

Reforming *our* ‘Barth’?¹

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the Reformation as catalyst for many church and societal reforms, this article wants to reflect upon the transformation of the past 40 years of Barth studies in South Africa. Not only have we consciously read Barth in South Africa, but we also differed in the way we made Barth our own. Therefore, in reforming our ‘Barth’, we will look into particular trajectory of first discerning Willie Jonker’s Barth, followed by that of Dirkie Smit, and lastly proposing another emerging Barth for the way we read him in South Africa today. It is especially the role and significance of the prophetic office in Barth’s theology which will emerge in challenging ways.

Key words

Karl Barth; Willie Jonker; Dirkie Smit; prophetic

1. On *our* ‘Barth’?

Knowledge and power is not only intimately bound to each other, but often in such a way that knowledge does not really speak to power, but rather reflect, mimic and serve it. This can happen in any field of study, even in the reading of Karl Barth in South Africa. Piet Naudé (2015) already started in this regard to explore some of the various readings of Barth in South Africa during the struggle for justice from 1960 to 1990. It was therefore maybe no coincidence that the phrase *Reading Karl Barth in South Africa* has been famously titled by a group of South African theologians (cf. Villa Vicencio 1988) – of whom well-respected international Barth scholars like Timothy Gorringer (1999:16) and Paul Dafydd Jones (2008:177) often refer

¹ This paper was presented on 22 June 2017 at the TSSA’s (Theological Society of South Africa) annual meeting in Stellenbosch with the theme of ‘Between conflict and communion: The reception of the 16th century reformations in South Africa.’

to as one of the best contextual readings in Barth's theology – because for the past four decades we began to read Barth in South Africa ever more conscious and critical. In fact, Dirkie Smit (2012) has captured the state of our knowledge in this regard as rather having Barth's name in South Africa in quotation marks, coupled with emphasizing this is *our* 'Barth'. In itself this is not a negative or critical comment from Smit, because Barth's theology precisely assumes and calls for this, but then obviously in very specific ways. As history has shown, many things are indeed possible with Barth, but all is not just and true to the spirit and ethos of Barth's theology. It is one thing to say it is 'our' Barth, but how much can we then assume and allow into that particular 'our'? Moreover, how much can we discern in terms of similarities and differences – (dis)continuities – regarding the transition from one generation's 'Barth' to that of another within a very particular shared trajectory? Thus, conscious of how a) our academic fields of expertise have shifted and transformed in a particular social context, and b) how we commemorate conflict and communion during Reformation 500 in 2017, as well as c) the challenges and temptations regarding decolonizing knowledge, let us venture into a small contribution of not merely continuing reading Barth in South Africa, but discerning how to do so against this particular backdrop.

We shall proceed to respond to the above in the following way: Although there are many readings of Barth available, we shall opt for three specific readings that can be placed within a very particular trajectory. We will explore the 'Barth' of Willie Jonker, seek the (dis)continuity in Dirkie Smit's 'Barth', whereupon reform of *our* 'Barth' may emerge in a third and last exploration within this article.

2. Willie Jonker's 'Barth'?

Two things are clear when it comes to Jonker's reading of Barth, namely that first of all he had immense respect for Barth, and secondly that he often disagreed with Barth. On the one hand he says "The generation to which I belonged was, theologically speaking, dominated by Barth ... He was undoubtedly the greatest theologian of our age" (Jonker 1988:29); and on the other hand it is quite clear in numerous writings of his that he won't accept everything from Barth, and often has a critical word or two in reference to Barth.

The above is especially clear from Jonker's work in Christology (1977), Pneumatology (1981) and Ecclesiology (posthumously published in 2008, but originally written in 1983). In all three these texts, Jonker is in critical discussion with Barth's doctrine of reconciliation (volume IV, *Church Dogmatics* [CD]). The most important aspects to highlight here for our purposes, are the following five remarks.

First, although Jonker reads Barth extensively and captures him very well on certain points, he ignores or misinterprets Barth on other crucial points. In both the discussions on Christology and pneumatology, the references are mainly from the first two parts in volume IV in the doctrine of reconciliation, dealing with the priestly and kingly office of Jesus Christ, and strangely enough with very little reference to the third part of volume IV, namely the prophetic office of Christ. On the one hand Jonker shows great insight of the unity in simultaneous movement between the priestly and kingly office of Christ, but then for some reason or another ignores or just does not grasp the crucial relationship it has with the third office of the prophetic, Jesus Christ the True Witness. On a formal level one is struck by the few references to the prophetic office in his text and bibliography; as if he stopped reading Barth after the first two parts of volume four. On a material level, regarding interpretation, Jonker senses the dynamic movement of humiliation and exaltation in the simultaneous unity of being both obedient as Lord and exalted as Son of God (man) so that reconciliation is fully achieved and fulfilled in this event of the first two offices, but then strangely enough misses the real and full actuality and dynamics of this as it is also *revealed* in and through the prophetic office of Christ as being *present* and actual as the True Witness for humanity in this world. On the one hand he correctly captures the importance of *geschichte* in Barth's theology here (1977:121), but then ignores the importance the prophetic office fulfils in Barth's theology *in revealing and effecting* this actuality of Himself in the present. In short, Jonker misses or neglects to read the significant place and function the prophetic office fulfils in Barth's thought.

Second, Jonker (1977:153) follows Barth in the innovative way of restructuring the traditional order of the *manus triplex* when he proposes his own guidelines towards the future, but then (again!) misinterprets Barth when he says: "On this original manner [of the new order within the

threefold office] Barth withstands the tendency within the new theology to put the prophetic office on the foreground by distributing most of the weight upon it.” (1977:153) [translation – ML]. Though the prophetic office *is last* in Barth’s order, it is by no means *the least* in his thought. It has no content of its own, because the ‘True Witness’ receives and works with what is already actual and fulfilled in the previous two offices. The prophetic office adds nothing, because it has everything – and to miss this, is to miss the crucial direction and content of Barth’s thought which was already implicit and actual in the doctrine of revelation (CD I/1-II/1), and even more specifically in the doctrine of election (CD II/2).

Third, this particular reading of Jonker’s Barth is then also the reason why Jonker continues to criticize Barth in response to the question of *the relevance of the church* in our (modern) age. What Jonker (2008:53–62, 147–149) cannot stand in Barth’s take on the church, is how he *relativizes* the church on the one hand, and *turns to the world with his universalism*. This is quite an important book for those interested in Jonker’s reading of Barth, because his love-hate relationship with Barth is quite intense in this work. Or, to phrase it a bit better: the implications of his earlier reading and interpretation of Barth, works itself out now. Already in the mere formulation of the title indicates how differently Jonker and Barth thinks about the church. Barth in all probability would not – especially given how his ecclesiology is worked out in the *manus triplex* with the special differentiation of the place and function the prophetic office has within it – phrase the challenge among the lines of the relevance of the church in our age. For Barth it is not a question regarding the *relevance* of the church, but rather a deeper question regarding the *faithfulness, obedience and witness* of the church in the current (‘modern’) age. Regarding Jonker’s critique of the Barth who *relativizes* the church, it is in fact Barth’s way of actually grounding the church on a real, actual and dynamic foundation, in which he truly wants to protect it from either becoming static, boring, or having ‘arrived’ in its search for relevance – a move which will make it truly irrelevant. Put differently: Behind Jonker’s concerns of *relativizing* the church, is actually Barth’s great insight of the prophetic office where he confirms the great insight that he had in the beginning of the *CD*, namely that God reveals/proclaims God; God reveals Himself; reconciliation is revelation; yes, that our Mediator is the prophet of his own with his glorious self-disclosure; reconciliation is not only act

or deed, but also speech, proclamation; He is vocal, eloquent and radiant! Or, as Barth (*CD IV/3*, 79–80) formulates this under the prophetic office: “A mute and obscure God would be an idol. The true and living God is eloquent and radiant. ... Hence it is not accidental or external to Him, but essential and proper, to declare Himself.” There is thus no gap or particular point of contact (natural theology) between God and the world which the church has to fill in the sense of its presence, representation, realization, identification of God, because He does that Himself, and therefore instead of *relativizing* the church, it is actually *called* anew to witness to this actuality. As John Webster commented on this: “[the church] lacks anxieties about foundations or justifications for its enterprise” (1998:138), because “kerygma is an activity of the risen Christ” (142) “whereby the church is redefined as a community whose task it is not of making affective Jesus’ reality, but attesting [witnessing to] its inherent effectiveness” (142). In short, for those who have read Barth’s prophetic office – because, as Webster also says, there are quite a lot of scholars who have not read Barth here (Jonker is not the only one not to have done so) – will immediately sense that the church is not actually relativized in God’s reconciliation of Himself with the world, but in fact freed and liberated to correspond and witness since their possibility proceeds from God’s actuality. The so-called *relativizing* of the church should not be seen in a negative light, because it is actually the gift and miracle that creates and enables the church to be the church – truly ‘relevant’ if you really would like to use the term, because its identity and mission is not self-referential, but eccentric living, on a sure, actual dynamic eventful eloquent and radiant Voice who speaks for itself, giving it a presence in witness.

Regarding the other crucial point of critique Jonker has in his reading of Barth, namely that of his ‘turn to the world’ and ‘universalism’, it is actually quite notable how the actual turn to ‘the world’ and towards ‘the whole of humanity’ are absent in Jonker’s church who seeks identity and relevance. What I mean here, is how low the particulars of the South African context registers in Jonker’s relevant and imagined church in South Africa at the time. One of Jonker’s main concerns in phrasing the question on relevance, is the loss of membership and “verstikkende ongeïnteresseerdheid” [suffocating apathy] (2008:5), while I believe that within its original context the concepts of ‘world’ and ‘humanity’ had some other more crucial things to say which he only addresses at the end. Put differently: The relevance

of Jonker's church assumes a white, European, middle to upper class man who is well-educated and powerful, while Barth's 'turn to the world' and 'God for us/humanity' open our eyes to see those on the margins – black African girl – who cries for liberation and justice (cf. Hunsinger 2000:42–59). This kind of critique is also in Piet Naude's (2008:209–222) reflection (as addendum at the back of the book), who hints between the lines on the orientation, focus, antenna and power-sensitivity of Jonker's church in the South African context: then (1983–1987) and now (2008 onwards). I believe much of this has to do with a particular reading of Barth's theology, especially the misinterpretation or neglect of the prophetic office by Jonker in Barth's theology.

Fourthly – and now in the process of bringing this part of the discussion to a conclusion – it is necessary to also note that part of this critique and particular reading in Jonker's Barth is also present in his work on pneumatology, where he criticizes Barth for preaching as "mere announcement without any appeal because of everything already being done ['stilgelé'] and decided in eternal Election of God" [translation – ML] (1981:158). Here again, as with the previous, it is quite remarkable how the references to third part in volume IV (the prophetic office) are absent in Jonker's engagement with Barth. In short, Jonker has it against Barth's conceptualization of faith which already falls in eternity for Barth, but then not only does he miss how faith is significantly placed *last* in the structure, order and flow of reconciliation – but also, according to Barth's logic in *CD* IV it assumes and implies *love and hope* as part and parcel of the dynamic unity within the doctrine of reconciliation. "It is as they have faith in the One who came, love the One who is present and hope in the One who is to come that they realise their calling to be a witness of Jesus Christ" (Nimmo 2017:165). (It sounds so simple and straightforward, but readers of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation often forget not just to read his work here in a chronological and linear fashion, but also simultaneously across in order to see something of this dynamic, actual, eventful description of the revelation we have received. Such a judgment on the role of faith in Barth's theology just fails to see how it is part of a context where it is placed not only under the Verdict of the Father, but also under the Direction of the Son, and assumed and implied under the heading of the Promise of the Spirit.) Lastly, still pertaining to his reading of Barth in the field of pneumatology, we need to highlight and stress that pneumatology is not

absent in the doctrine of reconciliation, but present and working in all three the offices of Christ as it *gathers, builds and sends* the church into the world in order to correspond and witness to its Lord in its earthly historical form!

In short – and now in closing our fifth remark – there is a clear ambivalence in Jonker’s reading of Barth. On the one hand, immense respect and interest in Barth – acknowledging numerous times his influence and significance for us – coupled with insightful summaries and captures of Barth’s thought for the development of his own. On the other hand, it seems that Jonker does not ‘read’ and ‘get’ the way how most of Barth’s work ‘pushes towards’ and ‘culminates’ in the prophetic office of Christ. What makes this even more significant and interesting is that Jonker himself makes much of the prophetic in his own thought on numerous occasions; but, as we may expect by now, in a different manner. In his homiletical credo from the heart, *Woord as Opdrag*, he defines preaching as follows: ‘If preaching is the free, *prophetic* proclamation of the Word of God in the actual situation of the congregation, then the question regarding how to make the Word of God concrete in the situation of the congregation, is of the utmost importance’ [translation & emphasis – ML] (1976:118). Towards the end of his life, in his autobiographical text, *Selfs die kerk kan verander*, he says in an often quoted passage ‘the struggle in next few decades to come will be amongst others dealing with church’s *prophetic* calling in society’ [translation & emphasis – ML] (1998:220–221).

In the end I can understand why Jonker did not follow Barth completely, but not necessarily why he did not read Barth at this particular point. That surely had to be the challenge of the person representing the next generation in this trajectory.

3. Dirkie Smit’s ‘Barth’?

There are significant similarities and differences in the shift towards Smit’s reading of Barth. As with Jonker, Barth’s presence continues – quite distinctively – as Smit finds Barth also very fascinating and even more persuasive. Barth’s name, voice and influence is seldom not part of the picture Smit describes in his work. However, there are also important differences in their work, namely that in Smit’s case it is less a case of *with and against* Barth (as we have seen in Jonker), but rather much more *with*,

alongside and 'after' Barth (pun intended). Smit's reference to 'our Barth' in the beginning, is first and foremost applicable to himself – and then in a positive and constructive sense. There is a clear shift from Jonker to Smit where Barth is not only being heard more thoroughly (as we'll shortly see), but indeed being made his own. This shift in the reading of Barth that Smit brings to the fore, happens in the following ways.

Firstly: There is an indirect, ever-occurring presence and influence of Barth's thought in Smit's work. It is seldom the case that Barth's voice is not heard in what he writes on a particular challenge, theme or question. Doing theology with Barth in such an indirect way is for instance clear in many of the essays where he addresses a particular theme or question – like on 'church and work?' (2000), or theology 'in service of the language Canaan' (2002), or on 'public theology' (2003), or the relationship between 'worship and life' (1997), and so-forth-and-forth. In short, besides the many references to Barth's work in responding to these themes, questions and challenges, there is a clear spirit and ethos of Barth's work present in the work of Smit.

Secondly: Then there are also various direct engagements with Barth's work, though it is seldom merely just *per se* with Barth and his interpretation, but rather with and 'after' Barth on a particular question or challenge within the specific South African context. Three good examples to cite in this regard are following: a) On the question regarding 'no ulterior motive – and public theology' (2007a), he responds with Barth by defining public theology according to the particular (one and only) revelation of God in Christ where we do not serve a general, abstract, generic god, but witness as a particular community (Christian community instead of religion) to this God who is for humanity; where our witness is called to correspond to this particular revelation; where no other motive gave us the right to confess; and instead of being captive to our sin of pride, sloth or untruthfulness, we are reconciled and thus called to renewed obedience. b) On the question of 'no other motives would give us the right – reflections on contextuality from a Reformed experience' (2007b), we hear "So, the way the particular historical context is experienced and read becomes the occasion to confess, but it does not provide the norm or the content. That should come from revelation, from the true gospel" (170). c) Or on the question of 'Social Transformation and confessing the faith. Karl Barth's view on confession

revisited' (2009a) we hear "Reformed doctrine is neither a principle nor a system, but the willingness to listen, again and anew, the willingness to be taught rather than a teaching" (310) – or: "To presuppose that any social transformation, even one as dramatic and terrible as the event in Nazi-Germany, could become the basis, content and legitimation for confession, would be to fall into precisely this error, that they were unmasking and rejecting" (320). In short, it is clear from these examples how Smit has learned from Barth and he now, with Barth, responds to specific questions and challenges in his own context. It is in the face of new and different challenges that he reads Barth for us.

Thirdly: The above line of thinking also confronts us here with a critical question or two. Though Smit is responding to different challenges and questions, is he not just repeating and merely echoing Barth's answer to the similar question? How is his answer really 'after Barth', and can it respond to unique South African questions and challenges? The answer is, at least, in the following two ways, namely that in the first instance he is trying to see things, connections and structure in Barth's thought in even better ways than Barth himself said or did, and thus, in his spirit and ethos, stressing *that* insight in new surprising ways. Standing a bit further away from the *CD*, Smit can see things Barth did not see; or merely assumed others would see, but failed to do so. What Smit does is to provide us with a reflective and insightful interpretation, close reading, thick description of the dynamic movement in Barth's thought. A good example to cite in this regard – especially in light of what we heard from Jonker – is the following:

It is not without good reason that Barth, in his later works, more normally uses the expression 'witness' to refer to the Christian life. The witness of the church is the more comprehensive and normal way to respond to the gospel in everyday life, but this witness is done according to the confession, which is the way the gospel is heard and understood.' (2007b:175).

Fourthly, and very much related to the above (but a bit different), is the way Smit also reflects upon and evaluates the reading and reception of Barth by others in the South African context. Two exemplary essays are here of note. In 'On Reading Karl Barth in SA – today?' (2009b) he not only shows how the church struggle produced many different 'Barths' – often in service of a

particular theme and/or agenda – but even more importantly how to read, interpret, differentiate, structure Barth’s thought and theology on certain key issues – especially regarding the issue of Barth and politics – like:

On the surface it may therefore seem that the influence of Barth in SA was primarily in the sphere of theology and politics, of church and state – *but such a conclusion would be a major misunderstanding* ... It was not Barth’s own political ideas at all that were so influential in SA. His real impact was on a deeper, more fundamental level ... truly at stake were theological questions and themes’ [emphasis – ML] (Smit 2009b:284–285).

This is a crucial insight, because at the time – and even still today – there are still proponents of this idea (cf. Kuitert 1986:84–88; Van de Beek 2011). What Smit does here (and also in the 2012 article “On doing dogmatics after Barth – South African challenges”) is to interpret, summarize and capture some of the leitmotifs in Barth’s thought for doing theology in our context. In the first essay he concludes with “‘a posteriori’, evangelical, realistic, ethical, and confessing” and in the other with “Christian and joyful”, “contextual and ethical” and “confessional and ecumenical”. In short, his reading of Barth is remarkably different from that of Jonker in this specific sense that he provides us with both positive reflections and evaluations of previous readings of Barth in our context, as well as with markers and lenses how to understand his theology as helpful resource in doing theology in this particular context.

Fifthly, our last and critical remark regarding Smit’s work on Barth, and that is: Smit’s appreciation and respect for Barth’s work is clear – so much so that the way in which he is actually ‘after’ Barth, is very affirmative and constructive – which begs the question: Is there no critique and specific departures – especially in the light of what we saw and heard from Jonker – to mention also in his reading of Barth? Moreover, especially in comparing his own reading with that of Jonker, there seems to be significant differences in their respective ‘Barth’s’, which not only helps us to discern and judge the place and role of the prophetic in Barth’s theology, but also teases us to wonder why Smit does not critically address that particular reading of Jonker’s Barth? Perhaps that was not the main calling of Smit and *his-but-partly-also-our* ‘Barth’ at the time, because another generation is emerging and will need to respond to that call.

4. Another ‘Barth’?

Following from the above trajectory in the reading of Barth in South Africa, it is clear that the role, place and function of the prophetic (office) is a contentious issue. Not only has a sensitivity for this brought new light (in the sense of revealing some tension) upon Barth’s prophetic relevance for church and theology within the South African society today, but also the challenge to problematize and develop even more the role, place and function of the prophetic office in Barth’s theology within our own unique locus.

What is clear from the descriptions above, is that we are confronted and called to read Barth’s theology *again*. More specifically the role, place and function of *the prophetic office*, but that entails actually the whole of his work and thought, as it clearly only makes sense when it is read and understood within the whole. One the one hand it means within the whole of the *manus triplex*, but also on the other hand within the whole of the *Church Dogmatics*. In short, any reflection on reforming *our* ‘Barth’ begs and drives one back to read his work *again and anew* for ourselves.

There is more than enough reason to suggest that we should be careful not to focus and specialize in only one particular area, aspect or phase of Barth’s theology (like the early Barth, or modern Barth, or confessional Barth, or Barth and politics, or even in an unqualified sense the prophetic Barth), because not only is there a particular density and maturity within his thought – especially when engaging the latter parts of his work like in *CD IV/3* – but also a continuous critical and further articulation, development and often revision of earlier insights. For instance, some of the earlier moves and departures Barth makes in volumes I and II of *CD* – like the different pairing of the perfections of God; or the threefold form of the one Word of God; or the ethics of witness already within the doctrine of election and thus deeply into the doctrine of God (and Trinity) – may help us in our search for further insight and questioning of our call to prophetic witness. One possible implication is to see how the current debate within Barth scholarship regarding theological ordering between Trinity and election is misleading and futile as it misses the point of prophetic witness (cf. Hunsinger 2015:32–55 and McCormack 2008:183–200). The scandal of particularity, and the ‘taxis’ within the doctrine of God, will surely help us to see and speak more truthfully the Word here and now.

Secondly, there is indeed a need to spell out more precisely the assumptions, temptations, implications and ambivalence to which the prophetic office represents a particular focus or even “centre” (Johnson 1997:7, 138–140) in Barth’s thought. On the hand we know the prophetic office does not constitute a “further development of our material knowledge of the event of reconciliation”, but in the same breath he also declares “We could not actually have described it in the first two forms if it did not have this third and if we did not take preliminary account of the fact that it does take place in this form too” (CD IV/3.1, 7). For theological reasons it is indeed placed ‘last’ by Barth, and precisely because of that it is surely not the ‘least’ in Barth’s theology. Contra Gunton (2007:148) who senses in the long-winded and wordier prophetic office the weakest part of Barth’s theology, I sense rather something of Willimon (2006:143–166) who highlights Barth’s acute witness to the “talkative God.” Thus, this ‘ending’ is very much also the ‘beginning’ as it reorients us backwards upon everything else said before in new-and-actual-yet-true-and-familiar ways so that it becomes impossible to ignore or separate it from the rest. The discussion in the reading and reflection of both Jonker and Smit’s engagement with Barth on this particular point, is thus by no means put to rest as we seek further articulation and nuance into this particular matter.

Thirdly, regarding the significant role of proclamation in Barth’s theology (CD I/2) – who not only saw the task of dogmatics as in to test and discern the truthfulness of the church’s proclamation, but moreover in being obedient to the call to continue doing theology (especially in a time like this) “as if nothing had happened” (Barth 1933) – we take special note of how he restructured, replaced, rewired and even “refilled” the prophetic office with the actualization and revelation of the fulfilment of it in the previous two offices. Barth’s take on the prophetic office, aligned with his earlier thoughts and motivations decades earlier in his resistance to Nazism and guidance in the church struggle – calling for emergency classes in sermon preparation (cf. Barth 1991; and Hancock 2013) – could be indeed of significant importance for the way prophetic preaching is studied currently in South Africa (cf. Laubscher 2017). Barth’s prophetic office not only provides us with a prophetic word on the current reductive and hollow state within the study of prophetic preaching since 1994 – where it is predominantly seen as merely speaking out on social issues and

particular public concerns and thus being truly ‘relevant’ and ‘prophetic’ – because with its basic thesis and insight of ‘revelation is the revelation of divine reconciliation’ we are called anew to see how everything we do as theologians and preachers is no more nor less than true and obedient prophetic witness. Being prophetic is then a derivative act as it is preceded by Jesus speaking anew his Word to us so that our *kerygma* is describing instead of prescribing. Precisely because of this, we discover anew how the Word is both simultaneously *eternal, timely but also temporal* – and that we are constantly called for the primary task of not necessarily speaking, preaching, even witnessing (in the sense of the former), but listening, ‘silently’, teachable, obediently. Moreover, in doing so, we will discover that this particular witness also entails to see how Christ is present beyond the confines of the church, so that we may also joyfully, constructively, point away and towards those other lights and parables of the Kingdom we realize in the light of this Word. Barth’s prophetic office and theology helps us to get the mode, order and scope right, especially in a time where there seems to be such a strange interest in prophetic preaching (cf. Laubscher & Wessels 2016).

Fourthly, the implications for doing homiletics is indeed full of potential, because as we start with the third form of the Word of God, we will possibly discover how *The witness of preaching* (Long 2016) is not the end, but actually referring us back, pointing away, towards the second and first form of the Word. Preaching in this fashion is then surely not arrived nor completed in the event of the sermon, but only initiated regarding the further emergence and growth of missional theology and witness. Guder (2015), Flett (2010; 2016:319–325) and more recently also Reichel (2017), to name a few, are sensing each in their own way the importance of mission in Barth’s theology – and may one add a welcoming and critical presence in the emerging missional theology and ecclesiology – but it is especially the work of Johnson (2015) who helps us quite intentionally with his development of a missional homiletic from Barth’s prophetic office. For Barth “witness is the genus and preaching is the species. *For Barth witness is not a way of preaching, but preaching is a way of witness.* Barth argues that every activity in which the church is engaged is an act of witness” (Johnson 2015:103) [italics original]. In the same way the sending or mission of the church is not opposed to the gathering and building of the community, nor

a second act or addition, but implicit and actual in the first (Flett 2010: x, 242–252; and especially 247). Put differently: if the prophetic refers us back to the kingly and priestly office, we see in this mission-al theology how the “paradigms of radical grace” come to the fore (especially!) in the church’s proclamation, where we are not interested in man because of their sin (but in spite of!), since, on the one hand, man’s situation (humanity in totality) is one of real misery-and-suffering, *and*, on the other, it is precisely because of this that this God is for our total redemption and actual freedom (cf. Smit 1988). Ironically enough it is Dirkie Smit who senses this, but what is implicitly assumed by him on this point, is made explicit here as regards this particular and nuanced unity of Christ in the prophetic office, which comes to the fore also in the church’s witness and preaching.

Fifthly, the implications then surely are not only of homiletical importance, but also of liturgical and devotional significance as the *CD* as a whole and the prophetic office in particular, is not over rationalistic (as it has often been raised by some – like Gunton 2007:212), but is here to help, guide and inspire invocation, living the Lord’s Prayer, corresponding to our call with prophetic witness through *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex convivendi*. The challenges are surely not to *comprehend*, but to *apprehend*, be claimed, because what we seek is not arriving, mastering, perfecting – but prophetic witness which is always gifted to us in new surprising ways, to bespeak and underline who God is truly *for us*. Inevitably it implies also – if we truly are going after this particular prophetic witness – that in a different age and place, critique and breaks with ‘Barth’ will come to the fore anew; most notably perhaps today seen in Barth’s take on gender as being derived from the relationship between the Father and the Son (cf. Rieger 2011).

In sum: By no means a completed picture of another reading of Barth in South Africa, but at least some pointers of continuing doing theology ‘after Barth’ and within critical distance of some of his interpreters in South Africa over the past few decades; and thus, also continuing with reforming *our* ‘Barth’.

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