Finding Its Place: Contemporary Art and the Church

Through the Lens of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology

by David McNutt

Introduction: An Unlikely Pair

Paul Basilius Barth (1881-1955) was a Swiss painter who studied at the Académie Julian in Paris and whose work featured landscapes, portraits, interiors, and still lifes. He was an acquaintance of Henri Matisse, a close friend of French painter Maurice Denis, and a well-respected visual artist in his own right, having been elected a member of the Société du Salon d’Automne in 1938.¹

He was also an older cousin of Karl Barth (1886-1968), the Swiss Reformed pastor and theologian. Reflecting on their relationship, the theologian said of the painter, he “belonged to a very different world.”² However, in his estimation, the two developed “a late yet warm personal contact.”³ Indeed, the artist completed two portraits of his cousin, one of which hangs at the University of Basel, and the theologian affirmed that there was an inexpressible yet genuine relationship between their respective work.⁴

These figures, who inhabited two distinct worlds in their vocational lives, point to the possibility for these spheres to co-exist and, even more, to have a genuinely beneficial relationship. With that in mind, this paper will consider how the connection between the worlds of contemporary art and the church can be informed by turning to what is perhaps an unexpected source: Karl Barth’s theology – in particular, his doctrine of the church. After briefly considering Barth’s own engagements with the visual arts, it will outline the main features of his ecclesiology, and it will then conclude by arguing that, despite Barth’s own hesitations and statements to the
contrary, contemporary art plays an important role within the church’s life and that the church can help art in finding its legitimate place.

Karl Barth and the Visual Arts

Employing Barth’s theology in an effort to understand the relationship between visual art and the church may seem like a fool’s errand. After all, he stands with both feet squarely in the Swiss Reformed tradition, which has regularly embodied an iconoclast attitude throughout its history, from the white-washed walls of Zwingli’s Zurich to the restrictions that Calvin placed upon Genevan worship.\(^5\) In the spirit of his predecessors, Barth appealed to the second commandment when opposing the reinstallation of stained-glass windows in the Basel Cathedral in 1952 after the previous ones had been removed during World War II.\(^6\) Barth even specifically lamented the fact that he had no understanding of modern art: “I have not passed a negative judgment on it and do not recall having ever said a bad word about modern art. It is just a sad fact that I have no understanding, no eyes, no ears for it.”\(^7\) In light of such comments, it is hardly surprising that Barth has been described as a “twentieth-century Tertullian,”\(^8\) a reference to the great patristic theologian who is perhaps best known for his opposition to what he perceived to be the intrusion of philosophy into the sphere of theology – represented by his famous rhetorical question, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”\(^9\)

It is certainly the case that Barth sharply restricts the role of the visual arts in Christian faith and practice. In light of his overriding emphasis upon the Word of God as made known in the triune God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, Barth argues that there is no possibility for the arts or aesthetics to guide the Christian faith and to determine its witness: “There can be no question, then, of finally allowing an aestheticism to speak” as if it were “the last word.”\(^10\) In addition, Barth points to what he believes are fatal shortcomings within the nature of art itself.
With regard to visual depictions of Jesus, he argues that art cannot fulfill its task in seeking to portray the reality of Christ, who is both fully divine and fully human. According to Barth, “even the most excellent of plastic arts does not have the means to display Jesus Christ in His truth, i.e., in His unity as true Son of God and Son of Man.”\textsuperscript{11} The results, he contends, will either be a docetic overemphasis upon Christ’s divinity, which he deems to be the case with Italian art, or an Ebionite overemphasis upon his humanity, which he believes to be true of Rembrandt.\textsuperscript{12} Likewise, he denies the veracity of attempts to portray the events of Christ’s life, especially the crucifixion: “No human art should try to represent – in their unity – the suffering God and triumphant man, the beauty of God which is the beauty of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{13} With that in mind, Barth makes an “urgent request to all Christian artists, however well-intentioned, gifted or even possessed of genius” – namely, that they “give up this unholy undertaking – for the sake of God’s beauty.”\textsuperscript{14}

As might be expected, this has direct implications for Barth’s views on the place of the visual arts within the worshiping life of the church. His concerns are evident in a brief but revealing consideration of church architecture. According to Barth, Protestant churches should be designed “to be places for the preaching of the Word of God and for the prayer of the assembled community.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, at the center of the worshiping space should be “a simple wooden table, slightly raised, but distinctly different from an ‘altar,’” which could serve as a pulpit, a communion table, and a baptismal font as needed.\textsuperscript{16} In this context, Barth offers a starkly negative view of the role of visual art in the liturgical life of the church: “Images and symbols have no place at all in a building designed for Protestant worship.”\textsuperscript{17} Elsewhere, he echoes his Reformed theological forerunners by arguing that “it is almost inevitable that such static works should constantly attract the eye and therefore the conscious or unconscious attention of the listening community.”\textsuperscript{18} It would seem that, for Barth, there is no place for the
visual arts in the sphere of the church.

However, like Tertullian, whose theological work actually engages with Stoic philosophy, Barth offered a more nuanced and complex evaluation of the visual arts than is represented by the above comments. While Barth’s deep appreciation for certain examples of the arts—indeed, Mozart’s music—is well known, his engagements with the visual arts are not as widely recognized. For example, within his personal life, in addition to his cousin Paul Basilius Barth, Barth’s youngest son, Hans Jacob Barth, was a painter. Moreover, Barth offered positive assessments of particular works of visual art. He visited and was impressed by Rembrandt’s *Syndics of the Drapers’ Guild* and *Night Watch* in Amsterdam, Botticelli’s paintings in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the collection at the Louvre in Paris, and Michelangelo’s *Pieta* in the Vatican. On occasion, he even found reason to refer positively to specific works in his theological writing. For example, according to Barth, Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* correctly reflects the truth that “the being of this Adam is an actual and historical being, grounded in and related to the action of God in His Word.” Likewise, in his view, Albrecht Dürer’s *Knight, Death, and the Devil* properly represents what it means for Christians to live under affliction.

It is the painting of Matthias Grünewald, however, that resulted in Barth’s most positive engagement with the visual arts. From 1919 onward, Barth worked with a copy of the *Crucifixion* from Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* hanging above his desk. In a letter from the year of his death, he acknowledged that it had served as “a visual aid” to him for nearly five decades. How so? Importantly, Barth was not primarily interested in Grünewald’s depiction of the crucified Christ, but rather in the figure of John the Baptist, who points with his “prodigious index finger” to Jesus. The theological significance that Barth identified here is found in John’s act of witnessing. By pointing to Christ, John embodies the testifying activity that, in Barth’s estimation,
stands at the heart of Scripture, the proclamation of the church, the Christian life, and the discipline of theology: “Could anyone point away from himself more impressively and completely…? And could anyone point more impressively and realistically than here to what is indicated? This is what the Fourth Evangelist wanted to say about this John, and therefore about another John, and therefore quite unmistakably about every ‘John.’”31 The role of the Christian, Barth contends, is to be an indirect witness, pointing away from oneself and instead toward “the majesty of the crucified… just as Grünewald saw and depicted Him.”32

Thus, despite Barth’s hesitations and concerns, it seems that the visual arts did indeed have a legitimate – if limited – place within his life and work. But can his theology contribute to building a more constructive relationship between contemporary art and the church?

A Theologian of the Church

Barth was undoubtedly a theologian of and for the church. Not only was he a pastor before he was an academic theologian, but he continued to serve the church throughout his life. In addition, Barth’s mature dogmatics is specifically a church dogmatics, that is, one that was written within and for the church because, as he states, “theology is a function of the Church.”33 However, Barth could also be harshly critical of the church. Yet, whether he was encouraging the church or challenging it, Barth’s primary concern throughout his ecclesiology was to affirm that the church’s existence is grounded in Jesus Christ and that its Spirit-led task is the proclamation of the Word of God.

Barth’s Early Ecclesiology: The Question of the True Church

The question of ecclesiology came to the forefront of Barth’s thought in 1914, when he was serving as a pastor in Safenwil, Switzerland. A manifesto supporting the Kaiser’s military
aggression was endorsed by ninety-three German intellectuals, including many of his previous professors. In response, Barth broke with the liberal Protestant tradition in which he had received his theological education. Instead, he turned to Scripture and penned the seminal Der Römerbrief, which included a harsh criticism of the church: “Circumcision, Religion, the Church, do not possess positive content: they are tokens and signs which must be understood negatively, and they are established only in so far as their independent significance diminishes and finally dies.”

Some twenty years later, during Hitler’s rise to power, the question of the true church was raised again for Barth when he was teaching in Bonn, Germany. Within this context, Barth was active in the Confessing Church movement, which opposed the German Christian movement that had aligned itself with Nazi ideology. Particularly significant for the Confessing Church movement was “The Barmen Declaration” of 1934, written primarily by Barth, which affirmed the centrality of Christ in the identity of the church: “Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, which we are to hear, which we are to trust and obey in life and in death.” As these brief examples demonstrate, Barth was consistently supportive of the church, but he could be highly critical of it if he believed that it was unfaithful to its witness to Jesus Christ.

Barth’s Later Ecclesiology: Putting the Church in Church Dogmatics

Barth’s mature doctrine of the church, expressed in his Church Dogmatics, reveals the fruits of his efforts to consider the nature of the church in his earlier years. Overall, he affirms that the church is founded upon Jesus Christ, guided by the testimony of Scripture, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill its task to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ.
1. The Church and Jesus Christ

First and foremost, Barth contends that the church’s existence is grounded in Jesus Christ. As is well known, Barth modifies Calvin’s doctrine of election by declaring that Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected man. Less known is the fact that he argues that God’s eternal election also includes the election of a community: “The election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God.” In his theology, then, there is a clear yet asymmetrical relationship between ecclesiology and Christology: “All ecclesiology is grounded, critically limited, but also positively determined by Christology.” Barth can thus declare that the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is “the earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ Himself.” According to Barth, the church exists as the body of Christ in the world, but only because it is ontologically grounded in Jesus Christ.

2. The Church and Scripture

Secondly, Barth’s ecclesiology affirms that the church lives under the authority of Scripture, which makes known God’s gracious action in the person and work of Jesus Christ. According to Barth, Scripture stands over the church, proclaiming its witness to Christ and providing the church with authority: “Having authority and freedom in the Church, it lends that authority and freedom to the Church.” On that basis, the church is called to proclaim the Word of God: “Talk about God in the Church seeks to be proclamation to the extent that in the form of preaching and sacrament it is directed to man with the claim and expectation that in accordance with its commission it has to speak to him the Word of God to be heard in faith.” For its part, theology serves to keep the church faithful to the Word of God that it seeks to proclaim: “As a theological discipline dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with
respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God.”\textsuperscript{44} In this way, Scripture provides the church with both knowledge of God’s self-revelation in Christ and the authority to proclaim that good news.

3. The Church and the Holy Spirit

Finally, Barth argues that the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill its task. Regarding this pneumatological dimension of his ecclesiology, he identifies three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church: gathering, building up, and sending the Christian community.

In the first instance, Barth affirms that the Holy Spirit gathers the church together. In this respect, the Spirit awakens humanity to knowledge and faith in God’s reconciling Word, such that the church exists “only as it is gathered and lets itself be gathered and gathers itself by the living Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{45} Secondly, the Holy Spirit builds up the church through its quickening, life-giving power. More specifically, this takes place as the Spirit grows, upholds, and orders the community. New members are added to the church “in the power and operation of the Holy Spirit,”\textsuperscript{46} but numerical growth should never become “an end in itself.”\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, although it is full of inherent weaknesses and despite the fact that it is constantly threatened by both internal and external dangers, the community is maintained: “It is the Holy Spirit who upholds the community as it is He who causes it to grow and live.”\textsuperscript{48}

The Spirit also orders the church according to a law rooted in its relationship with Christ, which includes service to one another and communal worship, for “it is only as the community has its distinct centre in its worship that it can and will stand out clearly from the world.”\textsuperscript{49} Lastly, Barth argues that the Holy Spirit sends the community into the world by its enlightening power. Having been called out of the world, the church is then “genuinely called into it.”\textsuperscript{50} The task with which it is sent is,
simply stated, to confess Jesus Christ: “[I]ts whole being and action in every aspect and form has the startling content of witness in the simple or varied proclamation: ‘Jesus Christ is risen, He is risen indeed.’”

In summary, Barth’s ecclesiology affirms that the church exists as the church insofar as it is grounded in Jesus Christ, guided by the testimony of Scripture, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Contemporary Art and the Church

Turning to a consideration of how Barth’s ecclesiology might inform the relationship between contemporary visual art and the church, it is important to be clear about what Barth’s doctrine of the church will not allow. For example, one cannot argue on the basis of his ecclesiology that the visual arts constitute the ontological basis of the church. For Barth, Christ alone is the foundation and ground of the church’s life; it exists because he lives, not because of art. In addition, one cannot contend that art provides the church with its knowledge of the good news of Jesus Christ or the authority to declare that message. For Barth, it is Scripture, the written Word of God that testifies to the triune God’s self-revelation, which provides such knowledge and authority, not art. Finally, one cannot argue that art itself empowers the church to fulfill its God-given task. Rather, for Barth, it is the divine power and presence of the Holy Spirit that enables the church to confess Christ. In short, Barth’s ecclesiology will not support the view that the visual arts are essential to the church’s identity and activity.

However, this does not mean that art has no place in the church or in a doctrine of the church informed by Barth’s ecclesiology. Although its place in the belief and practice of the church may be rightly limited, it is nonetheless legitimate. Indeed, appealing to Barth’s ecclesiology, the visual arts may be affirmed as an important aspect of the church’s life. In
particular, following the threefold pneumatological dimension of Barth’s doctrine of the church, I contend that the visual arts are part of the Holy Spirit’s work in gathering the church together, building up the church, and sending the church.

1. Art as Hospitality

In the first instance, art is part of the Holy Spirit’s awakening activity that gathers people together as the church. Whereas some people may be brought to the church through a clear articulation of the gospel message, and others may come to the church through a personal friendship, some may be gathered into the church through art. In this respect, art serves as a form of hospitality, inviting people to enter into the community of faith through what may be for them a more inviting and accessible means. Indeed, for some – perhaps many – people, viewing an exhibition of visual art may be more appealing than reading Scripture or reciting the ancient creeds of the church.

For example, reflecting upon Andrei Rublev’s icon *Holy Trinity*, which depicts Abraham’s hospitality to the three heavenly visitors, may be more hospitable and meaningful to some than reading about that event in Genesis 18. Within contemporary art, the vibrant paintings of He Qi, a Chinese Christian artist who depicts biblical narratives through indigenous Chinese art forms, offers similarly inviting images, including a depiction of that same event in his *Abraham and Angels*. This kind of artistic hospitality may take place within the church – for example, people may come to the church to view an in-house art gallery, as the proliferation of such church galleries attests. At the same time, the Spirit, who is not bound by ecclesial walls, may work through contemporary art to draw people into the church – regardless of where that art may be found and whether or not it explicitly engages with biblical narratives or themes.

Importantly, however, those who become part of the community of faith should not fail to
engage with the church’s recognized, authoritative sources for understanding who God is and what God has done on behalf of humanity. Thus, if through the work of the Holy Spirit, Rublev’s icon or He Qi’s paintings are instrumental in bringing someone into the church, then eventually that person should also become familiar with the narrative of Genesis 18. The story of the triune God’s hospitality, ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ, sets the standard for all forms of hospitality. Referring to Rublev’s icon, Scott Huelin suggests, “we see the three visitors to Abraham, but we also see more: the Holy Trinity, in whose perichoretic hospitality all things live and move and have their being. Consequently, we have cause to see ourselves differently, as the grateful and obliged guests of a superabundant hospitality.”

Thus, in its welcoming and gathering role, art does not become an end in itself; rather, like the pointing finger of Grünewald’s John, it points to divine hospitality.

2. Art as Worship

Not only is art part of the Holy Spirit’s work in gathering the church, but it is also a vital component of the Spirit’s quickening, life-giving activity in building up the church. There are, of course, many ways in which art can help build up the church – from children’s crafts to youth group film nights to adult education classes. However, just as worship stands at the heart of the church’s identity and activity, it is within the context of the church’s doxological life that art can have its most dramatic effect.

At its best, John Witvliet points out, liturgical art serves the church by expressing “the corporate nature of a Christian way of life and worship” and by deepening “the covenantal relationship between God and the gathered congregation.” In this regard, it is worth remembering that long before it was separated for viewing in the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, France, Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece was a functioning altarpiece in a nearby Anthonite
monastery. Likewise, although Lucas Cranach the Elder’s *Wittenberg Altarpiece* is perhaps now best known for its representation of several principles of Lutheran – and, more broadly, Protestant – theology, it stands within a church that continues to hold worship services. In our contemporary context, the installation of *Die Harder*, a work by Scottish sculptor and non-Christian artist David Mach that featured a crucified Christ made of coat hangers, in Southwark Cathedral during the season of Lent in 2012 demonstrates the possibility for contemporary art to find a legitimate place in the worshiping life of the church.

Of course, concerns about the place of the visual arts in the doxological life of the church persist – and for good reason. Both Scripture and our own experience remind us that humanity has an idolatrous streak, and we are prone to supplement our rightful worship of God with the unwarranted worship of other things, even good things. However, this sinful tendency on the part of humanity does not negate the fact that art can be part of the Spirit’s life-giving work within the church. Striking the right note, so to speak, in this task is no easy matter. As Frank Burch Brown rightly states, the church needs “to become more discerning and – in the best sense – discriminating in selecting and cultivating the arts for worship.” However, with the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who builds up the church, the arts can find a legitimate place in the church’s worship of the triune God.

3. Art as Mission

Finally, art is part of the Holy Spirit’s enlightening work in sending the church out into the world to confess Christ. In this way, art plays a role in the mission of the church as it seeks to bear witness to Christ.

One important dimension of the church’s outreach is its efforts to engage the artistic community itself. For example, discussing his experience in Tucson CAFe (Christian Artists’
Fellowship), an arts ministry in Arizona, Frederic Baue argues that there is “a dire need for the church to reach out to Christians who are already working in the arts and give them encouragement and support.” That support includes affirming the role of the arts in the sent church’s witnessing to Christ.

Like other forms of Christian witness, this missional work may take place, on the one hand, through explicit reference to Christ and the events of his life. Despite continuing wariness on the part of some, such as Barth, Christ has been and remains an essential subject for art. Indeed, for some artists and Christian communities, depictions of Christ serve to affirm that the good news of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection applies to them as much as it does to any other group by subverting dominant artistic representations. One thinks, for example, of the work of twentieth-century African American artist William H. Johnson, who painted Jesus as a black man. As James Evans explains, such works affirm Christ’s significance while rejecting prevailing images of him: “Christ in black theology is not the blond-haired, blue-eyed, white-skinned man who appears in European-American culture and art. Christ was poor, oppressed, despised, and persecuted. Christ died the death of a slave and rose again to witness the power of God over the forces of oppression. This is the Christ of black theology.”

On the other hand, such a proposal regarding art’s contribution to the Spirit-led missional activity of the church may seem counterintuitive, especially when much art – in particular, much contemporary art – intentionally does not have an explicitly pedagogical or didactic purpose. How, one might ask, can art testify to the grace and mercy of God revealed in the crucified and risen Christ without explicitly depicting him? However, the enduring significance of art includes its ability to communicate in multiple ways. For example, landscapes by seventeenth-century Dutch painters and later English Romantic artists, such as J.M.W. Turner and John Constable, point not only to God’s power and common grace revealed in creation, but also to humanity’s
fallenness and need for salvation. For many artists, the book of nature can be just as – or even more – illuminating as the book of Scripture: “Constable’s understanding of man in relation to the Creator God was deeply intertwined with his perception of nature.”

In contemporary Christian art, Joel Sheesley’s recent landscapes of the Lincoln Marsh have become his own version of the Low Countries or Dedham Vale, testifying to the grace of the creating and redeeming God. For those with eyes to see, like the church that is Spirit-sent into the world, contemporary art bears witness to Christ.

Conclusion

Although cousins Paul Basilius Barth and Karl Barth may have occupied two different spheres in their professional lives, their relationship embodies and reflects a mutually beneficial connection between the two worlds of art and the church. Indeed, despite his concerns about the role of visual art in the Christian life, Barth’s own ecclesiology provides a way of conceiving how art can find a legitimate place in the church through the work of the Holy Spirit, who gathers the church together, builds it up, and sends it out to proclaim the good news of the crucified and risen one.


2 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics in 13 volumes, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2004) [hereafter, CD], IV/3.1, xii.

3 Ibid.


8 Roger E. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 85.


10 Barth, CD, II/1, 652.

11 Ibid., IV/3.2, 868.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., II/1, 666. Barth makes similar arguments regarding the resurrection – “What was there actually to describe? God awakened Him and so He ‘rose again.’ If only Christian art had refrained from the attempt to depict it!” (CD, IV/2, 152) – and the ascension: “There is no sense in trying to visualise the ascension as a literal event, like going up in a balloon. The achievements of Christian art in this field are amongst its worst perpetrations.” (CD, III/2, 453)

14 Ibid., II/1, 666. Cf. Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 41: “God has done everything in order to present Himself. How should man make an image of Him after He has presented His likeness Himself? A well-intentioned business, this entire ‘spectacle’ of Christian art, well-intentioned but impotent, since God Himself has made His own image.”


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 93.

18 Barth, CD, IV/3.2, 867.


20 For example, Barth wrote, “I even have to confess that if I ever get to heaven, I would first of all seek out Mozart and only then inquire after Augustine, St. Thomas, Luther, Calvin, and Schleiermacher”: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 16. For Barth, Mozart’s theological significance included the fact that he “simply offered himself as the agent by which little bits of horn, metal and catgut could serve as the voices of creation, sometimes leading, sometimes accompanying and sometimes in harmony” (CD, III/3, 298). In addition, Mozart’s music spoke to Barth “not as gospel but as parables of the realm of God’s free grace as revealed in the gospel”: How I Changed My Mind (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1969), 71-72.

21 However, at the insistence of his father, Hans Jacob pursued a career in painting only after he received practical training as a Gartenbauer, a landscape architect: Busch, 312.


24 Busch, 361.


26 Barth, CD, II/2, 150.

27 Ibid., IV/3.2, 615.


29 Barth, Letters, 315.

30 Barth, CD, I/1, 112.

31 Ibid.


33 Barth, CD, I/1, 3. In fact, Barth had abandoned an earlier version of his dogmatics – entitled Christian Dogmatics – in favour of writing his Church Dogmatics: Busch, 211.

34 Busch, 81.

35 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (Oxford: OUP, 1968), 130.

36 Busch, 255.


38 Barth, CD, II/2, 103.

39 Ibid., 195.

40 Ibid., IV/3.2, 786.

41 Ibid., IV/1, 661.

42 Ibid., I/1, 539.

43 Ibid., 47.

44 Ibid., 3.

45 Ibid., IV/1, 650.

46 Ibid., IV/2, 641.

47 Ibid., 647.

48 Ibid., 674.

49 Ibid., 697.

50 Ibid., IV/3.2, 764.

51 Ibid., 846. Barth identifies twelve specific forms of the church’s ministry: six according to its speech – praise, preaching, instruction in the faith, evangelism, mission, and theology – and six according to its action – prayer, the cure of souls or pastoral care, producing exemplary individual Christians, service to the needy, prophecy, and establishing fellowship, which includes baptism and the Lord’s Supper (ibid., 865-901).


 Needless to say, no contemporary discussion about the mystery and the sacrament of the Church can take place without making some reference to the problem of the language of theology. It is obvious at this stage that the whole of ecclesial experience can no longer be expressed using ontological concepts, while discussing God and the Church in existential terms is also not something that everybody in the Christian world will find acceptable. Questions of ecclesiology abound, and Karl Barth has been regarded as an unhelpful conversation partner and guide for those who care about ecclesiology and the place of the church in the academic pursuit of theology. The Only Sacrament Left to Us recovers Barth's doctrine of the threefold Word of God and shows that it is at the heart of Barth's ecclesiological commitments, and that Barth offers a distinct and robust doctrine of the church worthy to be carried forward into the {\textasciitilde} Redescribing God (Hardcover). An exploration of the relationship between Christology and theological anthropology through the lens of Karl Barth's theology and the contemporary philosophy of mind debate. This essay argues that Barth's christological ecclesiology is worthy of consideration as a resource to fund a more robust and distinctly theological evangelical free church ecclesiology. Specifically, Barth's articulation of the church as witness, combined with his emphases on the gathering, upbuilding and sending of the church, all resonate with a distinctly free church vantage point. Additionally, I argue that Barth's theological interpretation of Matthew 18:20 (a verse of great significance for the free church tradition) further reveals his compatibility with free church eccl...