

Preface

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? AS THE CHURCH ENTERS THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, the church in the West faces internal strife over social issues and core principles, and a growing culture that is largely indifferent and skeptical to its purpose and contribution to the wider world. In recent decades, many theological studies have focused in particular on the field of ecclesiology, given the fact that ecclesial identity and love for the church can no longer be assumed within Christian communities, much less within the academic pursuit of theology. Karl Barth wrote a *Church dogmatics*, yet conventional theological wisdom asserts that what Barth had to say about the church's core identity and being was too inadequate, too weak, and too imperceptible to endure the challenges and struggles of late modernity. Others believe Barth's major theological contributions lie elsewhere. My own view is that Barth has a major contribution to make to the field of ecclesiology, especially Eucharist-centered ecclesiologies and practice-based ecclesiologies. In contrast to such ecclesiologies, Barth seeks to identify the church's christocentric identity in the gospel proclamation and its aftermath in mission and action.

This book explores and examines the concept of the threefold Word of God in the theology of Karl Barth, particularly the third form of the Word of God, the gospel proclamation, and argues that this tertiary form of the Word of God is a crucial component of Barth's own theology of the church. This book argues that Karl Barth revised the concept of the threefold Word of God in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, but did not seek to reject the concept nor reject Christ's presence and God's speech in the gospel declaration and in the life of the Christian community. This book argues that the threefold Word of God is a crucial element in Karl Barth's vision of the church and an important theme for the whole of his theological project. Disregarded by the field of Barth studies and rejected by modern ecclesiologists, Barth's description of the gospel declaration and its central role in the life together of the Christian community offers an important

ecclesiological alternative to carry forward for both Reformed theology and modern ecclesiology.

This study seeks to be the first of its kind to engage comprehensively with Karl Barth's concept of the threefold Word of God and to make clear its later revision. As a result, this study offers a review of the contemporary scholarly literature related to Barth's revision of the threefold Word of God, and addresses the theological and ecclesiological implications of this revision. Finally, this book makes a contribution to the fields of Barth studies and contemporary ecclesiology by arguing for the central place of the third form of the Word of God in Karl Barth's conception of the Christian community.

—TCC

SAMPLE