Introduction

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In the summer of 2007 the editors of the present volume met at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the NCCC Faith and Order Commission held at Oberlin College. We immediately resonated with one another, both personally and professionally. One particularly potent point of resonance was a shared frustration with the framing of the dialogue between Karl Barth and evangelical theology. This topic had come up because earlier that summer Princeton Theological Seminary had sponsored a conference devoted to this dialogue.[1] Though there were many excellent papers given and rich discussion was fostered, nevertheless, the conference was still caught in a framework which has shaped the question of the relationship of Barth and evangelical theology over the past several decades.[2] That framework consists of the unexamined premise that American Evangelicalism ought primarily to be understood as a species of Protestant orthodoxy, especially of the Reformed variety, and that the defining task of evangelical theology is the preservation of Protestant orthodox theology. The dialogue between Barth and evangelical theology is often conducted under these constraints, a shared source of frustration for many.

The present volume seeks to offer an alternative to the dominant constraints, one that we believe will open up new avenues for fruitful conversation. In this endeavor, our motivating conviction is that dialogue between

1. Many of those papers were published in McCormack and Anderson, *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*.

2. This is not to say that the framework described here was intentionally adopted by the conference organizers. Rather, the framework described here is part of the larger academic "social imaginary" that has shaped the scholarship on the relationship of Barth and Evangelicalism, especially in North America, for the past several decades. The conference was simply caught up in this larger set of assumptions, because they were brought to the table by conference participants, etc.

Karl Barth and evangelical theology as framed by the question of orthodoxy is at best misleading and at worst wrong-headed. We believe that the vast majority of academic evangelical reception of Barth has been so framed. We also believe that the vast majority of Anglophone Barth scholarship, insofar as it engages the evangelical tradition, takes this faulty premise for granted.

What, then, is the alternative? How should one frame the dialogue between Karl Barth and evangelical theology? The reframing we propose requires a twofold revision, in which we reinterpret both partners to the dialogue. We begin with a revised understanding of evangelical identity. Rather than identifying American Evangelicalism with Protestant orthodoxy, we believe that it ought to be identified with the revivalist forms of Protestantism which arose in the post-Reformation era, what W. R. Ward has named "the Protestant evangelical awakening."[3] This refers to the broader transatlantic Protestant coalition that finds its roots in Pietism and Wesleyanism—as well as some strands of "new light" Puritanism—where the theological orientation is centered more on the virtues of love and hope, rather than on faith. This is not to say that these movements were not concerned with faith, or the question of theological knowledge. Nevertheless, they were far more interested in the practice of love, or the shape of the Christian life in relation to the neighbor, and in the question of hope, or what kind of transformation can be expected in this life.

As such, the defining task of the evangelical tradition is the promotion of a form of life. Questions of orthodoxy are thus a function of a set of practical commitments and its accompanying theology of the Christian life. Accordingly, the dialogue with Barth ought to consist primarily in the question of his relationship to characteristic evangelical practices. Questions of orthodoxy come in to play, but never abstracted from the form of life that constitutes their significance. The structure of this volume as a whole reflects this priority.

But the reframing we propose does not rest on a revisionist reading of Evangelicalism alone. A fresh look at Karl Barth is also necessary. We believe that Barth himself is fundamentally misunderstood when seen as a preserver of orthodoxy. The question is not whether he succeeded in this task, answers to which vary among both evangelical theologians and scholars of Barth. The more pressing question is whether this task defined him. Our answer: it did not. Rather, Barth too was driven by an attunement to the primacy of praxis—though he was attuned first and foremost to the primacy

3. See his *Protestant Evangelical Awakening* and *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670–1789*. See also Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 13–25.

of *divine* praxis.[4] Barth's theological revolution cannot be understood—let alone joined—when pictured as a preservation of orthodoxy.

This twofold revision of the conversation requires significantly more substantiation than can be supplied by a single volume, let alone its introductory essay. However, we can at least explain ourselves in some detail. So, in the following two sections, we articulate our revisionist readings of each dialogue partner in turn: first evangelical theology, then Karl Barth. This overture to the volume as a whole unfolds around a single, simple theme: the new birth.

Rethinking Evangelical Theology: The New Birth of the Christian

We begin with some clues to the wider misunderstanding of Evangelicalism that come from evangelicals' critiques and appropriations of Karl Barth. The vast majority of evangelical literature on Karl Barth (positive or negative) focuses on the doctrine of Scripture.[5] This focus is a function of the assumption that the doctrine of Scripture is the defining feature of evangelical identity. Although the reading of Scripture plays a central role in the evangelical tradition, doctrines of Scripture do not provide an illuminating means of identifying Evangelicalism. At this point we need not contest the truth of these doctrines of Scripture. In fact, one could, for example, affirm the doctrine of inerrancy yet reject it as the defining feature of evangelical identity. Such identification betrays a foundationalism that conceals more than it reveals.

4. More to come on this below, but for now, consider this striking passage: "What has that metaphysics of being to do with the God who is the basis and Lord of the Church? If this God is He who in Jesus Christ became man, revealing Himself and reconciling the world with Himself, it follows that the relationship between Him and man consists in the event in which God accepted man out of pure, free compassion, in which He drew him to Himself out of pure kindness, but first and last in the eternal decree of the covenant of grace, in God's eternal predestination. It is not with the theory of the relationship between creaturely and creative being, but with the theory of this divine praxis, with the consideration and conception of this divine act, of its eternal decree and its temporal execution, that theology, and therefore theological ethics, must deal" (*CD* II/2, 531).

5. This claim is so obvious even to a casual reader of the literature that it needs no substantiation. But perhaps this is as good a place as any to list a handful of the most influential evangelical engagements with Barth: Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*; Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*; Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*; and Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*.

In addition to these sources is the famous—and highly symbolic—encounter between Barth and Carl F. H. Henry during Barth's American tour in 1962. Henry, who at the time was editor of *Christianity Today*, had the opportunity to ask Barth any number of theological questions and chose to focus his question on the doctrine of inerrancy. For a discussion of this encounter, see Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 15–17.

It is not that evangelicals are committed to a particular view of Scripture on which is built a set of practical concerns and commitments. Rather, a form of life with its implicit practical concerns and commitments requires a set of conceptual commitments regarding Scripture. One may contest how to best articulate these conceptual commitments and remain firmly within the evangelical tradition. But one who contests, let alone rejects, these practical commitments undergoes a deep alienation from the movement. Case in point: one who can sign off on inerrancy but lacks a personal testimony to conversion or way of describing a living faith experience will have difficulty getting a teaching job at an evangelical Christian college.

This phenomenon is inexplicable in terms of a more foundationalist interpretation of evangelical theology (i.e., that Evangelicalism is constituted primarily by adherence to key doctrines). Such phenomena are better explained when one takes evangelical identity as centered in the experience and event of new birth. This is the common theme that runs through German Pietism, the Anglo-American Awakenings, Holiness Revivalism, Pentecostalism, and contemporary Evangelicalism—the traditions that the present volume seeks to postulate as productive partners for dialogue with Barth. "New birth" is a term that can encompass both the experience of conversion as well as the ongoing experience of grace, the latter of which is expressed through cultivating a diverse array of practices. The centrality of new birth to Evangelicalism is particularly evident in its polemical relations with those outside the tradition. The dividing point comes over the question of regeneration and whether this is something that has actually taken place in one's life—and continues to do so. Nearly all the practical commitments of Evangelicalism center on the event of new birth, and the subsequent cultivation of the new life. One is either moving towards the new birth, or testifying to it in one of its many manifestations.

A focus on the centrality of new birth better explains the dynamics and emergence of Evangelicalism. Early German Pietism, one of the key streams that flow into Evangelicalism, arose in response to a nominal, confessional orthodoxy.[6] In Philipp Jakob Spener's programmatic text, the *Pia Desideria* (1675), he argued that many theologians seemed to think that true theology consisted more in argumentation than in the fruit of new life.[7] The theologians who first felt the wrath of these Pietists were themselves orthodox. Describing them, rather unfortunately, as unregenerate, the same epithet was later used for Enlightenment rationalists, many of whom the orthodox equally polemicized against, though for different reasons. Within the early

6. See Roger E. Olson and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*.

7. See Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 44–57.

stages of evangelical history, particularly the eighteenth century, a triangle was formed between Protestant orthodoxy, Pietism, and Enlightenment. Any two corners of the triangle would align themselves against the third. So orthodoxy and Enlightenment resisted the conversionism of the evangelicals. Pietism and Enlightenment joined forces against the heteronomy and confessional restrictiveness of orthodoxy. And orthodoxy and Pietism were allied in their defense of the supernatural against the Enlightenment. It is this third alliance that in the Anglo-American world has contributed to the confusion about Evangelicalism. The common enemy of "liberalism" led many to conflate revivalist Evangelicalism and Protestant orthodoxy.[8] But the experience of new birth and its accompanying practices remains definitive for evangelicals over against both liberalism and orthodoxy.

When the alternative genealogy of Evangelicalism, one shaped more by the dynamics of "new birth" as understood in Pietism and Wesleyan revivalism, is taken into account, evangelical theology looks and feels different. The question of doctrine does not recede, but it is reframed. Concern with elucidating theological themes that are framed by questions of praxis and experience—such as "new birth," regeneration, sanctification, pneumatology, prayer, social ethics, ecclesiology, hope, and certain forms of eschatology—become more important, while more classical themes like justification, atonement, and Scripture are themselves engaged in new ways. Admittedly, not all of these themes are engaged in the present volume, but what is offered is done so as a first draft of an emerging dialogue.

Rethinking Karl Barth: The New Birth of All Creation

When we approach Karl Barth from this revised understanding of Evangelicalism, we begin to see things that have been overlooked—the reality of new birth displaces the doctrine of Scripture as the framework for dialogue, and a different set of convergences and divergences comes into the foreground. In fact, the standard criticism gets turned upside down. Whereas Barth is criticized for being too subjectivistic in his epistemology by those who consider Evangelicalism to be a species of Protestant orthodoxy, when he is brought into dialogue with a Pietist understanding of Evangelicalism he is often attacked for being too objectivistic in his soteriology.[9]

8. For a discussion of the wider historiographical confusion, see Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 48–61.

9. In chapter 1 below, Donald Dayton presents this point as evidence of the confusion over just what the term *evangelical* actually means.

Notwithstanding the truth—or lack thereof—of these criticisms of Barth, the significance of this antinomy in evangelical reception of Barth betrays the extent to which there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the heart of Barth's theology. For the heart of Barth's mature theology is neither epistemology nor soteriology as such, but the living Christ himself.[10] "Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear and whom we must trust and obey in life and in death."[11] "The risen and living Jesus Christ is the one Word of God."[12] Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the revelation of God, the true witness to the covenant between God and humanity fulfilled in his own life of obedience unto death. Thus the risen Christ himself occupies the center of all theological knowledge, for he is in fact the center of all theological reality. This living Christ displaces all competitors, even well-meaning religious ones, among which is to be included a well-crafted Christology![13] Accordingly, neither a metaphysical doctrine of Scripture nor a personal experience of conversion may occupy the center of theological reflection. Both are relegated to the periphery surrounding the living center of Jesus Christ himself. They are not denied, but rather relocated to their proper place. And so Barth disrupts both an orthodox objectivism and a pietist subjectivism from the perspective of his Christocentric actualism.

It is precisely Barth's Christocentric actualism that both attracts and repels evangelicals. Evangelicals share Barth's sense and taste for living, vibrant faith in a living, active God. It is this livingness that immediately resonates with evangelicals. What evangelical is not immediately drawn in by passages like the following?

> The definition that we must use as a starting-point is that God's being is *life*. Only the Living is God. Only the voice of the Living is God's voice. Only the work of the Living is God's work; only the worship and fellowship of the Living is God's worship and fellowship. So, too, only the knowledge of the Living is knowledge of God. We recall in this connexion the emphatic Old and New Testament description of God as "the living God." This is no metaphor. Nor is it a mere description of God's relation to the

10. Although this can perhaps be said of Barth's theology from its inception, it comes most clearly into view in the later volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*. For the most striking instances of Barth's particular brand of Christocentrism, see his revisions of the doctrines of election (*CD* II/2), humanity (*CD* III/2) and reconciliation (*CD* IV/1–3).

11. Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 3. Barth is here quoting the Barmen Declaration as his *Leitsatz* for §69, but he has changed the pronoun from an abstract "which" to a personal "whom."

12. *CD* IV/1, 347.

13. See *CD* IV/3.1, 173–80.

> world and to ourselves. But while it is that, it also describes God Himself as the One He is.[14]

But it is this same livingness that perpetually disrupts the evangelical desire for assurance, whether in personal experience, ecclesial practice, or apologetic argument. When one or more of these modes of assurance are thematized, a fundamental rift with Barth is felt. Hence evangelicals are not wrong to be uneasy about Barth, though the cause of this unease is usually misdiagnosed.

The key to rethinking Karl Barth as a conversation partner for evangelical theology is to understand his own doctrine of new birth. For in fact the event of new birth is also at the center of Barth's theology! The difference between them is the location of this event. For the evangelical tradition, the new birth takes place here and now in the life of the believer. Of course, this event is grounded in the atoning work of the cross of Christ. But, in contrast to certain forms of Protestant orthodoxy and the concern with election and atonement, the accent lies on the present event of conversion.

For Karl Barth, the new birth takes place in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The event of new birth is irreducible to either a self-enclosed event in the past or an inward event in the life of a Christian. Rather, it is the very living-again of Jesus Christ, which both took place once for all and continues to take place. In him occurred the new birth of all creation, and in him occurs the new birth of many creatures invited to join him in his self-attestation. Here we are recapitulating the movement of thought in *CD* IV/1–3, especially the great transitional sub-sections on Christ's resurrection, i.e., §59.3, §64.4, and §69.4.[15] But there is no substitute for Barth's own words. So consider the following characteristic passage, to which many more could be added:

> The determination given the world and man by this event [of Christ's resurrection] is a total one. The reconciling work of Jesus Christ is not just accomplished, but has gone out into the reconciled world as a shining light. . . . The love with which God loved the world cannot remain external. The world is now the world loved by Him in His only-begotten Son. Man is now the man justified and sanctified in Him, and called by Him. . . . And the death to which he has fallen victim is now the death from which he is delivered, which he can have behind him and under

14. Barth, *CD* II/1, 263.

15. For further explication and substantiation of our interpretation of Barth's doctrine of Christ's resurrection, see Collins Winn, *"Jesus Is Victor!"*, and Drury, *The Resurrected God*.

> him, since Jesus Christ, and he too as elect in Him, is risen from the dead to new life. He is now the son of God, since the eternal Son of God has come to his side as his true Brother, and is revealed and confirmed in his proximity, and as it were hand in hand with him. . . . He is now the heir of eternal life and as such already has a share in his inheritance, because Jesus as the One who lives eternally has not merely associated with him but addressed him in His resurrection as one with him.[16]

So, is Barth's theology too subjectivistic or too objectivistic? Yes! Barth's Christocentric actualism, here crudely summarized, explodes any sort of subject/object scheme used to assess his theology. For Barth focuses relentlessly on the living God in his communion with the living human being, as this comes to be and be known in Jesus Christ. And as we have said, it is this very livingness that both attracts and repels evangelicals. Perhaps this twofold response betrays incoherence in Barth's theology. But it is just as likely that it betrays an antinomy in evangelical theology. Either way, by rethinking both conversation partners along these lines, a new and more fruitful dialogue can take place.

Outline of the Volume

The volume is divided into three sections. In the first section, "Reframing the Conversation," contributors offer thoughtful considerations of Barth's complex relationship with Evangelicalism, especially when the latter is conceived along Pietist lines. Donald Dayton begins the conversation by noting "the essentially contested nature" of the descriptor "Evangelicalism." The conversation with Barth unfolds along different lines depending on which definition one chooses to adopt. His own choice, not surprisingly, is for a definition shaped more by Pietism and the Anglo-American Awakening movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though published in 1985, Dayton's argument remains relevant today.

Of course, swapping out a Protestant Orthodoxy–inflected definition of Evangelicalism for a Pietist one creates new challenges for a dialogue between Barth and Evangelicalism—challenges that some might argue are far more problematic. But as Eberhard Busch shows in his contribution, Barth's relationship to "actually existing" Pietism was far more nuanced and dialectical than often understood. Busch traces Barth's lifelong engagement with Pietism and Pietist themes and describes Barth as a "friendly critic, or critical friend," who sought to do justice to Pietist themes, though often from a

16. *CD* IV/3.1, 301–2.

very different angle. Finally, Busch helps us see the kinds of questions that Barth's theology raises for a Pietistic Evangelicalism. Kimlyn Bender continues along this vein by tracking and teasing out the "family resemblances" that he detects between Barth and Evangelicalism. His sketch highlights a shared Christocentrism, a pneumatological theology of Scripture, and a "believers church" ecclesiology with mission at the center.

The second section, "Reconceiving Christian Experience and Practice," is comprised of reflections that engage concepts which might be described as distinctly evangelical. Terry Cross opens with a consideration of Barth's theology of experience—a descriptor that many Barth readers might consider a misnomer. However, through a careful engagement with Barth's later theology, Cross argues that Barth articulated a persuasive "heart theology" that resonates deeply with Pietist, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal concerns. James Nelson continues this line of inquiry through a consideration of Barth's theology of vocation, or calling. Despite some criticisms that Barth's soteriology leaves no room for the personal appropriation or response of the believer—a notion of considerable importance in evangelical circles—Nelson shows that Barth's conception of vocation is far more nuanced, including both subjective and objective dimensions.

John Drury follows this with a consideration of the evangelical practice of "testimony," bringing it into dialogue with Barth's conception of witness. Delving into the structural similarities between the two, Drury then argues that testimony/witness offers a better theological understanding of the dynamics and authority of Scripture than what is usually offered in evangelical reflections on Scripture.

Stina Busman Jost, implicitly drawing on the deep history of evangelical feminism, raises questions about current "masculinizing" trends among evangelicals. She argues that a faithful church is one that serves as witness rather than as origin of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To this end, she offers a consideration of Barth's theology of Joseph—in distinction from Mary—as a resource for how evangelicals should conceptualize the church. Collins Winn and Heltzel follow this through a consideration of Barth's ecclesiology and theology of prayer as sources for a socially engaged church. Their argument is that Barth's conception of the church as a parabolic witnessing community that calls out to God "Thy kingdom come!" offers a vision of the church that is necessarily engaged in a prophetic social witness.

In the final section, "Renewing Christian Doctrine," contributors engage key doctrinal themes with an eye towards the concerns of the volume as a whole. Joel Lawrence opens this section with a reflection on the central place of prayer in Barth's theological method. As Lawrence notes, this dimension of Barth's theology is widely misunderstood and overlooked and

he recommends Barth's approach to current evangelical discussions about the nature and task of theology. Chris Boesel follows this with a careful consideration of the doctrine of election. Boesel helpfully contextualizes the present volume by arguing that whether Evangelicalism is conceived as Reformed orthodoxy or as Pietism is ultimately of secondary importance—what matters is faithfulness to the "good" news of Jesus Christ. In Boesel's estimation, Evangelicalisms of various stripes often obscure the goodness of the news about Jesus, while Barth's theology of election goes a long-way towards bringing that goodness back into view.

Frank Macchia offers a careful reappraisal of Barth's often maligned theology of Scripture. His account shows how Barth's theology offers a dynamic and pneumatocentric approach to Scripture which does justice to the historical and ineluctably human nature of the text of the bible. Kyle Roberts follows with a consideration of Barth's ecclesiology in relationship to a more recent phenomenon in ecclesiology: the "missional theology movement." Roberts offers a reconsideration of the genealogy of missional theology, one which places Barth more at the center of the story. In so doing, Roberts hopes to commend Barth as a resource for current evangelical reflections on the nature of the church.

Kurt Anders Richardson's contribution offers a full-scale discussion of Barth's controversial "sacramental" theology. As Richardson shows, Barth's late, decisive move towards "believer's baptism" was no left turn. Rather, it was in continuity with some of the deepest impulses of Barth's thought. Peter Althouse concludes the section, bringing Barth's eschatology into dialogue with concerns in Pentecostalism. He bridges the conversation through an appeal to the Blumhardts, two nineteenth century Pietist figures who had an important influence on Barth's theology, revealing some unexpected continuities between the respective eschatologies of Barth and Pentecostals which point to future avenues for research and dialogue.

The reconceptualization offered here of the dialogue between Barth and evangelical theology opens up new possibilities. For Evangelicalism this offers the potential to deepen evangelical theological commitments, but also potential and useful correctives to evangelical theology. Furthermore, it fosters continued reconsideration of evangelical identity, one which embraces the Pietist, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal dynamics of the tradition. For Barth studies, this dialogue puts Barth in a new light, surfacing key elements in Barth's theology which have often been overlooked or misunderstood. Barth becomes a "critical friend" for evangelical theology as it seeks to articulate a theological vision that is both faithful to the gospel of God's reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ, and able to engage and meet the continuing challenges which face the churches. Our hope is that the present volume constructively contributes to this important task.

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