

Foreword

Setting out the “task of dogmatics” in the opening pages of his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth insisted that the criterion for all Christian utterance is to be found in Jesus Christ, in the one who is in person “God’s gracious and revealing address to humanity.”¹ The church must always ask in respect of its own utterances, “Does Christian utterance derive from Him? Does it lead to Him? Is it conformable to Him?”² Although some have contended that Barth did not always follow his own advice, no one has doubted Barth’s intent to be thoroughly christocentric at every point of the theological endeavor. But should we also regard Barth’s theology more specifically as crucicentric? Should we see Barth as upholding and developing the “thin tradition” of a *theologia crucis* that is represented before him in the likes of St. Athanasius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Johannes Tauler, Nicolas of Cusa and Martin Luther?

An answer to that question will depend, first, on our being able to say with an acceptable degree of clarity what distinguishes a *theologia crucis* from any other kind of theology, and second, upon our being able to show whether or not Barth’s theology shares those distinguishing marks. The consequent and vitally important question, is whether any particular instance of a *theologia crucis* can faithfully answer “Yes” to Barth’s own questions: Does such a theology derive from Christ? Does it lead to Him? Is it conformable to Him?

Consideration of these questions is the task admirably undertaken in this volume by Rosalene Bradbury. The particular task of clarifying what a *theologia crucis* consists in is addressed first. Such a theology is distinguished first, Bradbury contends, by an epistemological commitment to set aside the self-glorifying attempts by the creature to know

1. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 4.

2. *Ibid.*

and to encounter God on its own terms, and second by the associated soteriological conviction, that all anthropocentric methodologies for achieving salvation are negated by the vicarious, cruciform work of Christ. Bradbury's development of these insights in Part One of this work serves well in clarifying the distinctive features of a *theologia crucis* and gives cause to ponder whether these features ought to be distinguishing marks of every theology that claims to be Christian.

In the second part Bradbury engages specifically with Barth and considers whether the epistemological and soteriological convictions evident in the crucicentric tradition before him are decisive within his own theological project. Here Bradbury shows that Barth may be judged a theologian of the cross, not simply on account of his conformity to the received tradition but also on account of his profound and creative development of it. The case is made, and made well, that the generative power of a *theologia crucis* in Barth's theology deserves much more attention than it has commonly received.

What difference might this project finally make? It will serve undoubtedly to direct readers' attention to a neglected theme in Barth and will thus aid our comprehension of Barth's theological contribution as a whole. Comprehending more adequately a theologian of Barth's stature, however, requires also that we attend once again to the great themes of the Christian gospel, hear again the saving Word addressed to us in Christ, and ponder again what may be required of us in response. We have cause to be grateful to Rosalene for directing us again to that task.

Murray Rae
Associate Professor
Department of Theology
and Religious Studies
University of Otago