to the person who is in faithful service? The short answer is that if God depended on human works and achievements, we would then be faced with a Christianity of False Religion. The church is called to proclamation, but it must be said that whether the church engages in the verbal proclamation of its testimony or not, its mission is primarily to be present, available and accessible to all.

The church’s mission of presence creates the opportunity for individuals to respond freely to God’s grace without feeling coerced, manipulated or threatened into the Kingdom. Bosch (1980:199) adds to this point:

Mission as an essential aspect of the Church’s existence is also related to the fact that God’s grace – in Barth’s words – is never ‘brutal grace’. God does not want to appropriate man to himself against man’s will. He wants to offer man the opportunity to refuse God in liberty. And this opportunity which God offers man is called mission.

God elects all people in Jesus Christ. The election of the individual is bound in God’s election of the community, but it becomes a living reality in the person’s response of faith. The good news of God’s grace is that it is not limited only to those who respond, but that God’s acts of revelation and salvation are specifically for those who cannot respond in their own strength.

What would a church look like that treats each person, whether that individual is part of the Christian faith, their denomination or not, as a being who is already elect in Jesus Christ and carries God's approval? Each person carries with them moral- and ethical behaviour, whether outwardly or inwardly manifested, that may not carry God's approval.

The church in this sense is in as much need of salvation as the person outside its fellowship. The matter of sin is an issue that requires a journey both with God and the community. The growing awareness of one's own sinfulness while in community with God and with others who profess a relationship with God is precisely the journey of faith, hope and love. It is the path of healing, the process of sanctification.

The church's mission is then portrayed in the way it interacts with those who do not form part of its community. The inclusive and welcoming practices of the church should testify to its recognition of God's acts of revelation and salvation to each person in Jesus Christ. Church practices, especially the sacraments therefore cannot be used as instruments of punishment¹²⁵. Church practices, particularly the sacraments, must be seen in the light of a celebration of God's acts of love that cannot be confined by the Institutional church. The sacraments are not a right of passage to the grace of God, nor are they proof of God's acts of love in the community or the individual.

¹²⁵ This is the case in many denominations where a church member who is under discipline is refused access, specifically to Holy Communion. The Roman Catholic Catechism employs this in the discussion on excommunication by stating that such discipline "...impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them" (Catechism 1992:366).

When it comes to the point about Baptism, Barth's understanding of this Sacrament gives sufficient theological reason to combat the idea of a differentiation between personal salvation as the first divine act in the life of the individual and then Baptism of the Spirit (which accompanies adult Baptism in many Pentecostal Confessions) as a second divine act or "Second Blessing" (Floor 1986:11). Such a proposal is heresy, bordering on blasphemy.

The church's fellowship, accessibility and open witness to its Lord in worship and service are all part of the church's mission to those outside its expression of faith.

2.6 An instrument alongside the State.

The church's mission, stemming from its creation in God's self-revelation and from its relationship with those who exist within and alongside it lead the church to another form of mission. The church, dealing with people, also has to interact with institutions that govern, shape and guide humankind. This places the church in a relationship with the State. The world, which the church serves and to whom the church testifies concerning God's revelation in Jesus Christ, is governed by politics.

The Kingdom of God is not an immediate global reality, but in the church's existence, is an eschatological goal in creation. As much as the church has been engaged in the world, and with politics, history has shown various reactions by the church to the State. These vary from full participation with the State as displayed in the Roman Church's influence in the pre-Reformation era, the Reichskirche in

Germany during the early 20th century and the Reformed tradition's (in South Africa) endorsement of the Apartheid regime in South Africa during the mid to late 20th century. On the other extreme, there have been movements in the church protesting against the named church's stances and segments of different denominations that have refused to participate in discussion and simply removed themselves¹²⁶ from this fellowship between State and church, whatever the relationship may have been.

Barth is direct concerning the place of Christian engagement with the political realm. To Barth, Christians are not called to be passive observers of their situation (CD I/2:711), but carry a responsibility both as people of faith and citizens of their respective countries to engage with the powers and facilitate discussion, especially concerning matters that are against the morals and principles of the Christian faith.

Shall the church then view the State as an entity that exists as the human effort to bring about justice, peace and the ideals of the church? It may be tempted to do so and then label the State as a form of False Religion, but this is not the case. Barth (1960:144) describes a very delicate relationship between the church and the State.

On the one side, the church has the responsibility to observe and critique the State's actions. It nevertheless has to do so using a very specific point of reference. Its own identity in engaging as both observer and critic of the State is not undertaken with the understanding that the church possesses a higher morality, divinity or divine perspective. Neither can it engage in these acts, pretending to be an opposition-party to whatever political party is in power.

¹²⁶ The Kairos document describes this position as "Church Theology" (Kairos 1985:11-17).

The church's main perspective arises from the call to be in partnership with the State (Barth 1960:144). This may be an extremely sobering concept for the church. The notion in the church that it is the sole builder of the Kingdom of God is therefore denied. Once again, we must be reminded that the Kingdom of God is not one built by human initiative, but is purely God's act of grace, facilitating creation's response in faith. The church is not the Kingdom of God.

This point also reinforces the concept that God's act of revelation, salvation and thus election exists beyond the measurable points of the Christian Church. Where the Church is called to testify a message of hope, the State receives a similar call, but this time a call that directs this instrument to oversee and promote the well-being of its citizens (Barth 1981:445). Where the Church points towards Christ, specifically encouraging spirituality, there is a certain moral-standard that is proposed in the Person of Jesus Christ (Barth 1981:442). The State, on the other hand has a responsibility to look after its citizens and to promote a sense of community (Barth 1981:445).

The Church can therefore dedicate its mission to the State largely as one of intercessory prayer (Barth 1960:135) but its mission to the State does not end here. As a witness of God's self-revelation, and having responded to God's call to be Christ-followers, the church bears the responsibility to participate with the State in promoting justice, peace and righteousness.

This model does not juxtapose the Church in opposition to the State, but takes cognisance of the fact, that serving in the State are frequently people who have very

strong religious convictions. The Church is therefore not separated from the State, but has a part in it and visa versa.

The church should nevertheless guard against the temptation to dictate to or aim to replace the State. Another caution would be the antithesis: to prevent the State from dictating to or aiming to take the place of the church.

3. What conclusions can be drawn from these observations?

The notion of mission in Barth's ecclesiology has shown surprising results. Mission is a result of the church's existence as the church discovers itself and asks questions about its identity. The Church's primary relationship with God requires the church to be in mission. The relational ties between the church and God as well as the church and the world define the manner in which the church exercises its missionary objectives. Throughout the discussion, it has been evident that the church's first missional priority is to be the bearer of the testimony concerning God's self-revelation and salvific acts. The crux of this testimony centres around the Church's relationship with Jesus Christ as its Lord.

From here, the church develops further relationships and its testimony becomes defined and focussed according to these relationships. It is important to note that the essence of the Church's message does not change as the church engages with these different parties. The manner in which the church professes Jesus as its Lord becomes more deliberate and relevant.

3.1 Outcomes of this research.

Using the outcomes of the research, the following statement can be made:

The Church has come into existence through God's self-revelation to the world in Jesus Christ. In the power of the Spirit, the Church's mission is to:

1. bear testimony to the salvific work done by God for the whole of creation through Jesus Christ. This testimony of God's work is a continuation of the testimony of those who have lived throughout the ages and as shared with the church and the world through Holy Scripture;
2. acknowledge that the church is not yet complete as is evident in its denominational divisions. It is the church's mission to search for truth and to work towards an ecumenical point. Unity in the church will enable it to witness to one truth, but until such time it witness to one Lord in diverse ways. It deals with different perspectives in its own fold with dignity, respect and love;
3. engage with communities of faith outside the Christian religion, celebrating God's revelation to all of creation, while bearing testimony to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ;
4. celebrate the election of all in Jesus Christ, therefore treating each person, inside and outside the church, with dignity, love and respect. By being present in the world, the church is to be accessible and approachable to all, in fellowship enabling a deepening of individual and corporate spirituality;

5. support and criticise the State, knowing that the State too is a partner alongside the church – an instrument that God uses to bring about God’s Kingdom.

Because we have been able to identify a notion of mission related to the Church’s relationships with each of these entities, we can conclude that the hypothesis¹²⁷ of this thesis — that Barth’s understanding of the Church’s relationships to different entities gives guidelines for understanding the Church’s mission — is proven.

4. How do these conclusions compare to other studies?

Although I am not aware of any other study being done on the notion of mission in Barth’s ecclesiology, I was made aware during the writing of the final chapters of this thesis, of a recent publication that studied Barth’s ecclesiology as a Christological phenomenon. This publication by Bender (2005) has proven invaluable in assessing this work and evaluating the validity of the hypothesis.

The best description of Bender’s (2005:253) understanding of Barth’s notion of the church is found in the following paragraph:

The community of Jesus Christ exist for the world. While the community itself lives within the world, it is also set apart from the world by God in order to carry out its divinely-appointed commission of witness to the world. It therefore exists for the world but also for God, to serve God’s purposes and to serve the world’s need (CD IV/3(2):762). The community is set apart from the world, and yet set apart for service to the world, called out of the nations in order to live for the nations (CD IV/3(2):763-764). The church has no independent existence from this task and ministry entrusted to it by Christ.

¹²⁷ See p.6.

Bender (2005:168-174) agrees that the church's identity is found both in its relationship to God as its creator and its relationship to the world. Bender (2005:174) also acknowledges in the differentiation between the visible and invisible church, defined in this thesis as the church and the Church. The church's sole function is to refer to Christ as its Lord (2005:244), while showing solidarity with the world (2005:247).

Election is then described as a central theme in God's dealing with creation. The election of Jesus Christ (2005:98) is recognized as the pivotal point in God's redemptive acts in the world throughout history. The election of the world then becomes possible through the election of Christ. To Bender (2005:99) the concepts of rejection and election are not on equal footing. One interesting point that Bender (2005:105) raises is his understanding that Barth's notion of election is grounded in the doctrine of God and not in the doctrine of the church. This point was raised, but not as it has been defined in chapter 5. It is the church's mission, using the story of election as recorded in Scripture (2005:106) to proclaim God's "Yes!" to creation.

With the exception of the State, the relationships described in this thesis are not specifically discussed in Bender's work. The relationship between Church and State is described using a very strong Christological focus. As Barth sees the State as a partner with the Church in God's work of reconciliation (Bender 2005:259), so the church engages in a role of support, yet with the authority to critique. It is given authority by Christ (2005:260) to do so. The Church and State are not mutually exclusive; neither can the one fill the shoes of the other (2005:263).

Bender (2005:249) therefore agrees concerning the Church's mission that "The nature of the community influences its form, which then impact [sic.] on its mission.". The mission of the church (2005:250) is then shared by means of "...declaration, exposition and address, or the proclamation, explication and application of the Gospel as the Word of God" (CD IV/3(2):843). The multiple nature of the church's ministry therefore witnesses to the limitations of the church and the greatness of God. In its multiplicity, the church is able to witness in various forms, using unique gifts. It does so concerning the same God (2005:254), given that none of the gifts or ministries should lord themselves over another.

From reading Bender's study, there are no observable differences between the conclusions drawn in this thesis and those alluded to in Bender's book.

6. Questions to the modern church.

In conclusion, Barth (CD IV/2:620) manages to summarize the argument of this thesis well and answers the question posed as the title of this chapter:

The existence of the true Church is not an end in itself. The divine operation by which it is vivified and constituted makes it quite impossible that its existence as the true Church should be understood as the goal of God's will for it. The divine operation in virtue of which it becomes and is a true Church makes it a movement in the direction of an end which is not reached with the fact that it exists as a true Church, but merely indicated and attested by this fact. On the way, moving in the direction of this goal, it can and should serve its Lord. For this reason it will not be the true Church at all to the extent that it tries to express itself rather than the divine operation by which it is constituted. As such it will reveal itself, or be revealed, in glory at this goal; yet only as the Church which does not try to seek and express and glorify itself, but absolutely to subordinate itself and its witness, placing itself unreservedly in the service and under the control of that which God wills for it and works within it.

To speak in theoretical terms concerning the church is possible. The local church, consisting of individuals who gather in a community, with the purpose of serving and worshipping God, needs guidelines. The question is asked in the local congregations concerning the church's mission, its witness and its identity. From Barth's understanding of the church and its mission in the world there are nevertheless some questions that the local church can ask. These questions concern the nature of its relationships and the thesis will address these first before the church's mission will be more discernable.

After giving an opportunity for those who have been the unfortunate recipients of hurtful mission by the church to share their stories, Light and Rogers (2004:72-77) have posed these questions concerning the nature of the church, hoping that these questions would guide current congregations to be more sensitive in their methods of mission. I am sure that Barth would not have objected to these. They ask:

1. "How does your church advertise?" (Light and Rogers 2004:72)

This question relates to the church's identity and will clearly indicate the church's understanding of its relationship with God and the world within which it exists. The church's role in making itself known is only preceded by its existence. The nature of this existence will depend on its view of God, its role in society and its responsibility to both.

2. "How hospitable is your church?" (2004:73)

Here, the church's approachability is tested. If the church is open to all without discriminating, the church has already testified concerning the election of all in Jesus Christ.

3. "What is the atmosphere like in your church?" (2004:74)

Without succumbing to the temptation of becoming a church of popular culture at the expense of orthodoxy, a church's atmosphere in the context of worship speaks volumes concerning its theological approach. The more conducive the church is to allowing each person, including visitors, to express their worship of God in the knowledge of God's acceptance, the more likely the church will experience a diversity in its membership-composition.

4. "How accessible is your church?" (2004:75)

The church's physical location, its design and the way in which visitors can feel welcome in the shortest amount of time, all speak of ways in which the church can be accessible. The more open the church is to the outside world, the greater opportunity it has to fulfil its mission by professing the Lordship of Christ, while ministering to the its immediate context.

The local church needs to see itself as the pastoral and equipping fellowship of those who confess their faith in God through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit, while at the same time professing its faith outside its walls in word and in deed. Real mission is not always a denominational or structural practice. Every place where

Christians find themselves is a potential mission opportunity. The institution does not always have the availability or resources to deal with mission on the personal, inter-faith, ecumenical or even political levels. To the ordinary member this may very well be a daily reality as they move in these circles through work, interest or recreation.

So what can the church do? It needs to inform the people that they are as Christians, witnesses to God's work and therefore the extension of God's Church in the world.

They cannot expect the church to make statements on every issue in life as a prerequisite to the member being able to conduct his or her life. For this task, the church needs to be a continuous witness to them of what it means to be a Christian, by not giving answers, but being a place where the community can experience God. Does God need the church? No. However, even in Scripture, there is a natural tendency for those who have responded to God in faith to form a community and express the divine call to witness concerning their Lord. The institutional church is not the sole expression of that community, but it facilitates and ministers too that community.

Barth gives us a helpful ecclesiology, one that demands that the church to be humble, completely submissive to God, working in obedience in its world.

Perhaps the church should consider the following more seriously as it contemplates its mission:

In the work of Karl Barth, the Church is the living community of the living Christ. God calls it into being by His grace and gives it life by means of His word and His Spirit, with a view to His kingdom. Thus the Church is not a permanent fact, an institution, much less an object of faith. It comes about by God's action. It is an event constituted by the power of the word of God in Scripture, made real today and announced to human beings. This proclaimed word gives rise to faith, a gift from God that is outside human control. There

is no authority in the Church except the word of God, which is to be left free to call into question the Church itself. Through God's word the Church is renewed and, above all, urged on to its mission: constant proclamation of the salvific event, Jesus Christ, and of the advent of God's kingdom. This is the core of Barth's message. The word and its proclamation are not meant to reinforce confessional, institutional, social, or political positions, or to abet the expansion of the Church as a society. (Azevedo 1985:611).

As God reveals Godself in the person of Jesus Christ, so the Church as eschatological community becomes a valuable instrument in the proclamation of God's intension for a relationship with creation. It is a calling above all callings, a privilege and honour. And so, the Christian hope finds its expression in the way the church engages with different entities in this world. Our prayer is that God's Kingdom will come in all of these places.

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I wish to use the following abbreviations:

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¹²⁸ This publication first appeared as Wolf, E. (ed.) 1956. *Karl Barth zum Kirchenkampf*. No. 49: *Theologische Existenz heute, Neue Folge*. München: Kaiser Verlag.

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