Foreword

From the moment he burst onto the European theological scene with his *Romans* commentary, Karl Barth was a thoroughly eschatological thinker. On the main, his early investments in eschatology were largely concentrated on its role as a discourse by means of which Christian faith registers the transcendent freedom, and so utter graciousness, of the sovereign God of the gospel. Eschatology was and remained closely associated in his developing theology with the themes of the eternal deity of God, the resurrection of Christ, and the incontestable finality of the salvation wrought in Jesus Christ. For this reason, eschatology was much more often the discursive medium of Barth's theology than it was a discrete topic within it.

Yet any Christian theology committed to reflecting systematically upon the entire faith of the Church must come to treat of eschatological matters more narrowly, those "last things" concerning the ultimate fate of creatures within the economy of salvation. It is here that theologian comes face to face with the ancient Christian affirmation of the hope for the resurrection of the body. As Nathan Hitchcock demonstrates in the text you have before you, notwithstanding the truncated body of his *Church Dogmatics,* Karl Barth did venture a good deal of commentary on this particular eschatological theme, stressing throughout the importance of both elements, namely, the wondrous mystery of the *resurrection* of the body, as well as the crucial importance for faith of hope in the resurrection *of the body*.

Set against the backdrop of the wider theological tradition of reflection on the resurrection, Hitchcock expounds Barth's efforts to conceive of the resurrection of the body as a threefold hope that our bodily and temporal existence may be rendered at once eternal, manifest, and incorporated into Christ's own body, itself risen and eternal. As the exposition makes clear, Barth is respectively concerned to contemplate how the final resurrection of the body entails the salutary transformation of creaturely *time*, creaturely *self-knowledge*, and creaturely *identity*. Readers will

benefit from the clarity that this schematic analysis brings to appreciating the scope and nuances of Barth's varied and somewhat diffuse discussion of the subject.

Hitchcock himself is vitally concerned with the question of the integrity of the human creature in all this, insisting as he says in the preface, upon a "significant, earthly, corporeal, and concrete identity" for the human being raised to new life in the resurrection of the dead. The critical evaluation of Barth's theology with which this study concludes sees the author prosecute a case that Barth's account of resurrection of the body ultimately cannot deliver on such concerns. At root, he contends, to conceive of salvation as in some way creaturely participation in the divine nature is to be forced ultimately to forfeit the human as a distinctive, embodied agent in the *eschaton*. For Hitchcock, adequate defence of the full meaning of a *bodily* resurrection will require some notable revisions of the line of argument Barth (and others like him) pursue in their respective treatments. In light of wide-ranging interest in recovering "participation" as a key category in contemporary soteriology, Hitchcock's criticisms and cautions on this score merit close consideration.

Karl Rahner's classicly suggested that eschatological claims are ever extrapolations of present Christian experience which, as such, always concern the present as much as they do the future.[1] If this is so, then readers may well fruitfully reflect on the features of current Christian faith, life and theology which motivate Hitchcock's study generally and, in particular, animate his vigorous deference of the eternal future of human bodily identity and agency. But however that may be, there is much to be gained from taking Hitchcock's study as an able and provocative guide into the thicket of intricately interlocking questions and arguments into which we are led in any serious effort to plumb the depth of the evangelical faith that, "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:52).

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1. See Karl Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations* IV, trans. by K. Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 337 [323–46].