



Foreword

THIS IS A work of considerable importance. Karl Barth and Michael Polanyi are each figures whose respective places in the intellectual history of the twentieth century remain to be fully charted, notwithstanding the considerable volume of ink already spilled on the task.

Barth in particular has been the subject of a veritable publishing industry in the English-speaking theological community over the last decade or so. And although fewer trees have been felled to aid the scholarly reception of Polanyi's thought, his name has been familiar to theologians since the publication in the 1960s of Lesslie Newbigin's *Honest Religion for Secular Man*. The list of theological works directly indebted to his thought is by now a long one, and one that continues to grow.

It is true of Barth's thought and Polanyi's, though, that the veins of insight and understanding buried within run far deeper than the quarrying skills of any individual or even school of interpretation can reach, and fresh, carefully conducted excavation is always welcome to bring their hidden resources to light. Anyone who has returned time and again to the same shafts sunk deep into the crust of *Church Dogmatics* or *Personal Knowledge* will know the experience of stumbling unexpectedly across some new and striking material which they could swear was not there the last time they passed the spot. Of course this has to do with refreshed eyes and newly sharpened tools as well as the rich resources of the texts themselves; but the fact remains that there is plenty still to be said and written with profit.

What Tony Clark offers us here, though, is much more than a fresh reading of two figures from the recent past. His deliberate exercise in intertextuality not only helps to clarify elements in Barth's theological epistemology, but pursues what T. F. Torrance (in an incisive but somewhat indigestible phrase) refers to as an appropriate "transformation and convergence in the frame of knowledge." In other words, by bringing insights from Polanyi's account of scientific knowing into conversation with Barth's Christian theology (a venture that Torrance himself pioneered), what emerges is an unexpected shift in which neither voice is left unmodified, but in which there is also an identifiable gain for the epistemic fields in which each habitually participates. A "convergence" of insights occurs that is transformative not just of the several elements that feed into it, but of our wider appreciation of the truth of things.

The particular outcome of this work is a deepened and more comprehensive account of what might be meant when Christians refer to “revelation,” i.e. that event or series of events and phenomena in, with and through which God gives himself to be known. Barth’s account of this is famously Christ-centered; but in its fullness it goes much farther than many accounts do in recognizing (insisting) that the revelation of God is an event which includes our human response and participation. Thus his account has a deliberate Trinitarian shape: that which begins with the Father and is made concrete in the incarnate Son comes to fulfillment and fruition through the work of the Holy Spirit in creating the obedience of faith in the Church and, thus, in the lives of particular men, women and children. While this acknowledgment belongs to the very structure of Barth’s theology, though, it remains understated, and needs to be unpacked much more fully in concrete terms. By drawing on Polanyi’s account of the structure and practical means of participatory knowing in the natural sciences, Dr. Clark offers us a modeling of various human practices entailed in our human participation in revelation. Keeping its sights firmly fixed on the divine origin and undergirding of our knowing of God from moment to moment, this is nonetheless an account which is able to take fully seriously the human manifestations of this knowing and their relationship to other epistemic circumstances. In particular, the place of creative and imaginative modes of engagement in our knowing of God (as in our knowing of most other things) is here taken fully on board in a manner which avoids fallacious misrepresentations of it as an essentially constructivist exercise.

This is a masterly study which attends skillfully and with great insight to some of the complex and contested claims of theological epistemology, but does so with its feet firmly planted on the ground of daily living in the church, and an eye to how our Christian knowing of God at this down to earth and practical level might be better understood and, perhaps, renewed and transformed by what intellectual giants such as Barth and Polanyi have to tell us, and what they might have to learn from one another.

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