

Karl Barth's interpretation of Scripture from the perspective of a possible "second naivety"

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Abstract

Although the theological exegesis of Karl Barth cannot be depicted as "naïve", his cumulative style of interpretation presupposes that the Bible entails a "new world" that has a threefold character and that requires a "second naivety" as suggested by Paul Ricoeur (i.e. an interpretive position beyond criticism) as its hermeneutical point of departure: (i) an inner core of divine revelation in Jesus Christ; (ii) the prophetic and apostolic witness in the Bible that makes the divine core accessible for interpretation; (iii) the proclamation or preaching of the biblical witness that is rooted in this "second naivety". Critical scholarship in general and historical-criticism in particular are not rejected outright, but theological exegesis must move beyond criticism. In the early part of his career Barth, when appointed as a lecturer in New Testament, Barth took serious note of critical biblical scholarship. However, the jury is still out whether critical biblical exegesis remained an important point of reference in Barth's later publications and whether his reluctance to engage in hermeneutical and methodological reflection caused a lack of the self-criticism presupposed by a "second naivety".

Keywords

Karl Barth; Paul Ricoeur; Second Naivety; interpretation of Scripture.

1. Introduction

Why bother with a study of Karl Barth's interpretation of Scripture some fifty years after his death? More recently Jörg Lauster (2004:2) made a case that there is an ongoing crisis ("Dauerkrise") in current Protestant doctrinal reflection about Scripture and that the presupposition that Scripture must

be allowed to be its own interpreter (“*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*”) led to the conviction that the Bible was clear and self-explanatory.¹

Twelve years later Christiane Tietz (2016:283–302) still shares Lauster’s concerns and goes further by claiming that Gotthold Lessing’s diagnosis of “*ein garstiger, breiter Graben*” (“an ugly, broad ditch”) between human reason (“*Vernunft*”) and religious faith still holds true for the current theological interpretation of the Bible (Lessing 1777/1989). In this case, the manner in which the division between the current reader of the Bible (now) and the biblical text embedded in the ancient context of the formation of Scripture (then) is bridged remains a contested and polemical matter.

The ca. 8000 pages of Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* provide abundant proof of his “close familiarity with the text of Scripture and more than passing acquaintance with the history of Christian thought” (Webster 2000:49).² This contribution will focus on the former and inquire about how the presuppositions of his exposition of Scripture allow for the input made by critical biblical scholarship.

From the start I want to take a word of caution from Dirkie Smit (2013a:18) to heart that when Barth becomes an object of study in South Africa (or anywhere else), Barth becomes part of the local *Wirkungsgeschichte* because his reception becomes part of the interpreter’s own life story. When one reflects on Barth, he becomes the “Barth” of the interpreter and this “Barth” will differ from interpreter to interpreter.³ In my discussion of Barth’s interpretation of Scripture, it is inevitable that “my Barth” is influenced by my involvement in Old Testament Studies. The following discussion of

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- 1 Manfred Oeming (2015:175) is in full agreement with Otto Bächli (1987:101) that Barth’s “only principle of interpretation is *scriptura scripturae interpres*, Scripture is its own interpreter.” Is Barth correct to presuppose the “self-interpreting” character of Scripture, or must more attention be given to the reader or interpreter, faith, the Word and the Spirit? According to Mark D. Smith (1997) the guiding principle of Barth’s strategy of Bible interpretation was his conviction that the Bible was the “testimony of God’s self-revelation in history”.
 - 2 The index volume of the *Church Dogmatics* contains about 15 000 biblical references and an astounding 2 000 plus exegetical discussions (Hunsinger 2012:30).
 - 3 Smit (2013a:18–20) summarised three points of advice about theology “after Barth”: i) Theologians must find their “own voice” in their specific context and not aspire just to be “Barthian”. ii) Theology must have “Christ as content and joy as modus”. iii) There is “only one gospel and only one church, everywhere” and thus the unity of the church must receive high priority.

presuppositions pertinent to his exegesis can surely be amended by other enquiries into his exegetical procedure.

Due to the daunting volume of Barth's oeuvre, this research can only touch upon a few aspects related to the interpretation of Scripture by Barth. John Webster (2000:50) explains the "expansiveness of the *Church Dogmatics*" as due to the "cumulative" nature of Barth's method of exposition (as opposed to linear and sequential argumentation), by "producing an extensive set of variations on a few basic themes." Dirk Smit (2013b:181) also refers to Barth's theological argumentation as "a spiral" that starts each new argument from the beginning.

This discussion of Karl Barth's interpretation of the Bible will be introduced by a few biographical details pertinent to the development of his biblical hermeneutics, a brief discussion of Ricoeur's concept of a "second naivety" as a possible lens through which one can engage with Barth's biblical interpretation, followed by Barth's hermeneutical points of view undergirding his doctrine of the Word of God, as well as his understanding of time, history and reason. Against this backdrop, I shall argue that the concept of a "second naivety" may be considered as a hermeneutical key to come to grips with Barth's interpretation of the Bible.⁴

2. Biographical detail related Barth's Bible interpretation

Fritz (Johann Friedrich) Barth, Karl Barth's father, was at first a Reformed pastor in Switzerland before he was appointed as professor in New Testament and Church History at the University of Bern when his son was three years old (Brown 1967:14). It would seem as if Pietistic influence made the father of Barth to "value Christian experience over doctrine" (McCormack 1997:36).

Karl Barth started his theological studies at Bern and then moved to the Humboldt University in Berlin, where he attended Hermann Gunkel's Old Testament lectures and became "a star pupil" of the church historian Adolf von Harnack – a well-known proponent of nineteenth century Protestant

4 I must also confess a long-standing interest in the concept "second naivety" – going back to my inaugural lecture at UNISA in 1990. H.L. Bosman, Tweede naïwiteit en Derde Wêreld. Teologiese nadenke oor die Ou Testament, *Theologia Evangelica* 23(1990):45–56.

Liberalism (Brown 1967:14).⁵ After moving back to Bern for one term, Barth switched to Tübingen where he studied New Testament under Adolf Schlatter; concluding his studies in Marburg, despite his father's concern that theology at Marburg was considered "on the extreme left wing" (McCormack 1997:36). In Marburg Barth received tuition from Adolf Jülicher as his New Testament teacher and the much-revered Wilhelm Herrmann as his systematic theology lecturer whose views on ethics made a lasting impression on him (Brown 1967:15).

After his ordination in 1908, Barth became an assistant pastor in Geneva for two years and then returned to Marburg as an assistant editor of *Die Christliche Welt* – an influential journal committed to church embedded theology and focused on the self-revelation of God in the "historical person of Jesus Christ" as the foundation of Christian faith (McCormack 1997:38–39).

After leaving Marburg in 1909 he returned to Geneva as an assistant pastor and was eventually ordained in 1911 as pastor in the small industrial town of Safenwil in the canton of Aargau where he became increasingly alienated from the liberal theology of his German mentors (McCormack 1997:78–79). The traumatic outbreak of the First World War and the support provided by 93 German intellectuals for the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, including several of Barth's theological mentors, led to his decision that "the theology of the 19th century had no future" (Barth 1959:58).

The publication of his commentary on Romans in 1919, which was rewritten in 1921, was described as a bomb falling on the playground of theologians (Adam 1926: 276-277). Soon he received a call to teach Reformed theology at Göttingen where it became clear that he was disillusioned with Dialectical Theology's view of revelation and of describing God as the "Wholly Other" (Johnson 1998:433).

In 1925 Barth got a new appointment at Munster as professor in Dogmatics and New Testament exegesis; thereafter, he moved in 1930 to Bonn as

5 Barth's eventual interpretation of the creation's stories in Genesis as "sagas" and not as history, is probably rooted in his exposure to Gunkel's emphasis on "saga" as appropriate "Gattung" for Genesis 1 and 2 (Johnson 1998:438) – the English translation of *Die Sagen der Genesis* (1901) was published in the same year as *The Legends of Genesis*. Chicago: Open Court.

professor in Systematic Theology (Johnson 1998:433). During this period, he co-edited the very influential *Zwischen den Zeiten* with Friedrich Gogarten, Eduard Thurneysen and Georg Merz (Beintker 2009: 201–203). Besides the teaching of systematic theology, he was also expected to make some input in New Testament studies, and it is therefore important to note his commentaries on 1 Corinthians 15 (published as *The Resurrection of the Dead* in 1924) and *The Epistle to the Philippians* (1927).

Due to his refusal to pledge allegiance to Adolf Hitler and his major input in the Barmen Declaration in 1934, he was dismissed from his university position by the Nazis and deported to Switzerland, where he was appointed professor in Systematic Theology at the University of Basel – a post that “he held until his retirement in 1962” (Johnson 1998:433).⁶ One should note that during his almost thirty years at Basel, Walter Eichrodt taught Old Testament from 1921 to 1966. His magnum opus was the multi-volume *Old Testament Theology* that used “covenant” as a synthesising concept, not gleaned from History of Religions or Systematic Theology but from the Old Testament itself – “covenant” symbolising the reality of divinely initiated engagement between God and humankind (this is similar to Barth’s own use of covenant as a theological notion).⁷

The biography of Barth illustrates his intellectual journey from a conservative household to a liberal education in Germany during which time he had first hand exposure to the best that historical-criticism could offer. His biography also indicates a growing disenchantment with liberal theology and with historical-critical biblical interpretation that was triggered by the combination of the traumatic First World War and his ministry in the impoverished congregation of Safenwil. One should also take note that Barth’s emphasis on the narrative texts in the Old

6 It is of interest to note that Karl Barth’s son, Markus, became a well-known New Testament scholar that eventually was appointed in the New Testament chair in Basel – best known for his commentaries on Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon. Another son, Christoph became a professor in Old Testament, at first in Indonesia and later in Germany.

7 According to Johnson (1997:112–113) Barth distinguishes three aspects in covenant as a theological concept: the first two are “grand gestures of reconciliation – ‘I will be your God’ and ‘You will be my people’ (the “what” of the covenant), the third covenantal aspect ties the first two together: Jesus Christ as “the True Witness” [the “how” of the covenant] (IV/3: 69).

Testament was influenced by Gunkel, and his eventual focus on covenant corresponded with his Old Testament colleague in Basel, Walter Eichrodt – both exponents of different modes of historical-criticism.

3. Second naivety?

Rudolf Smend (1966:218), despite the claims made by some Barth detractors, remained adamant that Barth was not naïve “in any vulgar sense of the word”. Barth (IV/2, 478–479) utilised the concept “naïve” to describe two periods in the history of biblical interpretation: a) the period prior to historical criticism; b) the period after historical criticism that Smend (1966:219–220) depicted as “post-critical” (“Nachkritisch”) and in the case of Barth as “literary-historical”.⁸

In his final comments about Barth’s hermeneutic, Smend (1966:236–237) maintained that Barth made deliberate and conscious decisions in this regard that cannot in any way be considered to be “naïve”.⁹ Hunsinger (2012:48) agrees and describes the hermeneutic of Barth as being “from the standpoint of a second naivete” – resonating with Paul Ricoeur (1967:349), who in his early work *The Symbolism of Evil*, described a “second naivety” as the result when “beyond the desert of criticism we wished to be called again”.¹⁰

In an interesting comparison of the biblical interpretation of Karl Barth and Paul Ricoeur, Mark Wallace (1990/1996) argues that both had corresponding and diverging comprehensions of “second naivety” as their hermeneutical goal.¹¹ He suggests that Karl Barth and Paul Ricoeur share

8 Hunsinger (2012:33) is correct when he observes that “literary-theological” or “literary-narratological” might be more appropriate than “literary-historical” due to Barth’s complex presuppositions related to history.

9 Moberly (2017:656) points out that a “second naivety” should not be referred to as a “postcritical naivete” because it does not imply that one ceases to be critical, but rather that conducts interpretation in a new critical mode.

10 John Barton (2015a:119) claims that “Ricoeur adopted Karl Barth’s idea of a ‘second naivete’, which follows biblical criticism ...”, without indicating where Barth made explicit use of this term. It is correct that Barth and Ricoeur both made use of interpretations of Scripture that resembled a “second naivety”, but to the best of my knowledge Barth never made use of the term itself.

11 The Centre of Academic Teacher Training, at the Faculty of Divinity at KU Leuven (2009) equates a “second naivety” with “post-critical belief” that is characterised by a

a common commitment to the subject matter of the biblical texts and a related hermeneutical method – the second naivete – for interpreting it. Wallace (1996:22) presents Barth as a truly critical reader of scripture. Historical critics hide the Bible’s theological light under the bushel of the original context or the intention of the author; but true criticism means to “consider well”, that is, to attend to the text’s subject matter (the so-called (“*Sache*”), which for Barth is Jesus Christ as the Word of God. The biblical text presents itself as “the divinely chosen textual environment within which God in Christ through the Spirit is actively at play and present to the reader today” (Wallace 1996:42).¹²

Both Barth and Ricoeur are cast by Wallace (1996:40–42) as advocates for a critically mediated attitude of expectation towards the reality claims made by the biblical text. This common ground, the hermeneutical second naivete is actually a threefold movement through textual understanding, explanation and appropriation. Beyond the desert plains of historical critics, the text brings the reader into a relationship with a strange new world or (in Barth’s case) with the narrated Christ.

Wallace did not let his mediating ambition dull his discernment of the differences between Barth and Ricoeur. These pertain primarily to their respective descriptions of the matter (Barth) and the world (Ricoeur) of the biblical text. Barth’s *Sache* of the biblical text orbits around the Son, Jesus Christ; while Ricoeur’s world of the text is constituted by a vast ensemble of imaginative human possibilities. Indeed, the world of the text has as many moons as there are literary genres (prose, poetry, wisdom literature etc.) that provide imaginative expressions of the *Sache* of Scripture. For both thinkers, the world of the text is primarily not the Bible’s embeddedness

belief in a transcendental God that is established by means of a mediated relationship in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Belief according to its second naivety mode is the result of criticism overcome by a renewed trust, despite possible critiques. Since religious faith remains unfathomable, it keeps a dimension of mystery that makes a second naivety like a never-ending quest.

12 Wallace (1996:41) views Ricoeur as engaged in a similar project. “Beyond the desert of criticism”, Ricoeur longs to be called again. But if we meet the Word of God in Scripture, it is only because this revelation has been mediated by the Bible’s diverse forms of discourse: narration, legislation, prophecy, wisdom, hymns, etc. “The Bible is a complicated intertext characterized by the interpretation of competing genres and themes – not a stable book dominated by the Jesus story”.

in its historical context that is uncovered by historical criticism, but it is rather its embeddedness in Scripture that confronts the listener as the Word of God. This is the intra-biblical textual starting-point that Barth and Ricoeur share. The world of the text that sets the theological agenda for Barth and Ricoeur is also the world of the text that liberates a second hermeneutical naivety and that allows the modern critic to accept that World “then and there” as God’s Word “here and now” (Wallace 1996:7).¹³

In a recent article, Walter Moberly (2017:661) considers a “second naivety” to be “the key factor that enables a renewed Christian confidence in reading and appropriating Israel’s pre-Christian scriptures as Christian scriptures”. Thus, it becomes a crucial heuristic device that allows the understanding God and the life of faith today. A “second naivety” transforms theological interpretation to become “a space of encounter with God, without abandoning scholarly integrity” (Moberly 2017:655).

4. The doctrine of the Word of God (1932 & 1938)

Barth agrees with Anselm that theology must start with the confession or credo of the church concerning Scripture as “God’s revealing Word” (Webster 2000:51). It is important to note that the Bible is not the object of theological interpretation but rather “the Subject who veils or hides Himself in ordinary objects in order to make Himself know” (McCormack 1997: 423).

Furthermore, the Word of God is not simply available or directly accessible since according to John Webster (2000:55) it “is that complex but unitary event in which God has spoken, speaks and will speak, an event which encounters us through the human means of Scripture and its proclamation in the church”.

Although the Word of God is one event, it has three forms or concentric circles (Hart 1999:28; Webster 2000:55–57): (a) the act of *revelation* itself (= inner core as divine speech act). This entails the “enhumanization”

13 Recently Bernard Latagan (2018:115) discussed the impact that Ricoeur had in South Africa beyond philosophy and highlights three issues: discourse analysis, concepts of selfhood and the role of memory in social transformation. Perhaps the concept of a “second naivety” can be added to this list.

of God's own Word as the man Jesus of Nazareth; (b) the attestation in the prophetic and apostolic words (human speech-acts in *Scripture* that makes the divine speech-act approachable). To talk of Scripture as God's Word is to offer a description of God's action in the Bible (CD I/1, p.110). At the same time, the Word does not only entail divine revelation, because it also has an anthropological dimension to it, the humans who hear and know it (I/1, p.191); (c) the *preaching* of that testimony in the church (proclamation of the Word by its bearers and witnesses, becomes Word of God by derivation).

According to Barth (CD I/2, p.867) “dogmatics is about the business of tracing the path which God's Word takes ...” (Webster 2000:69). An important presupposition for the whole of Barth's theology is to realise that the Bible as the Word of God “is able to speak for itself” and that Dogmatics must be vigilant to ensure that this ability to speak for itself has an undisturbed effect on “human thinking and speaking” (Webster 2000:70).

Smit (2013b:181) points out that Dogmatics wants to enable the church to read, to confess and to preach the Bible. The importance of the Bible is for Barth rooted in its narrative focus on the living God, or more precisely the “Triune God”: “The contents of the Bible are God” (Smit 2013b:186). The relationship between God and Scripture remains a mystery and this is somehow reflected in the enigmatic formulation of Barth (I/1, 139): “God is the Lord in the wording of his Word”.

5. Sense of history and time

During a lecture in Thurneysen's church in 1916, Barth responds to what he considered the hegemony of “scientific exegesis” (i.e. historical-criticism at that point in time) by reminding his audience: “Within the Bible there is a (strange)¹⁴ new world, the world of God”; he continues (Barth 1928: 33, 37; MacDonald 2000): “When God enters, history for a while ceases to be, and there is nothing more to ask; for something wholly different and new begins – a history with its own distinct grounds, possibilities and

14 Not in the original German version of this early seminal statement by Barth: *Die neue Welt in der Bibel* (1925:18–21).

hypotheses ...” It boils down for theologians to ponder the paramount question: Do theologians have an appreciation and understanding of Scripture as a strange new world?

The commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans* (first published in 1919 and then rewritten in 1922) is “a kind of hermeneutical manifesto” (Gadamer 1979:463) and illustrated his refusal to let his exegesis be dominated by historical-criticism’s goal “of historical reconstruction of the text’s origins” (Webster 2000:28–29). In his Romans commentary Barth (1933:8) explained what the criticism of historical documents meant to him: “Applying criticism (*krinein*) to historical documents means, to me, measuring the words and phrases against the subject matter about which (if appearances do not deceive) they are inquiring.” Historical criticism examines Scripture as answers to questions that were asked by ancient faith communities. Theological interpretation goes beyond the investigation of the historical circumstances addressed by the Bible and is focused on the basic question that holds the whole of Scripture together: the witness concerning Jesus Christ.

It must be made clear that Barth did not disregard the value of historical-criticism as mere “prolegomenon to ... understanding” since he accepted this exegetical methodology as “both necessary and justified”; but a certain ambiguity must be admitted because Barth depicted historical-criticism as “preliminary work” and not as “genuine understanding and interpretation” that entails listening to Scripture as human testimony to divine address (Barth 1933:6). Richard Burnett (2001:240) explains Barth’s reaction to the criticisms that he was not taking historical criticism seriously enough by pointing out that he did not reject historical criticism as such, but any preconceived notions “set up in advance by historical criticism, since such restrictions would limit the subject matter of the text from freely determining itself as such” (I/2, 726).

There seems to be an unresolved hermeneutical tension in the preface of the English translation of Barth’s *Römerbrief*. On the one hand (Barth 1933: ix): “no interpreter is rid of the danger of reading in more than he reads out. I neither was nor am free from this danger.” On the other hand (Barth 1933: x): “I do not want to hear criticisms which proceed from some religious or

philosophical or ethical ‘point of view’. Proper criticism of my book can be concerned only with the interpretation of the text of the Epistle.”

Biblical interpretation as performed by Barth to some extent “affirmed historical-critical exegesis, but also attempted to move ‘beyond it’”, and this is illustrated by the three dialectically related (not linear) phases that Barth (I/2, 713–714, 722–740, 870–884) eventually employed in his exegesis (Hunsinger 2012:31–32): (a) *Explicatio*: technical exegesis of the biblical text was essential but not enough; (b) *Meditatio*: critical and constructive theological reflection that supplements and completes the first step; (c) *Applicatio*: consideration of practical relevance or application that forms the culmination of the first two steps – an open-ended ethical phase that is relevant to the situation of its interpretation, without inhibiting the sovereignty of the triune God (I/2; III/4; IV/4 & Johnson 1998:437).

When Barth (I/2, 494) argues for the reconsideration of what can be considered to be “historical” he formulated the following description: “What modern study has to ascertain as the historical truth is the true meaning and context of the biblical texts as such... in their unity and totality”.¹⁵ Smend (1966:234) quite correctly pointed out that Scripture consists of a composite unity “with innumerable individual testimonies” and he made an interesting comparison between Barth and Gerhard von Rad. The latter distinguished between two “histories” of ancient Israel: the first, as understood by ancient Israel was the object of theological reflection, and the second, as reconstructed by critical scholarship is significant for exegesis (Smend 1966:235).

6. Perception of reason

The criticism Barth developed with regards to the historical-critical method must not be seen as a retreat to “precritical objectification of the privileged status of the text” but he is in fact “affirming that a proper hermeneutic is underpinned by the principle that God is known through God” (Webster 2000:30).

15 As argued above, Ricoeur would be less concerned with the unity of the biblical text and more focused on the diversity of Scripture as literature.

It is for Barth less important to be objective and rational, since he placed much more emphasis on the “self-involving” imperative of theology and the interpretation of the Bible (Smit 2013b:183).¹⁶

According to Hunsinger (2012:37) Barth understood the relationship between the text of the Bible and its extra-textual referents “as being a matter of analogy”. An interesting example would be his understanding of the existence of the miraculous: for Barth (I/2, 63–64) the Bible as divine revelation is “grounded, centred and fulfilled in Christ” and thus “inherently miraculous by definition.”

Contrary to many Barth critics, Mark D. Smith (1997:10) argues: “Barth’s interpretive strategy is a rational and historical one – i.e. being sensitive to two key demands of modernity and also capable of being sensitive to the major insights of modern biblical studies into the nature of the Bible. For example: In his Introduction to the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth (1933:8–9) described the criticism of historical documents to be “the measuring of words and phrases by the standard of that about which the documents are speaking ... Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter (*Sache*)”.

When Gogarten complained about Barth not explaining his presuppositions: “Why don’t you do anything about the necessity of getting your presuppositions clear?” Barth simply replied with a telling question of his own: “When will you get down to business?” (i.e. focusing on the *Sache* of the Biblical text).

7. Conclusion

That Barth took the Bible seriously and that his interpretation of Scripture had a profound effect on his *Church Dogmatics* go without saying. Some Barth researchers have even depicted his dogmatics as being reminiscent of “biblical thought forms” – i.e. Wolfhart Schlichting (1971).¹⁷ Smend (1966:215) also agree that Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* have a “biblical

16 According to Barth (I/2, 725) “Biblical hermeneutics is not guilty of an arbitrary exception when it takes a different line. On the contrary, it follows the path of strict observation to the very end.”

17 It is telling that the title of his monograph is “Biblische Denkform in der Dogmatik”.

attitude” because he consistently attempted to shape his formulation according to the “biblical thought forms” he identified (I/2, 816–822; IV/3, 92–93).

For Barth (1923/1968:154) the relationship between Systematic Theology and Biblical Studies was a perennial concern. He formulated the following challenge soon after the publication of his *Römerbrief*: “If Protestant theology is to recover once more from its emaciation, and it is by no means certain that it will, our Old and New Testament scholars will, without prejudice to what they do as historians (as an avocation), be theological exegetes, and as such really also work in obedience to ‘the truth’”.

Although not always being clear on what biblical interpretation entails, Barth does not necessarily claim that the “hermeneutics of biblical texts different from hermeneutics of any other text” (Johnson 1998:437). Barth did not consider historical-criticism to be invalid but attempted to develop a theological interpretation of biblical texts that went beyond the historical-critical engagement of the Bible and that could act as a first phase in the theological interpretation process (*explicatio*).

It seems to me that Barth’s version of a “second naivety” entails the presupposition that the theological interpreter must go beyond the critical *explicatio* and as part of a *meditatio* yield to what he considered the substance (*Sache*) of Scripture – “the gracious and triune character of God, revealed in Christ by the efficaciousness of the Spirit” (Johnson 1998:439). Only then can the practical *applicatio* for the church become possible.

To conclude: diverging scholarly responses have been triggered by Karl Barth: On the one hand, R. H. Roberts (1979:146), who concluded his discussion of “Barth’s Doctrine of Time” as follows – indicating somewhat mixed feelings about Barth’s theological legacy:¹⁸ “His work lies before us, the stricken, glorious hulk of some great Dreadnought¹⁹ – our task is to

18 One might consider that the less enthusiastic response by this Durham systematic theologian can be related to a trend that Bruce McCormack (1996:280) identified amongst several Anglo-American theologians ‘to dismiss Barth as “the foremost exemplar of that most lamentable of twentieth-century aberrations: the ‘neo-orthodox’ theologian”.

19 A World War I battleship with thick steel armour that became obsolete.

dismember and salvage, to exploit what is usable, and to melt down and re-forge the rest into weapons for the continuing battle for the truth.”

On the other hand: given Barth’s love for music (especially Mozart) the following depiction of Barth’s theology by William Stacy Johnson (1997:1–3) seems more appropriate: “Like the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart whom he so much admired, Barth’s theology is a composition in which melody and reverberant countermelody run in ceaseless competition ... Like the music of Mozart, theology is in ceaseless interplay between the “no” and the “yes”, between a God who is made known in Jesus Christ but remains profoundly unknown in the impenetrable depths of mystery ...”

Any appraisal of an unfinished work should be tentative. Since Barth never completed his *Church Dogmatics* this also applies to this discussion (Bromiley 1979:245). Tongue in cheek: perhaps Schubert’s “Unfinished Symphony” might provide a more appropriate musical metaphor for Barth’s unfinished *magnum opus* than the music of Mozart!

Finally, in one of Barth’s most concise definitions of theology mystery plays an important part (CD I/1, 368): “Theology means rational wrestling with mystery.” Perhaps the notion of a “second naivety” will contribute to our appreciation of the “rational wrestling” embedded in Karl Barth’s theological exegesis undergirding his lifelong quest, as formulated by Bruce McCormack (1996), for “critically realistic dialectical theology”!?

However, the question remains whether Barth’s well-founded criticism of the historical critical reconstruction of the world behind the biblical text should not have been extended to a more self-critical attitude towards his own theological interpretation in front of the final or canonical form of Scripture? (Barton 2015a:316, 330).²⁰ Barth’s endeavour in his commentary on Romans to let Paul speak directly to his Twentieth Century audience and not to be interrupted by historical-criticism did not take responsibility for the inevitable intervention of him as close reader of the Pauline text – even when declining historical-criticism to have the last word in text interpretation.

20 Underlying this lack of self-criticism with regards to Barth’s theological interpretation is that Barth was of the opinion that his exegesis need not be undergirded by a critically reflected hermeneutic, but that priority should be given to the theological interpretation focused on the *Sache* of the biblical text (Macdonald 2008:310).

Furthermore, Barth did not keep track of developments in Biblical Studies after World War II that paid more attention to the world of the text (literary and rhetorical approaches to exegesis) and the world in-front-of the text (reception history, reader-response criticism etc). The ongoing and open-ended dynamic dialectic of biblical interpretation can be well informed by the overlapping and diverging appropriations of a “second naivety” by both Barth and Ricoeur that allows for theological interpretation to be grounded in a close reading of the Bible, informed by yesterday’s newspaper and challenged by critical biblical scholarship.

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