Introduction

This book brings together two long-standing interests of mine, namely Christian social ethics and social theory, and the theology and ethics of Karl Barth. Giving serious attention to both of these fields of inquiry is not an easy task, but requires a great deal of thinking about how the methodologies of these two fields fit together. On one hand, this really is not a problem for the social ethicist who occasionally refers to Barth's theology or ethics, by applying his thought to issues like church and state, war, or politics. On the other hand, it is a different matter when the ethicist takes Barth's theology seriously before discussing these or other issues in Christian ethics. Barth demands a great deal from his reader, especially the patience and perseverance to continue with his line of reasoning on various topics and how they interrelate with each other. Barth is a complex thinker and he requires more than a simple precursory reading. Furthermore, Barth demands that the reader critically examine his or her own presuppositions about the relationship between theology and ethics, which leads to a further investigation about the possible integration of faith and reason and the church and the academy. Is the Christian ethicist an academic professional, who stands outside theology, faith, and the church, when he or she address issues in society or the world? Or is the Christian ethicist also a theologian, who begins with the faith commitments of the church, and then seeks to give witness to that faith in society and the world? Of course, one might say that a good Christian ethicist splits the difference and takes a middle position, but even here, usually one side will invariably triumph over the other leading to a particular view of ethics, theology, church, world, and above all, God. Just

as theologians have an ethics, so too, ethicists have a theology, whether it is recognized or unrecognized, hidden or public, or operative or dormant.

Barth is important for Christian social ethics because he not only takes theology and God seriously, but he also takes society seriously. Obviously, his place in the history of theology is secured by his monumental task of reformulating orthodox theology in his *Church Dogmatics*.[1] Still, this massive work was not written in an academic vacuum, but in the social and political context of the first sixty years of the tumultuous twentieth century, during a period of two World Wars, the Cold War, and the triumph of post-Christendom secularism. Regarding this, Timothy Gorringe writes: "To read Barth as first and foremost a person of ideas is to do him a profound injustice. The very structure of the *Dogmatics*, the integration of theology and ethics, the refusal to separate law and gospel, is sign of his determination not to allow so much as a knife blade between theory and praxis."[2] Although Barth sought to integrate theology and ethics, his ethics is less well-known and extensively studied than his theology, although this has changed in recent years with several publications.[3] Like these studies, my book seeks to describe Barth's ethics, but it also seeks to place Barth's ethics in the *context* of our current society and world. My fundamental claim is that Barth is important because he presents us with a theology and ethics of *witness*. I'm not claiming that witness is the *leitmotif* or master key of Barth's theology or ethics; rather, it serves as a particular entry point into the narrative of his theology and ethics. This description and interpretation of Barth's thought as witness, however, is not seen as an end in itself but as a *means* to critically engage contemporary social and cultural situation and contemporary Christian ethics. To reiterate, this book is more than a description of Barth's ethics. Rather, it engages Barth as the primary interlocutor in determining how Christian ethics *is* an ongoing task of Christian witness. Barth is chosen for this task because his thought remains centered

1. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Henceforth, all references to this book will be cited in the text in parenthesis and abbreviated as *CD,* followed by abbreviations of volumes and parts. Citations within the body of the text are made to the English, *CD* edition.

2. Gorringe, *Karl Barth*, 8.

3. In addition to Gorringe's book, some important works during the last two decades include: Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*; Webster, *Ethics of Reconciliation*; Webster, *Moral Theology*; Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*; Nimmo, *Being in Action*; and most recently, McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*. Each of these books, in their own way, seeks to show how Barth integrated theology and ethics, that is, how his theology is ethical and his ethics is theological.

on God as an acting subject past, present, and future. For Barth both theology and ethics remain focused on the subject of God's action. In so doing, Barth develops a theological language for what a Christian ethics of witness looks like in theory and practice. Put differently, Barth's ethics is not an end in itself, but provides an *opening* for others to enter into this discussion about ethical responsibility in our secular age as a Christian witness to God's action. This makes Barth's voice about the Christian life relentlessly hopeful. "Nowhere does the overall hopeful character of Barth's theology come across more clearly than in this treatment of the task of witness."[4] In a postmodern age of global risk, it is the message of *hope* that our world desperately needs, that is, it needs to know that God has not abandoned the world but loves and cares for its future.

POSTMODERN WORLD AT RISK

What the world needs to hear is hope, but it remains difficult given the inherent ambiguities of our times. Our age promises the possibility of great hopes, but at the same time brings us uncertainties about our future. We continue to live our lives acting as if nothing has changed, and yet, we also know that a great deal has changed. We experience "cross-pressures," says Charles Taylor, which can either push us toward a more positive view of the future, or pull us away from hope in an increasingly secular world.[5] This leads to a kind of schizophrenic existence that remains hopeful yet skeptical, confident yet fearful, diligent yet apathetic, and optimistic yet pessimistic. Indeed, these "cross-pressures" are inherently self-contradictory, namely our materialism and naturalism is placed side-by-side with notions of the transcendental self arising above nature making ethics possible. So, on one hand, we live within "closed world structures (CWSs)" in which "nothing is demanded of us," or in which "we have no destiny we are called on to achieve."[6] On the other hand, persons also assume that "the colossal success of modern natural science and the associated technology can lead us to feel that it unlocks all mysteries, that it will ultimately explain everything."[7] Our core dilemma is that we feel apathetic, powerless, and pessimistic at the same time as we feel resourceful, powerful, and optimistic. "What pushes

4. Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 161.
5. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 594–616.
6. Ibid., 367.
7. Ibid., 548.

us one way or the other is what we might describe as our over-all take on human life," adds Taylor, "and its cosmic and (if any) spiritual surroundings. People's stance on the issue of belief in God, or of an open versus closed understanding of the immanent frame, usually emerge out of this general sense of things."[8] Whether we see the future as open or closed depends upon whether we think God remains sovereign over the future. Is God in control of time and our future or are we? How we answer this question has bearing on our view of the future as optimistic or pessimistic, open or closed.

Let's look further at these negative and positive, or closed and open, dimensions of our current circumstances. First, on negative side, we've lost the confidence of previous generations in knowing how to accomplish our hopes and goals. The future appears close-ended with little opportunity to shape our destiny. We become overwhelmed by the possibility of numerous dangers and risks that threaten human society, and indeed, life as we know it on earth. The overall pessimism comes not from human knowledge but from the human will. That is, we are aware of the problems that we confront, whether political, economic, or environmental, but we often remain paralyzed in knowing how to fix these problems. This is largely because these problems are no longer local or national but *global* problems. Human societies have always lived with threats and uncertainties, but today, we live in a world where "risks are lurking everywhere."[9] How can any one nation, or even groups of nations, address the problems of global violence and terrorism, global climate change, and the uncertainty of the global market? This ambiguity, even fear, of the future can lead to apathy, even despair, which takes away our initiative and hope for a better future. Second, on positive side, we still remain hopeful about the future because it appears to us as open-ended, and something that we can shape and influence in positive directions. Our optimism is not naïve but guarded and realistic. We question the past and seek to go beyond the core aspects of the modern way of life, which has led toward these global problems. We have learned from our mistakes. In the twenty-first century we are perhaps more aware that we've entered a time and space that seeks to alleviate the global risks posed by modern societies. We are more willing to talk about peace, justice, and environmental integrity, as a hope for the world, than previous decades

8. Ibid., 550.
9. Beck, *World at Risk*, 13.

of the last century. People do hope for a better world, and seriously believe that a better world is possible.

The ambiguity about the world's future, as open or closed, creates confusion about the nature of ethics itself, including how we think about moral agency and knowledge. Are we really free to change the world? Do we really know what is good? We know we must act for a better world, but we remain uncertain about the source of this moral knowledge and the moral imperatives that guide our actions. We generally distrust moral authorities, whether secular or religious, and remain unwilling or unable to provide legitimate reasons to believe in a common morality. These conflicts are at the heart of postmodernity or postmodern society. In Zygmunt Bauman's words, it is essentially a "discrepancy between demand and supply that has been recently described as the 'ethical crisis of postmodernity.'"[10] In postmodern society we are confronted by the ethical "demand" that we *must* believe and act in a pluralistic and technologically driven world; we cannot sit idle and do nothing. Yet, even though we are obviously aware of these problems, we remain confused about whether we can implement a positive course of action. Our ethical "supply," our sources of morality and wisdom, seems to be lacking. Although we have deep convictions about what is right and good, we cannot claim these convictions are true for all people; we are inherently skeptical of any objective moral claims. Bauman points to the fact that in postmodernity we know we must do something, but we don't know what to do or why we should do it. So, our knowledge and action, conscience and practice, truth and agency, remain paralyzed and rendered not useful in a world of risks that demands our action. Postmodernity is not only ambiguous about our future but also about the process of determining ethical actions which benefit humanity's future.

How does this postmodern ambiguity affect the strategy of Christian ethics? Can Christian ethics help with this postmodern discrepancy between moral knowledge and moral agency, that is, between our ability to know what is good and our ability to do it? What sources (or supply) does it draw from in answering such questions? Does it pull from specific theological sources, from the numerous nontheological sources of the social sciences, philosophy, and cultural studies, or does it combine these in some meaningful way? This raises the important issue of whether Christian ethics is simply another version of general strategy of ethics, or if it is something

10. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 17.

entirely distinct and unique offering an alternative understanding of the sources of ethical knowledge and agency. Like other ethical viewpoints, does it simply evaluate global risks and then seek to fix these problems, or does it offer an alternative vision, a greater hope, rooted in God's action and relationship to the world, for the world community? Is its strength its ability to work with other viewpoints providing a general account of global risks and prospects for a better world, or is its strength its unique theological and ethical vision of a world, which remains different from other viewpoints? Turning to such questions leads us to a fuller discussion of how theology is related to ethics, both in its historical and contemporary settings.

WHY BARTH?

For my response to these and other pertinent questions, I turn to the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth. Barth's thought presents us with a unique challenge, in that not only did he write a great deal—as any Barth scholar surely knows—but the burgeoning supply of secondary literature on Barth continues to grow every day. This, coupled with the enormous amount of literature in the field of social ethics, social theory, and Christian ethics, obviously creates limits to the amount of material that can be cited and critically assessed.[11] Although I discuss numerous viewpoints, I often return to the central point that if Christian ethics wants to remain theological in our postmodern world-at-risk, it must be willing to consider or reconsider the theology and ethics of Barth. As Gerald Loughlin writes: "In so far as postmodernity is the weakening of univocal reason, the church is freed to recover its own self."[12] Indeed, as the church seeks to "recover its own self," it looks to its own beliefs and practices as the starting point for moral reflection and action. Yet, behind such beliefs and practices lies the firm conviction that God continues to act in the church and the world, and the church's mission and task to give witness to God's action in its proclamation and social action. In short, the church's ethics becomes an ethics of

11. With this in mind, my challenge was to limit my study to pertinent social scientific, ethical, and theological literature. Most references in this book will be to Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, however there will be references to Barth's other important works, especially in the areas of ethics and political thought, while the references to secondary material on Barth is kept at a minimum. In a similar way, my selection of materials in social ethics is also limited to important scholars in the field or to others who fit nicely with the perimeter of my project.

12. See Loughlin, "Doctrine," 51.

witness. By shifting the focus away from "univocal reason" and toward the church's witness, individual Christians can further rediscover their vocational identity as individual witnesses in their discipleship, while living out God's promise of faith, hope, and love in a world at risk.

This book takes the position that Christian ethics begins with a prior understanding of theological ethics, which is, at its core, an ethics of witness. Theology is not a creation of the theologian, but an intellectual discipline of the church reflecting about its witness to the gospel, as articulated in Scripture and the church's credo. It follows that a "theological ethics" cannot be anthropocentric but consistently relies upon God's grace as the source for human moral knowledge of the good. In turn, if a "Christian ethics" seeks to remain theological, it too rests upon God's grace for its deliberations and actions in choosing to do what is ethically right. Said differently, Christian ethics as witness is a theological *reminder* about what Christian ethics *ought* to be if it remains committed to the truth of the gospel. A Christian ethics of witness rises and falls with the truth of the gospel. Barth's thought, of course, is *not* the gospel as such, just as the theology of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher, or von Balthasar is not the gospel; in each case, the theologian seeks to articulate the gospel in language of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Like other great church theologians of the past, Barth understands God's gracious actions occurring prior to the human response of faith and action. Faith by its very nature is, of necessity, ordered toward the understanding of God, or put differently, with faith comes the *proper* understanding of God. In the opening pages of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth writes that theology, as dogmatics, is "the scientific self-examination of the Christian church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God" (*CD* I/1:3). It is this "distinctive talk about God" that often presents unique challenges to those who see themselves as Christian *ethicists*. The language of witness, of course, is the language of the theology of the church in its *status confessionis*, and not the language of "ethics" in the secular academy. The academic study of ethics often incorporates all interested participants from religious studies, philosophy, the social sciences, and medical, business, or legal professionals. Christian ethics is a subcategory of the larger, and more inclusive, category of "ethics." This is perhaps why most Christian ethicists speak of their vocation as an "ethicist" rather than a "theologian." To be a Christian ethicist implies a certain willingness to push theology to the margins, while concentrating on a full-fledged ethical description and analysis at the human level of action

and evaluation. Since there is clear separation between the disciplines of theology and ethics, theology inevitably becomes ancillary to ethics.

This separation of ethics from theology began long before Barth, and was one of the central features of the modern liberal theology that he rejected and sought to overcome. So, how did he see the relationship of ethics to theology? In one of his most interesting analogies regarding ethics, Barth equates the general category of ethics with the ancient people of Palestine, and theological ethics with the Israelites entering into and annexing the Promised Land.

> From the point of view of the general history of ethics, it means an annexation of the kind that took place on the entry of the children of Israel into Palestine. Other peoples for a long time maintained that they had a very old, if not the oldest, right of domicile in this country. But, according to Josh. 9:27, they could now at best exist only as hewers of wood and drawers of water. On no account had the Israelites to adopt or take part in their cultus and culture. Their liveliest resistance, therefore, could be expected, and their existence would necessarily be for the Israelites an almost invincible temptation. Ethics in the sense of that general conception is something entirely different from what alone the Christian doctrine of God can be as a doctrine of God's command. Whatever form the relationship between the two may take, there can be no question either of a positive recognition of Christian ethics by that conception or of an attachment of Christian ethics to it. Christian ethics cannot possibly be its continuation, development, and enrichment. (*CD* II/2: 518–19)

At first glance, Barth makes it sound as if Christian ethics has nothing in common with other ethical frameworks. Like the ancient Israelites, Christian ethics refuses to assimilate any methods or insights from general conceptions of ethics, but remains completely distinct from other accounts of ethics. As we shall see later, this interpretation is too simplistic. The point that Barth is making here is an important one, namely, does the foundation of Christian ethics lie in some general or unspecified account of "human ethics" where the principle actor is the human subject apart or isolated from divine-human encounter made visible in Jesus Christ? If so, this both denies God's freedom to act in such an encounter, but also creates a fictive account of the human subject in isolation from God. In plain language, how can Christian ethics remain "Christian" if it jettisons its most fundamental belief in the gospel that God is with us and for us

in covenant-partnership, as revealed in Jesus Christ? For Barth the qualifying term "Christian" "goes all the way down" so to speak. Likewise, the Israelites did not simply take over the land, but annexed the land that originally "belonged to Yahweh" (*CD* II/2: 522). Just as the land originally belongs to God, the order and content of the good and ethics originally belongs to God. As the original possessor of land, God seeks to reclaim ownership over it through the annexation of the people of God. In the same way, Christian ethics seeks to reclaim ethics from the various anthropocentric methodologies that have sought to possess its structure and content. Yet, this annexation is primarily the work of God, not God's people. Thus, Christian ethics should not see itself as metadiscourse with the right to *usurp* other ethical discourses, but limits itself to the task of being a witness to the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, declaring to those inhabitants that Jesus Christ is Lord. What does this imply for Christian ethics? Although the tradition of Western ethics finds its roots in ancient philosophy, in the thought of Plato and Aristotle and others, this tradition is not the original owner or inhabitant of the land. Christian ethics simply acknowledges this fact and begins with the reality that God has acted and spoken. This is why there can be no assimilation or accommodation to alien ethical worldviews without the risk of being absorbed into this alien worldview and losing one's Christian identity. Saying this, however, does not imply that Christian ethics can completely isolate itself apart from its neighbors; it still exists in the land of Canaan. So, in the end, what this means is that with the "annexation" of other ethical worldviews, Christian ethics "puts an end to the discussion" to false dilemma or complete synthesis or diastasis or of assimilation or separation (*CD* II/2: 519). Cultural borrowings do take place, but only to such an extent they help clarify the original task and mission of Christian ethics.

What does the annexation of ethics look like in theory and practice? The detailed answer to this question, of course, will be developed in later chapters of the book. At this point, it is worth mentioning three sets of correspondences that arise from the analogy of the Israelite annexation. The first correspondence is between God and the land, the second is between God and the Israelites, and the third is between the Israelites and their neighbors. For our response we turn to two important essays that Barth wrote on the topic of ethics, namely the 1946 essay on "Christian Ethics," and the previously quoted essay "The Gift of Freedom," written in

1953.[13] Regarding the first point, as stated above God is the original owner of the land which implies God's ownership of the good and its embodiment in ethics. In this sense, what Barth calls "divine ethics" comes before "human ethics." Yet divine ethics is not composed of abstract ideas about the "good" apart from God's action in history—God *reveals* the good, and with it, the true nature of ethics. This revelation arises, not of necessity, but from God's free decision to act as Father, Son, and Spirit in gracious relationship toward God's human partner in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. "God's own freedom is trinitarian," says Barth, "embracing grace, thankfulness, and peace. It is the freedom of the living God. Only in this relational freedom is God's sovereign, almighty, the Lord of all." (*HG*: 72) Second, God's correspondence to the Israelites, as witnesses to God's ownership, implies a covenant-partnership that God freely chooses to have with the people of God, whom God has elected. Christian ethics gives witness to the fact that in Jesus Christ humanity is elected and brought into a covenant-partnership with God. In its annexation of ethics, Christian ethics articulates a general account of ethics as it objectively and really is, namely an ethics which emerges from the witness to God's free choice to be *for* us (*pro nobis*) as our covenant-partner. "God is free for *man*," says Barth, "free to coexist with man and, as the Lord of the covenant, to participate in his *history*. The concept of God without man is indeed as anomalous as wooden iron" (*HG*: 72). Lastly, just as the Israelites are free to dialogue with their neighbors, so too Christian ethics is free to dialogue with other ethical discourses. "Christian ethics does not rest, therefore, on a philosophy or *Weltanschauung* and it does not consist of the development of an idea or a principle or program" (*GHN*: 106). Christian ethics is free from all ethical methodologies that "lock" humanity in a "conversation with himself" (*GHN*: 106). Thus, Christian ethics is free from being assimilated or absorbed into other viewpoints, just as it is free from becoming sectarian and isolated from other viewpoints; it moves freely between the poles of synthesis and diastasis. In its critical engagement with other viewpoints, therefore, Christian ethics "tests everything and preserves the best, only the best, and that means those things by which from time to time God grace is best praised" (*GHN*: 110). All non-Christian viewpoints have the potential

13. Barth, "Christian Ethics," 105–14. Henceforth, all references to the book: Barth, *God Here and Now* will be cited in the text in parenthesis, and abbreviated as *GHN*. Also, Barth, "The Gift of Freedom," 69–96. Henceforth, all references to the book: Barth, *Humanity of God* will be cited in the text in parenthesis, and abbreviated as *HG*.

to be secular witnesses to God's grace, and the task of the Christian community is to listen to the witness of these other voices.

So, we've seen how in each set of correspondences there is a freedom between God and the good, God and God's human partner, and Christians and their neighbors. Saying this, let us explore further how this "gift of freedom" lies at the heart of Christian ethics. Ethics emerges from God's freedom to act making ethics itself a gift of freedom. "Ethics is reflection upon what man is required to do in and with the gift of freedom" (*HG*: 87). This "gift of freedom" is not grounded in the *imago Dei,* as many assume, but in God's trinitarian freedom to be Father, Son, and Spirit. Beginning with the human subject itself apart from this trinitarian relation leads to the fictive notion that human freedom is "self-assertion of one or many solitary individuals" rather than "coexisting" and "participating" with God in human history (*HG*: 71–72). God's freedom is the basis for human freedom in responsible witness and ethical action.

> This freedom of God as it is expressed in His being, word, and deed is the content of the Gospel. Receiving this good news from those who witness to it, the Christian *community* in the world is called to acknowledge it in faith, to respond to it in love, to set on it its hope and trust, and to proclaim it to the world which belongs to this free God. It is the privilege and mission of the Christian community to acknowledge and to confess the Gospel. By acknowledging and confessing Jesus Christ as the creation and revelation of God's freedom, this community is incorporated into the body of Christ and becomes the earthly and historical form of his existence. He is in its midst . . . Even in this central act God declines to be alone, without man. God insists on man's participation in His reconciling work. He wants man, not as a secondary God, to be sure, but as a truly free follower and co-worker, to repeat his divine "Yes" and "No." This is the meaning of God's covenant with man. This is the task man is called to fulfill when God enters into the covenant relationship with him. This is the freedom of discipleship bestowed upon him. (*HG*: 73–74, 81)

Christians are brought into fellowship with Jesus Christ in the context of the Christian community. The church's witness becomes the individual Christian's witness. In their witness, God calls Christians and the church to a task of saying No to the powers that oppress human freedom and Yes to God's reconciling love and grace, which brings us into fellowship with God and others in the surrounding community. God gives liberation and

freedom to humanity who remains preoccupied with the ethical task. "God does not put man into the situation of Hercules at the crossroads. The opposite is true. God frees man from this false situation" (*HG*: 76). God brings freedom to choices and decision-making because God's freedom establishes human freedom. This freedom, of course, is discovered only in God's "gift" of grace concretely unveiled in the covenant-partnership between God and humanity made visible in Jesus Christ, as the divine and human representative. This is further manifested in the church, which is "incorporated into the body of Christ and becomes the earthly and historical form of his existence." In this way the church remains an important place from which Christians understand their witness to and *for* the world. In the essay on "Christian Ethics," Barth explores the more practical side by looking for correspondences in which "God does something and does it in such a way that man is thereby called to do something in turn" (*GHN*: 109). Just as God stands with and for others in Jesus Christ, so does Christian witness stand for human dignity and value. Just as God has forgiven sinners, so too, ethics demands the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation. Just as humanity is saved by grace alone, so too, ethics should neither be entirely optimistic, which denies human sin, or pessimistic, which denies God's grace; humanity is sinful but also reconciled and empowered to do the good. Just as God in Jesus Christ in his witness and actions, is responsible, so too, ethics demands that we act responsibly in our witness and actions. Just as God's covenant is inclusive of all persons, so too, ethics should be inclusive of differences within the human community. Just as Christ was a servant to others, so too, we should give of ourselves to others. Lastly, just as God has acted eschatologically, so too, we should act in such a way, privately and publicly, in prayer and work, in love and hope, knowing that God's decisive action is past, present, and future (*GHN*: 111–14). In each of these ways, human actions responsibly *correspond* to God's covenant-partnership with the world, and gives witness to the gracious trinitarian command that calls us forth to be children of God.

What these essays demonstrate is that Christian ethics as witness involves both knowledge and practice. Christian moral knowledge derives from the theological articulation of Christian witness. So, instead of beginning with ethical methodology or social scientific theory, this book argues that *theological* ethics provides the basis for Christian ethics. In turn, theology is understood within the process of *fides quaerens intellectum*, a reflective discipline, linked with the Christian community, which seeks to talk about

God from the standpoint of the biblical and church's witness to God's revelation, as principally unveiled in Jesus Christ. Theology must take seriously the church's confessional witness that the trinitarian God has acted in Jesus Christ and continues to act in the Holy Spirit. Put differently, Christian ethics depends on the witness of theological ethics, and theological ethics depends on the witness of God's revelation. Although theology and ethics can be distinguished they cannot be separated or driven apart because they are both rooted in the witness of God's revelation. Second, as practice, this book looks at the practical application of Christian *witness* within a deliberative framework that engages in dialectical and responsible analysis of contemporary issues in social ethics. It uses a dialectical form of moral reasoning that cannot be reduced to a deontological (rule-based), teleological (consequence-based) or areteological (virtue-based) ethical theory. Rather it envisions moral decision-making and action as a free *responsible* form of witness of individuals and the church. What this implies is a very close relationship between the living beliefs and practices of the church and Christian ethics. Saying this, however, does not imply that Christian ethics be reduced to the church's ethos, whether in beliefs, sacraments, or other practices. Christian ethics cannot begin with ecclesiology, but with the church's witness to God's trinitarian action. In the church's witness to Jesus Christ, Christians invoke and invite God's action, as veiled in mystery but also unveiled in the agency of Holy Spirit, which empowers the church to freely respond to this divine initiative in its practical judgments and actions. As Christians, in their vocation and discipleship, respond to God's action (or command of grace), they remain free to think and act in response to their unique circumstances. Christian ethics, then, is less a tightly controlled system of principles, rules, or even virtues, but more of a free and open-ended responsibility to God's gracious command to be with and for others, the church, and the world. It is an invitation to God's Yes to act in responsible freedom. "Human freedom is the *gift* of God in the free outpouring of His grace. To call man free is to recognize that God has *given* him freedom" (*HG*: 75).

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into four parts which basically moves from Barth's earliest to his latest writings. Yet, throughout these chapters is the continuing critical engagement with intellectual and social contexts, both past and present. In

brief, the first 2 sections (chapters 1–5) demonstrates why *theological* ethics provides the basis for Christian ethics, and the last two sections (chapters 6–13) lays out the basic features of why and how Christian *witness* provides the framework for Christian ethics. The first several chapters describe how postmodernity has left us with a crisis of moral knowledge and practice, that is, of knowing and doing the good, and how Barth's theological ethics is helpful in addressing these problems. In part one (chapters 1–3), I sort through various theological and epistemological issues relevant to contemporary Christian theology and ethics. The first chapter, in particular, addresses the *Christian* (theological) context by looking at the general transition from modern to postmodern theological ethics. It begins with a general description of modernity ("methodological universalism") and how this is represented in the ethics of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher. This legacy of "modern ethics" results in: 1) the separation of ethics from theology; and 2) the reduction of ethics to nontheological foundations. Modern theological ethics, with its emphasis on human agency, leaves little room for divine agency to act in the world. God becomes absent. Yet, we must ask, is the voice of God—as trinitarian *Other*—indeed silent?

In chapter 2, I discuss the transition to postmodern thought by looking at the early thought (1916–31) of Karl Barth. Barth's "postmodern turn" in theological ethics is evident in his departure from the ethics of Kant and Schleiermacher, while at the same time, opening himself to the divine Other, by developing a theological description of the moral life that begins with God's action. Reversing the anthropocentric structure of modern ethics, Barth asserts that human freedom depends upon God's freedom to act *in relatio*. This relational view of God—as "with" and "for" humanity—is principally revealed in the event of the Word of God. Beginning with the Word of God, therefore, Barth develops a theological ethics that includes a trinitarian command ethic and dialectical method. Chapter 3 continues the basic narrative of the previous chapter, in which Barth's ethics are situated within their historical and cultural context, namely the German struggle with Nazism in the 1930s. In this way, this chapter continues the narrative of chapter 2, while laying the groundwork for the theological discussion of chapter 6. In particular, I consider Barth's discussion of the issues of "natural law" and "law/gospel." After this, I look at Barth's social and political writings (1938–1950s) with particular focus on the 1946 essay: "The Christian Community and the Civil Community." This essay not only demonstrates how both the ecclesial and secular communities remain a witness to the

Word of God, but also a strategy for a dialectical social ethics within the context of post-Christendom. In the context of the ruins of 1946 Germany, Barth on several occasions gave this address, setting the stage for a post-Christendom Europe, one committed to constitutional democracy, human rights, and a social market or democratic socialist economy.

In part two (chapters 4–5), the subject shifts from theological to *social* and *ethical* analysis, within the postmodern situation. Here I look at both "deconstructionist" and "reflexive" (late-modern) thought regarding social theory (chapter 4) and ethical theory (chapter 5). The former includes individuals like Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, and Alasdair MacIntrye, and the latter includes Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty. In chapter 4, I argue that although reflexive social theory fails to provide a strong argument for *how* we ought to live in the world, it remains a good conversation partner with Christian ethics, especially as it helps assess the "risks" of contemporary life. The fifth chapter discusses the same two theories, and concludes that a "reflexive" theory of moral realism, although better than the deconstructionist model, fails to account for a moral ontology of the good. Postmodernity has left us with a crisis of moral knowledge and practice, that is, of knowing and doing the good. Even if we know the good, we are often paralyzed from doing it. This is because there are not only "external risks" (or powers), like political, economic, and ideological absolutism, global violence, and environmental destruction that threaten persons and communities, but there are also "internal risks" (or powers), like the ideas of antirealism (relativism) and nihilism that correlate the "good" with "power" itself. If the good remains defined by power rather than the other way around, then there is no "good reason" to do what is right *apart* from power. If good truly exists then power itself must be good. It is *potestas*—the power to do good and not simply *potentia*—sheer authority or power to act. This logic leads us to consider God's agency and revelation, as the source of the good. This I argue makes sense in postmodernity only with *revelation* of the good by a good God. So, just as social theory needs ethics, a reflexive account of ethics needs a theological, rather than a philosophical or social scientific, account of moral realism. Although one task in these chapters is entirely descriptive, namely demonstrating the shift from modern to postmodern thought, another more important task relates theology to this discussion. Failure to do this leaves human moral knowledge and action remain paralyzed by the antirealist assumptions of deconstructionist postmodernism.

In part three (chapters 6–9), we return to Barth's theology and ethics considering now the entirety of his work, including the *Church Dogmatics*. Our task here is to discuss themes in Barth's ethics of witness in the context of contemporary Christian ethics. The focus here is more on the theoretical rather than the practical, thus, more on theological ethics. In chapter 6, we explore how Christian witness begins with theological ethics which begins with God's action in the Word of God. Mostly looking at *CD* II/2 and III/4, we look at Barth's theology of divine command and at the same time discuss how his critics misunderstand his theology. Barth's ethics is not a "divine command theory" as much as a trinitarian theology of divine action. This leads to the second point, which focuses on the centrality of how divine and human agencies are related. Unlike most Christian ethics, Barth rejects the basic presumption of the self-determinative moral agent, and instead, uses an Christological framework to redefine moral agency according to the human-divine action in Jesus Christ. This makes God's divine command a command of grace (not law), which practically speaking, makes it open-ended and dialectical. This dialectical approach implies saying Yes to responsible action of witness and No against the powers that threaten to undermine human freedom. These are the subjects of the following two chapters. Chapter 7 looks at how the *Yes* of moral judgment can be understood within a Christian ethics of witness. In this we look at the related ideas of vocation, discipleship, and witness, and their role in ethics. The chapter discusses why these concepts remain crucial for Christian ethics today. The next section focuses Barth's understanding of vocation, discipleship, and witness. Ethics as responsible witness leads to a vision of practical judgment which requires that the Christian freely test and judge his or her actions in response to God's trinitarian command of grace. The heterogeneity between God's Word and human word, between God's command of grace and the human law, is underwritten by a more fundamental covenant of grace, which provides the objective reality for freedom within responsibility. In the last section of the chapter, we explore further how Barth's thought relates to contemporary ethics by comparing Barth and Stanley Hauerwas on the subject of Christian witness.

In chapter 8 we discuss how Christian witness involves saying *No* against the powers. What are these powers? Barth singles out several, namely spiritual powers of leviathan, mammon, and ideology, or if one prefers, political, economic, and ideological absolutism, and the earthly chthonic powers of technology, entertainment, and fast-paced nature of modern life. It is

God not humanity that defeats the powers. Still, these powers remain a force that seeks to destroy human freedom because in their foolish attempt to "be like God," persons place themselves under their own power, which entraps and limits their own freedom. In resistance to the powers, Christian witness must affirm that they are defeated by Jesus Christ, and no longer control human destiny; only in Christ are we free from the powers. The Christian act of resistance against the powers is only possible because of *Christus Victor*. Lastly in chapter 9 the subject shifts to the relation of Christian witness to public ethics. In many ways, this chapter serves as a summary of many of the ideas developed in previous chapters. Should Christian ethics begin with the particularity of Christian faith and practice or general human claims of moral truth, or in brief, should it be exclusivistic or inclusivistic? If, on the other hand, this is a false dilemma, and Christian ethics combines these two perspectives, then how is this accomplished? This chapter addresses this issue as it discusses Barth in conversation with three other important options in contemporary Christian ethics such as the "theocentric ethics" of James Gustafson, the "Christian realism" of Robin Lovin, and the "Radical Orthodoxy" of John Milbank. Gustafson and Lovin charge that Barth's ethics remains too exclusivistic both in theology and ethics; hence, he is unable to provide an adequate general theory of moral truth. Milbank, on the other hand, sees Barth as too "inclusive" of modern presumptions, and in particular, his acceptance of the "secular." Yet, in contrast to the others, Barth dialectically weaves his way between the twin poles of synthesis and diastasis avoiding the risks of secular reductionism and theological esotericism. The purpose for this comparison is to demonstrate how an ethics of witness is free to critically engage in public discourse in a way that remains beholden to God's gracious action to be with and for others.

The final section (chapters 10–13) moves from theory to practice in demonstrating how Christian witness becomes ethics in political, economic, and environmental practice. Chapter 10 looks at the subject of Christian responsibility. For Barth, Christian responsibility occurs in the context of three spheres of action, namely the interpersonal, the ecclesial, and the world (or social). Living under God's free grace, allows Christians the freedom to live out one's vocation of witness and discipleship in a responsible manner in the context of these three spheres, while avoiding the extreme polarities within each sphere. Without moving "back and forth," Christian ethics remains tied to one absolute perspective unable to encounter the freedom found in God's command of grace; in such cases both human

and divine freedom are denied. Christians must responsibly act "for" the good and "against" evil, but they also must be cautious of absolutizing any particular moral strategy as Yes or No, because to do so fosters the risk of replacing one potential hegemony with another. Christian witness implies being responsible for others, the church, and the world. Following this, chapters 11–13 continue this analysis of Christian responsibility and witness, within the context of reconciliation, by examining the interface of Christology and ethics in *CD* IV/1–3, while bringing back into the discussion the powers discussed in chapter 8, and how responsible witness says both No and Yes. The basic argument here is that the Christian witness of faith, hope, and love provides an opening for the practice of various "goods" that contribute to greater peace, freedom, and justice.

In chapter 11 the central discussion focuses on political ethics. For this we turn the narrative in *CD* IV/1, where Christ as the Son of God and "high priest" exposes the human sin of pride and overcomes it with faith, thereby providing his disciples with the means for resisting witness of *faith*. In contrast to faith, then, stands the sin of pride which seeks to usurp God's kingdom with the lordless power of leviathan. The power of leviathan further drives nation-states and terrorist organizations to promote violence and war. Standing against leviathan, the church's witness of faith affirms the practice of *peace*, which leads to supporting constitutional democracy under law, peacemaking, and global cooperation. Christian faith leads to the practice of peace, which stands for humanity and the world and against pride and leviathan's preoccupation with powers and violence. Peace leads to cooperation, fellowship, and human freedom. Furthermore, in chapter 12, we shift toward economic ethics. To begin, we see in *CD* IV/2 how Christ as Son of Man, "royal man," and "exalted king" discloses the human sin of sloth while overcoming it with love, thereby providing his disciples with the means for resisting witness of *love.* In contrast to love, stands the sin of sloth which seeks to usurp God's kingdom with the lordless power of mammon. Against mammon stands love, moreover, which leads to the practice of *justice*. Witness affirms justice by supporting global "social market" economic reform and development, the practice of humane work, and global economic cooperation that moves between a total neoliberal free market and state-controlled communism. Since it is non-dialectical to either demonize or divinize the global market, this chapter presents a dialectical view of wealth and work that resists mammon, but not the market economy's role in social justice. Still, Christian love *resists* mammon by seeking the welfare

of others in justice and work, which brings together Christian vocation with what Barth calls "counter-movements" that seek social justice.

Lastly, chapter 13 shifts toward environmental ethics. In *CD* IV/3, Barth explains how Christ as Prophet, the "true witness" who brings together into his one person divine and human agency as "high priest" and "royal man," discloses the sin of falsehood (or deception) and overcomes it with hope, thereby providing his disciples with the means for resisting witness of *hope*. It is the sin of falsehood which provides power to ideology, and it's the virtue of hope that resists its power. Ideology today has many faces, but no one more important than the common belief "there is no alternative" (TINA). This ideology gets at the heart of the crisis of postmodern apathy and despair. In the face of environment destruction and commoditization, the witness of hope says Yes to *freedom* by supporting global environmental stewardship, technological reform, and ecological sustainability. Yet, as Christian witness, this ethics of environmental reform can only be seen emerging from the freedom discovered in God's covenant-partnership with humanity and the world. More than political or economic ethics, Christian environmental ethics has often flirted with diverse cosmologies, whether pantheistic or panentheistic, to challenge the traditional Christian theocentric account of God-world relations. This chapter, then, looks at this theological debate by comparing Barth to other theologians, such as Sallie McFague. Christian hope and freedom for humanity, and humanity's relationship to nature, is not discovered in a new immanentist cosmology but in the witness of God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ.