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Barth's Explicit Reception of Luther

An Auxiliary Tool for the Study of Karl Barth

1 Preliminary Remarks

Let me start my reflections* with a few remarks on why systematic theology should engage with questions of reception at all. Of course, if we are to understand what a given author says, it is essential that we study the sources they have received. But fulfilling this demand of historical interpretation or exegesis still will tell us next to nothing about *why* they chose to draw on this or that particular source. This question can only be answered if we presuppose that there is some sort of common problem to unite both the author and their sources even if to identify that common problem in advance runs the risk of setting aside the methodology of historical interpretation for a while. Christine Svinth Væge-Pöder has argued convincingly that it was the epistemological phenomenon of negativity that linked Barth, Hermann, and Holl to each other.¹ I must confess that in the case of Barth's reception of Luther I have been unable to identify such a common problem beforehand since it cannot be Barth's historical curiosity of studying what Luther thought about this or that particular theological issue. I will only identify the common problem which drove Barth more or less unconsciously towards Luther in the final section of my paper.

I will start with some methodological reflections, followed by an outline of my study design and the results which I am going to discuss in the end. The composition of my contribution thus resembles the way in which empirical studies normally proceed, and even if the following is still a piece of hermeneutical, not empirical research in the strict sense of the term, I understand it to do no more than offer an auxiliary, but useful tool for further investigation.

* Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG; German Research Foundation) – project number 261105911.

1 Cf. Christine Svinth Væge-Pöder, “Luther's lectures on Romans in the works of Karl Holl, Rudolf Hermann, and Karl Barth,” in this volume.

2 Methodological Reflections

Modern theology, so E. Troeltsch taught us,² is based on three principles it has in common with historical research no matter whether the object studied is profane or not. These principles include analogy and correlation which allow for comparing any historical source – most commonly a text – to other sources. The third and in some sense overarching principle is criticism since it is by criticism that scholars become ready to question a given source they work with and treat it as a document among others open to historical comparison in the aforementioned manner. It is well known that critical theology in the sense of Troeltsch has celebrated its greatest successes since the second half of the 19th century which is when the critical Weimar edition of Luther's works (*Weimarer Ausgabe*, WA) began to be published. However, still almost a century later E. Jüngel stated that he “could not quite see the point behind the enormous amount of scholarly expertise on Luther if it did not make an attempt at [...] exegetical commentaries on his main writings.”³ In Germany, a series of such historical commentaries started no earlier than 2007, when R. Rieger of Tübingen published a commentary on Luther's *Treatise on Liberty*.⁴ As for Barth, there is no historical critical edition of his writings until the present day, so the question what texts by Luther Barth did actually read and receive needs deepened study to which I want to contribute in this essay.

If we turn to this question, it is important to note that it asks for Barth's *explicit* reception of Luther. This needs explanation. Even if the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) of the edited author's works is not a historical critical edition in the sense of giving comprehensive evidence of all reachable sources and printings of the texts edited, its editors have spent a great deal of work on identifying the sources particularly where quotations from other authors are concerned. The problem with

2 Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, “Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie,” in, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1913), 729–53, particularly 731.

3 Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, “Zur Freiheit eines Christenmenschen. Eine Erinnerung an Luthers Schrift [1978],” in *Indikative der Gnade – Imperative der Freiheit. Theologische Erörterungen 4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 84–160, here 115 fn. 89 (translation by H.T.). G. Ebeling's commentary on Luther's *Disputatio de homine*, whose first volume (*Lutherstudien*, vol. II/1 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977]) postponed the exegesis of Luther's own text until the second (1982) and third volumes (1989), is probably not the target of Jüngel's criticism, since he welcomes it in a footnote passage added while the first publication of his essay (1978) was already in print (Jüngel, “Freiheit,” 96 fn. 24).

4 Cf. Reinhold Rieger, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen = De libertate christiana*, Kommentare zu Schriften Luthers 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007).

this sort of text editing is that the editors may have extended this kind of referencing the edited author's texts beyond the source material as such, thereby adding their own interpretation to the presentation of the texts. This problem applies to the editing of other important theologians' works from the 20th century, too. E. g., the contextualizing remarks which the leading German Bonhoeffer edition (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, DBW*) offers for many text passages strikingly often refer to his contribution to the anti-Nazi resistance even where the source material does not necessarily encourage this. It is also this kind of problem one is faced with when studying Barth's reception of Luther. There are hosts of Luther footnotes in the Barth *GA* including detailed references from the *WA*, but in a number of cases these were added by the editors and are only implicit in Barth's texts. They serve mainly to give these texts a more detailed and colorful overall impression. This would certainly be a nice thing for a textbook, but can be twilight in an edition since it suggests a closer and more thorough relationship between Barth and Luther than the texts themselves might support.

There is another reason why I will in this contribution content myself with Barth's *explicit* reception of Luther, and this becomes obvious if we take a look at the earlier research on our topic. There are particularly two essays which require attention, one by the distinguished Luther scholar G. Ebeling (1985) and the other by one of the world's leading Barth researchers, G. Hunsinger (1998).⁵ Both do not only differ in their confessional backgrounds, but also methodologically. Ebeling, who began his academic career as a church historian, follows Barth's major writings chronologically identifying certain periods of intensified study of Luther, which then receive closer doctrinal investigation. Hunsinger, on the other hand, places some methodological reflections at the beginning of his essay which state that any theological idea in Barth's texts which stems originally from Luther ought to be considered a piece of influence by the Wittenberg reformer himself even if there is no evidence that Barth actually drew it from Luther rather than one of his pupils or the relatively anonymous complex of "Lutheran church and theology".⁶

What unites Ebeling and Hunsinger despite their many differences is that for them the question of Barth's reception of Luther is a *doctrinal* question. And as

5 Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen mit Luther," in *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985), 428–573, and George Hunsinger, "What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 279–304.

6 Cf. Hunsinger, "What Karl Barth Learned," 282. Hunsinger adds that this criterion applies in particular to such instances where Luther's teaching on a given topic differs substantially from Calvin's and thus from Barth's own Reformed tradition.

Troeltsch taught us is always the case with doctrinal theology, once you reach out your hand towards it, it will seize you entirely.⁷ Likewise, Ebeling and Hunsinger do not content themselves with questions of reception, but offer reflections on the whole of Barth's theology against which Ebeling takes a Lutheran stance⁸ whereas Hunsinger emphasizes that there is hardly any topic in Barth's theology that could not in one sense or another be derived from Luther.⁹ This hardly comes as a surprise since Hunsinger's definition of what reception of Luther means in Barth suggests that every text dealing with Protestant theology must receive Luther at least to some extent in the background. If the following reflections are confined to *explicit* receptions they do so in order to achieve results on some level other than doctrinal.

By "explicit reception" I mean *quotes with references* as this is the only way to be sure that Barth did actually work with the texts he refers to. This implies that if the following reflections are to be successful in any sense of the term, they must provide us with information on *what particular writings* by Luther Barth did work with. The focus will not be on doctrinal topics or keywords.

One could object that there might also be a sensible reception of Luther's writings in Barth's works merely on the basis of keywords or scientific terms; in fact it is characteristic of scientific discourse that it tends to discuss things on a more abstract level where terms and concepts play a more important role than single quotes or wordings. Although this is true in general, it cannot direct our research in this study because if we allowed reception on a mere keyword level into our reflections, we could not avoid the following problem: How can one be sure that Barth learned those concepts and keywords from the source texts and not somewhere else?

This, by the way, is a problem which even affects quotes with references. As the editing of Barth's first version of his commentary on *Romans* in the *GA* has shown, he drew many of his Luther references at that time from a book by a certain Ch. Eberle entitled *Luthers Episteln-Auslegung* (1866).¹⁰ However, I think that

7 Cf. Troeltsch, "Methode," 734: "Wer ihr den kleinen Finger gegeben hat, der muß ihr auch die ganze Hand geben."

8 Cf. in particular Ebeling, "Barths Ringen," 537–39, where Ebeling observes a "fundamental difference" ("Grunddifferenz") between Barth and Luther.

9 Cf. Hunsinger, "What Karl Barth Learned," 304, where Hunsinger, who is not unaware of "real disagreements" (303) between the two, refers to Barth's "substantive christocentrism, the theology of the cross, the primacy of God's Word, the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*, and the use of the Chalcedonian pattern" as Luther's legacy in Barth's thought.

10 Cf. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief [Erste Fassung] 1919* = idem, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Akademische Werke*, vol. 16, ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), XXIV.

in order to classify a given quote as an explicit reception of some source text there is no need for that source text to be taken from a particular edition rather than a quote in secondary literature. The explicit reference as such will do to make sure that the quoted source text has really been received. Whether it is best scientific practice not to disclose the literature from which the source reference is taken is a different problem.

3 Study Design

In what follows I will argue that only cases of explicit reception of identifiable texts ought to be included in a study of Barth's reception of Luther. On this methodological premise the practical question arises how to spot the relevant passages of Barth's work. I would therefore like to add a few remarks on the study design behind this small essay.

Neither Ebeling nor Hunsinger had the opportunity of using the electronic devices which theology has at its disposal today. I have used the advanced search tools of the *Digital Karl Barth Library (DKBL)* published by Alexander Street Press. This database displays digitalized versions of the *GA* (except for its most recent volumes), Barth's main work that will not enter the *GA*, the *Kirchliche Dogmatik (KD)* or *Church Dogmatics (CD)*, and a number of additional Barth texts that have not yet been edited in the *GA*, but will be in the future. Even if *DKBL* is incomprehensive and regularly misrepresents some German characters, it is still a very valuable and powerful tool to conduct a study of the type that is required in order to answer the question of Barth's explicit reception of Luther.

Some have discarded the use of digital search tools such as *DKBL* as brute and unintelligent data mining, but I think that if it is used in a smart manner, it will lead us further than earlier generations could get. I have used *DKBL* to set up a table that contains all of Barth's quotes from Luther I could identify. Of course this presupposes that there are indeed references in the *GA* for Barth's reception of Luther which the search engine can match.

This poses an additional problem in terms of study design since there may be quotes without references in the sense of some bibliographically detailed evidence in such cases where very popular writings like, e.g., Luther's Catechisms are quoted. This, in fact, is a point which already Ebeling has raised. He states in a certain passage of his essay that the mature Barth seems to have appreciated

Luther for his elementary wording (“elementare[.] Formulierungen”)¹¹ that is so typical for his catechisms and his Bible translations. No doubt such popular quotes (as one might call them) ought to be considered explicit receptions even if they might in some instance or another be close to mere “keyword dropping.” But as a student of mine has checked for the volumes of the *KD* where Luther is received the most, such popular quotes are quite rare.¹² Thus I think we can safely say that by far the majority of Barth’s Luther quotes are accompanied by references. Whatever Barth’s use of Luther’s texts may have been like, he seems to have used them with scrutiny. There is a nice letter by Barth to Lollo von Kirschbaum (April 2nd, 1931) which supports this view. Barth wrote it when working on the first volume of the *KD*.

Dearest Lollo!

Well, I have now left you alone for an indecently long time, and there is no comfort in the fact that there are many others whose urgent calls are also waiting in vain for an answer from me. At least I can now send you the first [part] together with this small letter. I have continuously worked on it and do hope now that it was worthwhile and will be so for my listeners and readers. Well, the thought really scares me that I am now more or less obliged to proceed exactly in this manner and on such a broad background. Our dogmatics is thus certainly going to be a beautiful book, don’t you agree? But what an amount of work is that going to be for me – and for you! Here are some technical details for copying: 1 Would you not like to acquire some better paper for the main copy? 2 Wouldn’t it be good to have a ribbon half black and half red for the footnotes? Such do exist and our little typewriter is prepared for them (see the switch on the right!). 3 Would you and could you locate all the quotes from the W.A.? In the case of the epistle to the Galatians you should try to find out in the E.A. to what biblical passage Luther’s words belong. Use the Latin text for this which you will find in the New Testament on my desk or in your own Vulgata copy. In the W.A. the biblical passages are at the top of the pages. It will be more difficult to find the passages from *De servo arbitrio*. But you are so clever that you will certainly succeed. Please verify also the text provided by me and add the first line numbers from W.A. together with the page numbers. [...]¹³

This letter reveals several things about Barth’s reception of Luther. Though some have suspected that von Kirschbaum’s contribution to the *Church Dogmatics* was much greater than her function as private secretary suggests,¹⁴ I think

11 Ebeling, “Barths Ringen,” 533.

12 I am indebted to Verena Pütz for her support at this point.

13 Karl Barth – Charlotte von Kirschbaum, *Briefwechsel* = Karl Barth, *Gesamtausgabe*. V. Abteilung: Briefe, vol 45, ed. Rolf-Joachim Erler (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), 174 (letter no. 82; English translation by H.T., disregarding the italics in the German original).

14 For a brief discussion of this issue cf. Hinrich Stoevesandt, “Charlotte von Kirschbaum,” in *Barth Handbuch*, ed. Michael Beintker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 54–58, hier 56–57.

Barth is somewhat flattering her here when he refers to “our” joint dogmatics. I suppose that the Luther references were generally implemented into the text body by Barth himself and not some assistant or student of his even if there is evidence from Barth’s correspondence with von Kirschbaum that it was she who had gathered suitable quotes from Luther’s sermons since 1929.¹⁵

What seems more important in terms of our study design is that Barth obviously used the Erlangen edition (*Erlanger Ausgabe* = *EA*) of Luther’s works until the 1930s, which is some forty years after the first volumes of the *WA*. Of course this was inevitable in the case of texts that were still unpublished in the *WA*. The rather rare instances where Barth stuck to the *EA* even when the respective texts had already been published in the *WA*, too, might suggest that these quotes indicate Barth’s use of older secondary literature like the aforementioned Eberle who had no better source than the *EA*, but the total number of these instances is too low to make an argument. What Barth’s letter seems to suggest is that he did not switch to the leading scientific edition until preparing his main work, the *KD*.

Based on the assumption that Barth quoted Luther (whether directly or according to secondary literature) using both the *EA* and the *WA*, the most important step of our study is to spot all occurrences of *EA* and *WA* in *DKBL*. This search largely confirms Ebeling’s findings that Barth’s engagement with Luther generally declined during his academic career. There are obvious peaks in his first Göttingen year when his lecture on Zwingli inspires him to a study in Luther’s theology of the eucharist that almost bursts with source references.¹⁶ Another important example is the first volume of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* which is loaded with Luther references.¹⁷ The decline, Ebeling notices,¹⁸ coincides with Barth’s move to Switzerland and the publication of *Evangelium und Gesetz* (1935) – a text critical of Lutheran theology. As E. Busch says in his biography, Barth’s interest in Luther was raised again in 1953 when *KD* IV/1 was published¹⁹

15 Cf. Christiane Tietz, Karl Barth. Ein Leben im Widerspruch, München: C.H. Beck: 2018, 198: The quotes were supposed to enter into the reworked edition of the *CD*, which never appeared, but they may have become part of the ‘Zeddelkasten’ which Barth used later on to compose the excursus passages of the *KD*.

16 Cf. Karl Barth, “Ansatz und Absicht in Luthers Abendmahlslehre [1923],” in *Gesamtausgabe. III. Abteilung: Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten*, vol. 19: 1922–1925, ed. Holger Finze (Zürich: TVZ: 1990), 248–306.

17 Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. I: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*, vol. 1: Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1932).

18 Cf. Ebeling, “Barths Ringen,” 441 and 460.

19 Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth’s Lebenslauf: Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), 409 with reference to Barth’s academic teaching on Luther in the summer of 1953.

– the volume containing the doctrine of justification which according to Ebeling simply demanded engagement with Luther.²⁰ By that time Barth or rather his publisher, the *Evangelischer* [later: *Theologischer*] *Verlag Zürich*, had modernized the spelling of the *WA*. Before the Second World War this abbreviation (and *EA* alike) was printed with a blank between the two capitals and a dot after each of them; after 1945 both the blank and dots were omitted. A lot of *WA* occurrences (with blank) in *DKBL* do not refer to Luther quotes, but to Barth's correspondence with W.A. Visser 't Hooft or his numerous mentions of W.A. Mozart, whose initials also meet the search criteria.

As this example shows, using the *DKBL* search engine runs the risk of producing false results, but it also gives us more detailed information about the particular writings Barth received from Luther. In this respect Ebeling propounded in a rather generalized manner that Barth drew more on the “churchy” side of the Wittenberg reformer and his “hymns, catechisms, and bible translations” than his academic writings, which Ebeling considered in accordance with Barth's own move from dialectical theology to the *Church Dogmatics*.²¹ An important piece of evidence for this hypothesis is that in working on his commentary on *Romans*, Barth did not show much interest in Luther's early lecture on *Romans* (1515/16) which had only been discovered in 1908 and edited for the first time two years later by J. Ficker (the *WA* edition appeared no earlier than 1938). This lecture, as is well known, gave rise to the Luther Renaissance in K. Holl, R. Hermann and others, which is nowadays considered “another departure” (H. Assel) in 20th century theology besides the Dialectical Theology which largely built on Barth's second version of his commentary on *Romans*. What would have become of this chapter of the history of theology if in reworking *Romans* Barth had dedicated himself more to the study of the lecture that stimulated Holl's and Hermann's works? There are about thirty references to Luther in the first *Romans*, but the majority of them follow the aforementioned study by Eberle which was published in 1866 well before the discovery of Luther's lecture. There are only four passages²² where the *GA* editors were able to spot Barth's use of Luther's early lecture on *Romans*. In the second edition of Barth's *Romans*, by which the contours of his dialectical theology had become clearer, the total number of references to Luther has increased to almost sixty, among which the *Romans* lecture remains rather insignificant.²³

²⁰ Cf. Ebeling, “Barths Ringen,” 492.

²¹ Cf. Ebeling, “Barths Ringen,” 533 (translation by H.T.).

²² Cf. Barth, *GA* II, vol. 16, 154; 213; 284; 395.

²³ In fact, two of the four passages mentioned in the previous footnote also appear in Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung) 1922 = Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Akademische*

More important than the number of occurrences, though, is the variety of Luther texts quoted by Barth. I spent a seven-hour train journey with K. Aland's *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium* on my knees in order to reidentify the single writings. And the result of this I think gives a good overall image of Barth's reception of Luther.

4 Results

There are hundreds of references to Luther throughout Barth's writings, but, considering his literary productivity, certainly not to an extent that one would have to consider Barth an extensive and lifelong thorough reader of Luther's texts. However, there are the aforementioned exceptions to this rule of thumb. At certain stages of his theological career Barth dramatically intensified his engagement with Luther's texts. The following three stages which deserve particular interest have already been identified by Ebeling.

The first stage is one of Barth's first lectures as a professor at the university of Göttingen where he read on *The theology of Zwingli* in the winter term of 1922/23. The GA edition of this lecture contains an astonishing 400 WA references in the paragraph on Zwingli and Luther alone.²⁴ Most of them were added by the editors, since Barth here quoted Luther according to the EA giving only the volume and page numbers, which would make it difficult to spot these in DKBL if there were no redactional remarks. Barth's essay on Luther's doctrine of the eucharist, published in 1923 in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, is the quintessential result of this lecture²⁵ and contains another 250 Luther references from the same writings: almost all of Luther's writings on the topic from the late 1510s (e.g., *Sermon dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften*) and 1520s (e.g., *De captivitate babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*) up to *Vom Abendmahl Christi*. Bekenntnis (1528). Never before or after this have Luther's works had a similar impact on any single text by Barth. However, even if it is undeniable that for some reason Barth must have felt driven to engage deeply with the reformer's texts, the overall significance of this enormous bulk of quotes

Werke, vol. 47, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi/Katja Tolstaja (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), 213, 268. Two other passages from that lecture have been newly introduced into Barth's second *Romans*: *ibid.*, 67, 503.

²⁴ Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Zwinglis 1922/23. Vorlesung Göttingen Wintersemester 1922/23* = *id.*, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Akademische Werke*, vol. 40, ed. Matthias Freudenberg (Zürich: TVZ, 2004), particularly § 4, 251–498.

²⁵ Ebeling, "Barths Ringen," 444 calls it the "eigentliche Frucht" of the lecture.

is not quite as high as the statistical figures might suggest. One reason for this is that Barth quotes so thoroughly from Luther's writings in this essay he is rather meditating Luther as a whole than discussing the details of his position. If H. Assel is right in suggesting that there is a distinct thesis on the representation of the cross concealed in this kind of arguing with Luther,²⁶ it still seems to use Luther's sacramental thought as a dialectical counterpart needed to affirm Barth's own position, as Ebeling has argued.²⁷ Ebeling's argument is in perfect harmony with what Barth says in an unpublished draft for the preface to his first *Romans* about the function of quotations in the book: they were integrated into the book in order to support and underline what the text of the book says itself.²⁸

The second period of Luther influence on Barth's thought is in the composition of the opening volume of the *Church Dogmatics* (I/1–2) from which period of time the letter quoted above originates. This is particularly interesting in comparison to the imperfect *Christian Dogmatics* which Barth reworks here. Beginning with his famous paragraph on the threefold shape of the word of God (§ 4 KD I/1), Barth multiplies the Luther references of the corresponding *Christian Dogmatics* passages by five, thus foreshadowing the excursus passages of the *Church Dogmatics* volumes to come. The exact reason why Barth obviously sought to defend his argument against objections from theologies drawing on Luther's texts still needs research, but one should realize that just like under his first Luther impact Barth receives a particular group of the Reformer's writings here. This time, however, it is not a doctrinal topic like the eucharist, but obviously Luther's engagement with the Bible that attracted Barth's interest. The vast majority of Luther quotes in *KD I* is from Luther's different collections of model sermons (*Postillen*)²⁹ or other printed sermons while his exegetical writings take the second rank: his lecture on Galatians (1535)³⁰ in particular and, though much less used, the second lecture on the Psalms (1519–21).³¹ Even if

26 Cf. Heinrich Assel, "Barth und Luther zur Repräsentation des Kreuzes Jesu," in *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 22 (2006/special issue): 40–46.

27 Cf. Ebeling, "Barths Ringen," 444–45.

28 Cf. Barth, *GA* II, vol. 16, 590: Quotations serve as "eine bes. treffende, kräftige und gleichsam prophetische Formulierung des Textgehaltes."

29 Cf. Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Schriften*, vol. 7, 466–537; 10/I, 1–2; 17/II, 21–22; 52 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897/1910/25/27/28/29/15).

30 Cf. Luther, *WA* 40/I–III (1911/14/30).

31 Cf. Martin Luther, *Operationes in psalmos 1519–1521*, part 2, *Archiv zur Weimarer Ausgabe* 2, ed. Gerhard Hammer/Manfred Biersack under the auspices of Heiko A. Oberman (Weimar: Böhlau, 1981).

the majority of the former is probably³² borrowed from Eberle's book (like in *Romans*), it is clear that in *KD I* Barth has taken considerable efforts to integrate Luther's work both on the academic chair and in the pulpit into his own argument.

The third period after a long decline in Luther engagement is in vol. IV/1 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Ebeling argued that this newly arising interest in Luther had doctrinal reasons since it was the doctrine of justification Barth had to deal with in *KD IV/1* – and how could one do so without referring to Luther?³³ However sensible this may seem on doctrinal terms, the evidence of Luther's writings Barth quotes in *KD IV/1* tells a different story. Again it is Luther the bible theologian who appears in these quotations taken mainly from the sermon collections (*Postillen*) and the exegetical lectures.

5 Discussion

The overall image we get from these results is that the seemingly plausible idea of Luther's gradually declining significance for Barth once his doctrinal development had settled in the *Church Dogmatics* needs correction. I think the problem with hypotheses of the kind Ebeling suggests is to presuppose that the question of Barth's reception of Luther was primarily a doctrinal one. Quite to the contrary it seems that the textual evidence plays a crucial part. Considering the concrete texts by Luther which Barth quotes it is obvious that doctrinal texts are only of minor significance to him. Of course we do encounter quotes that reference doctrinal texts like *De servo arbitrio* or *De libertate christiana*, e.g. in several paragraphs of the *Christian Dogmatics*,³⁴ but their total number is rather low. It is likewise noteworthy that Barth hardly draws on those texts which Lutheran theologians usually consider characteristic of the reformer's social ethics like *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*. An exception to this rule seems to be the early lecture on

³² This seems likely not just because many of the references stem from lesser known sermons like the ones used by Eberle, but also because Barth's letter to von Kirschbaum (quoted earlier in this essay) seems to suggest that the manuscript von Kirschbaum was supposed to work with did not yet contain the proper references from the scientific editions of the *EA* and the *WA*.

³³ Cf. Ebeling, "Barths Ringen," 492.

³⁴ Cf. Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf. Erster Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik 1927* = id., *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Akademische Werke*, vol. 14, ed. Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1982), §§ 16; 20–21.

Ethics II (1928/29) where Barth dwells a bit over Luther's concept of the law.³⁵ But these passages are certainly not enough to support the overall impression that the reception of Luther's texts was in itself a doctrinal question.

The only stage in Barth's theological career to support a doctrinal approach to our question seems to be his *Zwingli* lecture and resulting essay on Luther's doctrine of the eucharist in 1922/23. I suppose the reason why this is so is that this was one of Barth's first academic lectures he had to deliver without ever having earned the normally required academic degrees – which is to say that Barth here had to make his way into academic practice. It is well known that in this situation he took shelter from the history of theology: the medieval scholastics, later on the Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxies – why not Luther himself? If the massive Luther impact from 1922/23 was rather a transient period of trying to find his own style as an academic teacher, this would perfectly account for the fact that the impact was scarcely sustainable. Barth did try once to do what was expected of him at Göttingen, namely deliver academic lectures as a doctrinal theologian – but he must have found out quickly that he was not going to be a doctrinal theologian in the sense academic conventions of that time did doctrinal theology! It would be an interesting question to ask what the style of the *Church Dogmatics* is that finally represented the results of this transient stage of self-finding in Barth's theological career – but it is certainly not building doctrinal theology, rather it is something prior to that which we might call the architecture of theology. I would like to add a few more remarks about this suggestion.

To speak of theological architecture (not in the Kantian sense of the term) evokes the idea of some sort of mental building which theologians may enter to walk through its rooms. It also suggests that theology was done best behind closed doors or at least in a clear distinction of what is inside of theology and what is outside of it. Classic or neo-orthodox aesthetics of perfection come to mind if one develops theology in this line of thought. However, all these ideas would be misleading if they were to conduct our study of Barth's theology. From the fragmentary shape of his famous dialectical 1922 lectures to the *KD* which remained just as imperfect as its predecessor from Münster, Barth was hardly ever inclined to that sort of architecture. On the other hand it is true that in the *KD* the argument is all in the structure and composition – the architecture – of the book. E.g., it would be pointless to practice close reading of *KD*

³⁵ Cf. Karl Barth, *Ethik II 1928/29. Vorlesung Münster Wintersemester 1928/29, wiederholt in Bonn, Wintersemester 1930/31* = id., *Gesamtausgabe. II: Akademische Werke*, vol. 10, ed. Dietrich Braun (Zürich: TVZ, 1978), particularly § 11, 9–167. Again it is Luther's exegetical lectures (on Genesis, Isaiah, and both psalm lectures) Barth draws on.

texts since the significance of a given passage depends so much on its particular position in the overall architectural framework that two identical formulations may have opposite argumentative value in different places of the book. The relevance of these architectural features is most obvious, as E. Jüngel has shown, in Barth's doctrine of reconciliation,³⁶ but it also applies to many other chapters of his dogmatics, since the ingredients of which that architecture of reconciliation is made combine the doctrines of Christ and that of predestination with the doctrine of the Trinity as the probably most comprehensive doctrinal unit. Even if this architecture is rather easy to reconstruct, the whole point about it is that it is *not* a combination of doctrinal elements resulting in doctrinal integrity. As numerous scholarly contributions have shown, this Trinitarian and/or Christological architecture is something which theologians are supposed to *narrate in the church*. This is why I prefer to speak of an architecture of Barth's dogmatics rather than an "ontology" albeit "narrative ontology" (K.J. Bender).³⁷ It was H.W. Frei who thus emphasized the correlation between theology, church, and narrative,³⁸ and this is in my opinion one of the most important parts of the legacy of Barth's theology. As the late D. Ritschl has elaborated in his "story" concept,³⁹ it turns the architecture of theology into a lively reality rather than a mentally constructed building called "ontology."⁴⁰

The problem which I think Barth research should discuss today is what sort of narration suits theology best. In some way, it is a question of the rhetorics of theology. Different suggestions have been made as to what rhetorics to adopt into theology, and I am doubtful if we are to expect one single and definitive answer to the question; it is perfectly possible that theology should have a flexible rhetorics according to the contexts in which theologians find themselves. This has led some to the idea that despite the enormous bulk of dogmatic work he

36 Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, "Barth, Karl," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 251–68, here 265.

37 Cf. Kimlyn J. Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, *Barth Studies Series* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 119 et passim.

38 Cf. Hans W. Frei, "Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative. Some Hermeneutical Considerations," in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94–116.

39 Cf. Dietrich Ritschl/Hugh O. Jones, "Story" als Rohmaterial der Theologie, *Theologische Existenz heute*, new series 192 (München: Kaiser, 1976).

40 The significance of ontology for Barth's theology has been discussed in German theology particularly since the book by Wilfried Härle, *Sein und Gnade: Die Ontologie in Karl Barths Kirchlicher Dogmatik*, *Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann* 27 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975).

does Barth was something like a godfather of postmodern theology.⁴¹ But here we encounter a severe problem since the Trinitarian architecture at least of his *KD* clearly “eats up the background,” as D.F. Ford said,⁴² and this would mean that it tells the sort of great or meta narrative postmodernity is supposed to have overcome.

My suggestion is that the sort of rhetoric we encounter in Barth, particularly his *KD*, is an indirect rhetoric: a rhetoric of witness with Christ as primary witness and the church as the cloud of witnesses gathered around him so that each and every believer bearing witness to Christ directly echoes his primordial witness. It is through the mediation of witness that God reveals Godself to the world. I should like to emphasize that the witness type of rhetoric is the inspiration I draw from Barth in respect to the question of how to narrate the architecture of theology; it is probably not compulsory. But whatever sort of rhetoric theology is to adopt, the one presupposition in the background will always be that there is something to narrate throughout theology in its entirety. Of course this also applies to the work of Barth if Barth is to inspire this or that particular theological narrative. What this something was in Barth's theological career, I will now try to make a few remarks about turning back to the different stages of his reception of Luther.

There was a second Luther impact on Barth after his first Göttingen lecture, and it stands at another important turning-point of Barth's career when he reworked the unfinished *Christian Dogmatics* into the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. It would seem that to establish an entire dogmatic system Barth needed to trespass the boundaries of a professor of Reformed theology he used to be when working at the universities of Göttingen and Münster. But as our survey of the actually received and quoted Luther texts suggests, Barth's concern in the opening volume of the *Church Dogmatics* was a different one. It was centered around his famous doctrine of the threefold shape of the word of God – a piece of doctrinal theology at first sight, but to solve a highly practical question that had haunted Barth ever since his Safenwil days: It was the dilemma of the proclamation of the word of God trapped between the expectations of the Bible on the one hand and of the congregation on the other, as Barth portrayed it in his famous lectures delivered in 1922 (e.g., *Not und Verheißung der christlichen*

⁴¹ Cf., e.g., Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology. The Rhetoric of Karl Barth*, SUNY Series in Rhetoric and Theology (Albany NY: State University of New York Press 1991); Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the language of theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴² David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story. Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics," Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums 27* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, ²1985), 92 (borrowing the wording from J.P. Stern).

Verkiündigung)⁴³ when the experience of Safenwil was still very fresh. It is easy to trace the ways this dilemma makes through all of Barth's work in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and his accompanying essays from these years.⁴⁴ And it was not until the *Church Dogmatics* that Barth found the Christological and Trinitarian solution to this dilemma which the doctrine of the threefold shape of the word of God expounds (§ 4 *KD*).

It is my suggestion that Barth's reception of Luther in the time of *KD I* was determined by the two factors that made up the Safenwil dilemma: Luther the exegete of the bible and Luther the man in the pulpit. This suggestion fits perfectly well in the body of referenced writings we encountered in *KD I*, *Ethics II* and Barth's first and second *Romans* alike, particularly the exegetical lectures on Galatians (Genesis and Isaiah, too, though much less) and of course the great bulk of quotes from Luther's model sermons. What seems to favor this suggestion additionally is that the Safenwil dilemma is nothing else than the heart of Barth's dialectical theology – which amounts to saying that the dialectics the pastor of Safenwil had experienced did not cease when Barth entered into an academic career. Ever since B. McCormack's study on Barth's theological development⁴⁵ it has been widely accepted that these dialectics was the most sustainable factor in Barth's theology – so sustainable, I should like to add, that it also accounts for the third and last impact Luther had on Barth when in 1953 he intensified his engagement with the Wittenberg reformer once more, and once again centered on Luther's bible theology and his preaching.

What seems to follow from all these observations is that Barth's reception of Luther is not an item of doctrinal theology. Rather, it is first of all biographically contextualized in Barth's theological career. Another point worthy of notice is that there is an important theological issue behind it, but this again does not really belong to doctrinal theology but to the ecclesial fundamentals and practical corollaries of any constructive Christian theology: the Bible and the task of preaching it.

⁴³ Cf. Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922–1925*, 65–97.

⁴⁴ For a closer investigation of this, cf. Henning Theißen, *Die berufene Zeugin des Kreuzes Christi. Studien zur Grundlegung der evangelischen Theorie der Kirche, Arbeiten zur systematischen Theologie* 5 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 373–85.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).