

# Some Questions About the Chalcedonian Christology of Karl Barth

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Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* witnesses to his central preoccupation with Christology. Barth makes his position plain:

An ecclesiastical dogmatic must indeed, as a whole and in all its parts, be Christologically determined, as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed word is identical with Jesus Christ. If dogmatics does not in principle understand itself as Christology, and succeed in making itself intelligible as such, it has certainly succumbed to some alien domination . . .<sup>1</sup>

This article examines Barth's discussion of the hypostatic union in relation to some of his critics, and the implications of that doctrine for the traditional understanding of Jesus. It questions whether Barth, while attempting to be attentive to Scripture, has himself avoided a possible "alien domination" in his account of how God was in Christ. A number of distinguished commentators have indeed wondered whether Barth's views are strictly scriptural and how far they may share unresolved perplexities created by traditions which date from Chalcedon in 451.

Barth describes the hypostatic union as:

the union made by God in the hypostasis (mode of existence) of the Son . . . [God] does this by causing His own divine existence to be

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<sup>1</sup> *Kirchliche Dogmatic, Erster Band, Zweiter Halbband*, 135, as translated by D.M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, 67.

the existence of the man Jesus. This hypostatic union is the basis and power of the nativity of Jesus Christ, of the secret of Christmas, which as such is accompanied by the sign of the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ, yet which is not grounded in this miracle, but in the fact that it is event. This *unio immediata* — which includes of course a *communio naturarum*, but does not remove or alter either the divine essence of the logos or the human essence existing by Him and in Him — is properly and primarily and centrally the divine-human actuality as which Jesus Christ expounds Himself and wishes to be expounded.<sup>2</sup>

Barth rejects a whole series of analogies which might help to explicate this union. It is not consubstantial (though Chalcedon speaks of the Son as “of one substance with us as regards his manhood”). It is not of the same order as that by which God maintains all things in existence; not like a man in a suit of clothes; not analogous to any relationship between two human beings; not like soul and body. How God was in Christ, according to Barth’s scheme, must therefore presumably remain largely a mystery. What is clear for Barth, however, is that the ancient doctrine of anhypostasia — the notion, as Donald Baillie describes it, that “Christ is not a human person, but a Divine Person who assumed human nature without assuming human personality”<sup>3</sup> — must be upheld.

The necessity for Barth’s insistence on predicating anhypostasia of the Son stems from the impossible notion of a double personality in Christ, once a personal center is accorded to the man Jesus. If Jesus has a human personality, and if he is also the eternal Son of God, there would be a double person in the Son. The logic of the problem is spelled out by Newman in *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius*. It deserves a hearing as background to the questions raised by Barth’s critics with regard to his unwillingness to surrender the ancient doctrine of anhypostasia, unlike many of his contemporaries who find the doctrine detrimental to the humanity of Jesus as well as alien to the New Testament:

That personality which our Lord had had from eternity in the Holy Trinity, he still had after his incarnation. His human nature subsisted in his divine, not existing as we exist, but so to say, grafted on him, or as a garment in which he was clad. We cannot conceive of an incarnation except in this way; for if his manhood had not been thus after the manner of an attribute, if it had been a person, an individual, such as one of us, if it had been in existence before

<sup>2</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, T & T Clark, 1936, 4/2, 51.

<sup>3</sup> D.M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, 85.

he united it to himself, he would have been simply two beings under one name, or else his divinity would have been nothing else than a special grace or presence or participation of divine glory, such as is the prerogative of saints.<sup>4</sup>

The Docetism, however, to which the doctrine of anhypostasia can lead is well illustrated by Aquinas' defense of a remark he attributes to Pope Innocent III that in the incarnation "the person of God has consumed the person of Man."<sup>5</sup>

Barth evidently wants to avoid any view of incarnation which posits the analogy of the indwelling of the spirit in an individual. It is in this connection<sup>6</sup> that he mentions Donald Baillie's *God Was in Christ*. Baillie is highly critical of the notion of anhypostasia, considering it to be incompatible with true humanity. His uneasiness with Barth is reflected in his remark that "the cruder forms of Docetism were fairly soon left behind, but in its more subtle forms the danger continued in varying degrees to dog the steps of theology right through the ages until modern times."<sup>7</sup>

Baillie recognizes that Barth would not want to speak of Jesus being "man" but not "a man," as the doctrine of anhypostasia traditionally seemed to require. Barth nevertheless holds firmly to the "impersonality" of Jesus' human nature as worked out at Ephesus and Chalcedon:

God and man are so related in Jesus Christ that He exists as man so far and only so far as He exists as God, i.e. in the mode of the existence of the eternal Word of God. What we thereby express is a doctrine unanimously sponsored by early theology in its entirety, that of the anhypostasis and enhypostasis of the human nature of Christ . . . What the eternal Word made His own, giving it thereby its own existence, was not a man but man's nature, man's being, and so not a second existence but a second possibility of existence, to wit, that of a man. We have to take seriously sayings like Luke 1:32, cf. 35, "He shall be called the Son of the Highest."<sup>8</sup>

We wonder, however, whether Barth has in fact fully noted the implications of Luke 1:35.

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<sup>4</sup>J.H. Newman, *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*, Longmans, 1881, Vol. 2, 293.

<sup>5</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 3, 4.2.

<sup>6</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, 4/2, 55ff.

<sup>7</sup>Baillie, 11.

<sup>8</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 163.

Barth is, of course, fully aware of the charge that has been brought from many quarters that this traditional Christology is in a subtle way Docetic, destroying the real human personality of Jesus. Barth meets the accusation by saying that what Christ's human nature lacks, according to the early doctrine, is not what we now call personality. The latter would be *individualitas*. Barth claims that no one denied personality to Jesus' human nature. Early theology claimed only that Christ's human nature possessed no *independent* existence.<sup>9</sup>

Barth wishes at all costs to avoid what he considers to be the mistaken Christology of the older Protestant dogmatics which:

was already asking whether the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ does not have its most appropriate formal counterpart in what was then called the *unio mystica*, i.e the presence of grace in which God can give Himself to each individual, or assume the individual into unity of life with Himself in the Christian experience and relationship. But it was not suspected at that time how fatally productive would be the theological possibility touched at this point.<sup>10</sup>

Barth mentions Donald Baillie's *God Was in Christ* as an example of this tendency to weaken Chalcedonian Christology. However, as A.T. Hanson says, "Most unfortunately, instead of answering Baillie's arguments directly, Barth associates him with a continental theologian of the last century (E.E. Biedermann, 1885) and contents himself with answering Biedermann."<sup>11</sup> Hanson points out that Barth does not succeed in replying satisfactorily to Baillie. Just how Jesus was God and Man remains unclarified. Has Barth found a way round the perennial difficulty or merely restated the Chalcedonian dogma with its positive and negative statements? Do these amount more to a definition of the theological water within which one must navigate rather than a clear explanation of what is meant by the hypostatic union?

Another critic of Barthian views of the two natures is the British theologian John A.T. Robinson. In characteristic style he points to the problem posed at Chalcedon:

If you start the Christological sum with one individual substance (divine), it means you cannot introduce another (human) without finding yourself with the impossible exercise on your hands of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/2, 164.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 55.

<sup>11</sup> A.T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God*, SCM Press, 1982, 43.

trying to put two billiard balls on the same spot. Either the divine displaces the human (as in the doctrine of *anhypostasia* . . .) or the human exists, in Cyril's phrase, "as another individually beside him."<sup>12</sup>

Robinson notes that the term "hypostasis" as used of members of the Trinity was not intended to mean "a distinct centre of conscious selfhood," but rather a "mode of being" of the personal Godhead. However, it was highly problematic that the same word "hypostasis" was also used to indicate the selfhood of one who, as man, *was* a person in the modern sense of that word.<sup>13</sup> The heart of the problem which Robinson thinks Barth does not solve lies in the question of the genuineness of the humanity of Jesus once *anhypostasia* is predicated of him.

Robinson's discussion revolves around two negative implications of this doctrine. It has been used to deny that Jesus was an *individual* man and that he was a man *independent* of God's self-incarnation in him. The former, Barth holds, rests on a misunderstanding. Personality does not mean individuality. But does not the denial of independent existence amount to a denial of individuality? This is Robinson's question to Barth. Robinson alerts us to the possibility of crypto-Docetism in the Chalcedonian Christology which Barth follows. Must not the subject of manhood be truly and completely human in order to justify the predicate "a man"?

Robinson further points out that there has been "a persistent tendency in the history of Christian doctrine — stretching . . . from the Fathers to Karl Barth — to assume that Jesus could not be *both* a genuine product of the [human] process *and* the Word of God to it."<sup>14</sup> Barth, while not denying the individuality of Jesus, insists that the doctrine of *anhypostasia* is essential as a guard against Jesus being one man among many whom God could have taken. He wrestles with this issue in *Church Dogmatics*:

For this would necessarily mean either that the Son of God, surrendering His own existence as such, had changed Himself into this man, and was no longer the Son of God . . . or that He did not exist as One, but in a duality, as the Son of God maintaining His own existence, and somehow and somewhere alongside this individual

<sup>12</sup> John A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973, 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

man. And if, as is not possible, we could and should accept one of these absurd alternatives, what would happen to all other men, side by side with the one man who is the Son of God in one or other of these curious senses? How far could God, in and with the adoption of this one man to unity with himself, adopt them all? How far could the one Son of God not be merely *a son of man but the Son of Man*, the man who could represent them all, who could plead with God for them all and with them all for God.<sup>15</sup>

Robinson replies by stating that it is necessary to sift the truth from the error in this.<sup>16</sup> He agrees that Jesus cannot be independent of God, if by this it is meant that he existed *independently of the divine purpose*. But Barth has not sufficiently considered that there is an alternative other than the “absurd alternative” of the conversion of the Godhead into flesh or uneasy coexistence. Robinson suggests at this point that “for once Barth is not treating the question with sufficient theological seriousness. The epistle to the Hebrews at any rate found it not impossible to see him as *both ‘Son’ and in every sense of the word a ‘man’* and it is up to theologians to wrestle with the problem without discarding one of the factors in advance.”<sup>17</sup>

Before commenting on this exchange, we will take up briefly another strand of the Barthian Christology which has come under criticism. This has to do with Barth’s remarkable doctrine that in some sense the *humanity* of Jesus Christ was preexistent. We first get a hint of this in *Church Dogmatics* 3/2: “The man Jesus already was even before He was.”<sup>18</sup> This concept is repeated: “The man Jesus was already at the beginning of time as the One who was to come in the plan of God.”<sup>19</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman accuses Barth of “logical nonsense and the theological error of Docetism.”<sup>20</sup> However, I wonder whether Barth has not put his finger on a crucial Christological point. It is a fact that the “preexistence” texts in John are predicated of “the Son of *Man*” (i.e. John 3:13, etc.), not “the Son of God.” Barth takes an original line indeed when he proposes that the Johannine prologue should be read, except for John

<sup>15</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 4/2, 48.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, 201.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 3/2, 464.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3/2, 483, 484.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*, 205.

1:1, in terms of the man Jesus: “the whole Prologue . . . speaks also of the man Jesus.”<sup>21</sup>

Barth points out that the author of the letter to the Hebrews likewise refers to the man Jesus where it is said that “God made the aeons by Him” (1:2):

This and the many statements which follow concerning His superiority to the angels would be quite inexplicable if the reference were only abstractly to the eternal Son of God and He were supposed to stand in need of this exaltation and the inheritance of the more excellent name. Indeed how could the eternal Son be put in the same series with the Fathers by whom God spoke at sundry times and in diverse manners?

Barth then pursues his argument in 1 Peter: “The One who in I Pet. 1:20 ‘verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times’ is obviously the One of whom it is said to the readers that they are redeemed by his blood ‘as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.’” He refers in the same way to Revelation 13:8 and concludes: “in all these predestinarian passages the emphasizing of the blood, of the putting to death of Jesus Christ is obviously inexplicable if they are referred to a *logos asarkos*, and not to the eternal Son of God and therefore also to the Son of Man existing in time.”<sup>22</sup>

Reverting to the exchange between Robinson and Barth (above), we note that Robinson complains that Barth excludes without argument the possibility that Jesus may be seen *both* as the unique Son arising from among human beings *and also* God’s final Word. Robinson’s point, which is not, of course, original to him, is that the problem of the two natures was “largely created by the terms of the debate. If you do not think of the Logos as ‘a being’ but as something more like the ‘self-expressive activity of God,’ then you can recognize Jesus as ‘a man’ in the fullest possible sense, who can *also* be his Word to the world.”<sup>23</sup> The same point was made by James Dunn, and would have been of critical importance to Barth’s whole Christological exposition:

The conclusion which seems to emerge from our analysis of John 1:1-14 thus far is that it is only with verse 14 [“the word became flesh”] that we can begin to speak of the personal Logos. The poem

<sup>21</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 4/2, 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, 104.

uses rather impersonal language (“became flesh”), but no Christian would fail to recognize here a reference to Jesus — the word became not flesh in general but Jesus Christ. Prior to verse 14 we are in the same realm as pre-Christian talk of Wisdom and Logos, the same language and ideas that we find in Philo, where as we have seen, we are dealing with personifications rather than persons, personified actions of God rather than an individual divine being as such. The point is obscured by the fact that we have to translate the masculine Logos as “he” throughout the poem. But if we translated Logos as “God’s utterance” instead, it would become clearer that the poem did not necessarily intend the Logos of vv. 1-13 to be thought of as a personal divine being. In other words, the revolutionary significance of v. 14 may well be that it marks not only the transition in the thought of the poem from preexistence to incarnation, but also the transition from impersonal personification to actual person.<sup>24</sup>

If we now integrate the various strands of the argument, it will be possible to see our way towards a solution to the “Problem of Christology.”<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of an Anabaptist Christology fully developed in the minor church in Poland in the 17th century, and earlier developed in Dutch Mennonite circles by Adam Pastor,<sup>26</sup> we may propose that Barth’s struggle results, in part, from his desire to be loyal to the patristic tradition enshrined at Chalcedon. The issue we are considering has, of course, to do with the definition of the “divinity” of Christ. Barth is fully aware that “the dogma as such is not to be found in the biblical texts. The dogma is an interpretation.”<sup>27</sup> The question is whether it is as good an interpretation as Barth contends or whether its premises may have led us away from original biblical Christology.

If we survey the section of the *Church Dogmatics* in which Barth deals with the Eternal Son,<sup>28</sup> it is noticeable that there is an unusually small proportion of “fine print” devoted to the exposition of the biblical text. Indeed, a rare citation of Scripture in these pages shows Barth applying 1 Timothy 6:15, which nearly all commentators refer to the Father, to Jesus. Surely it is the Father, who for Paul “only has immortality.” Barth

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<sup>24</sup> James Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980, 243.

<sup>25</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 122ff.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Henry Newman, *Adam Pastor*, American Society of Church History, 2nd series, Vol. 5, 75-99.

<sup>27</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1, 475.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/1, 474-512.



elsewhere maintains that the term *kurios* used of Jesus automatically gives him the same ontological status as the Father. Has he perhaps overlooked the very much more convincing argument that Jesus is “lord” following the very frequent New Testament use of Psalm 110:1 to refer to Jesus? According to this formative text (alluded to more than any other Old Testament passage), Jesus is the Lord *Messiah* (*adoni*), not *adonai*, the Lord God. As Geza Vermes states, “this fusion [from Ps. 110:1] of ‘lord’ and ‘glorified Messiah’ preserves the typical Jewish stress on an ‘act of inauguration’ conferring lordship on Jesus”<sup>29</sup> — lordship, that is, as Messiah, not God in the later creedal sense. Barth seems perhaps not to take seriously enough the Jewish background to the biblical titles of Jesus. One may insist that the New Testament be heard first from its own point of view, with a caution that the later post-biblical language of Chalcedon not be exalted to a “midway position,” with the power to silence the text.

Our suggestion is that Barth’s wrestlings with anhypostasia might have been unnecessary, had he taken as the *point de départ* of his Christological task the Synoptics and Acts and not relied so exclusively on John 1:14, read, as it appears to many, with spectacles tinged with Greek philosophy. Had he done this, he would not have made so easily the equation “Jesus is Lord” = “Jesus is God.” Barth justifies the title “mother of God” for Mary on the basis of Luke 1:43 where Mary is addressed as “the mother of my Lord.”<sup>30</sup> But has he taken into account Luke’s use of a current Messianic title, *Christos kurios*, for Jesus (Luke 2:11)? Mary was indeed the mother of the “lord Messiah.” The “eternal Son” might well have seemed alien to Luke’s understanding of Christology.

We take this opportunity to identify what seems to be the essential point of our reservation about Barth’s Chalcedonian language. When confronted with the fundamental Lukan Christological statement in Luke 1:35, Barth does not seem to abide by the strict exegetical principles he uses elsewhere. Luke’s account proposes a direct causal link between the virginal conception and the Sonship of Jesus: “*for this reason [dio kai] he shall be called holy, the Son of God.*” Barth’s comments on this verse are revealing. The pressure of his own preconception seems to overrule his faithfulness to Luke’s words:

<sup>29</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973, 108.

<sup>30</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 38.

Noetically, i.e. for us to whom this sign is given . . . the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh stands or falls with the truth of the *conceptio de spiritu sancto*. But it could not be said that ontically, in itself, the mystery of Christmas stands or falls with this dogma. The man Jesus of Nazareth is not the true Son of God because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, because he is the true Son of God and because this is an inconceivable mystery intended to be acknowledged as such, therefore he is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.<sup>31</sup>

But, with the greatest respect, that is not what Luke said. The remark of the Jesuit theologian P.S. Lyonnet is exactly to the point: “Most modern exegetes, finding in Luke’s statement a disagreement with their theology, attempt to give to the word ‘therefore’ (*dio kai*) an interpretation which eliminates or weakens this ‘embarrassing’ causal link.”<sup>32</sup> In this instance the choice is between the eternal Son of Chalcedon and the conception Christology of Luke. The question may be posed as to whether the Chalcedonian Jesus can be found in Acts or Peter. Without the aid of an a priori perspective, can he even be found in John and Paul?

Barth’s Christology is satisfying and illuminating where he deals with the text of Scripture; much less convincing when he elaborates the creeds. An uneasiness about Barth’s restatement of classical Christology was expressed by John A.T. Robinson:

The biblical basis of [the traditional doctrine of the Trinity] which did not trouble Aquinas much but should have troubled Barth had he been more of a New Testament exegete, has increasingly disturbed me and been brought to a head as I have wrestled with the great Johannine texts on which so much of it was based . . . On any interpretation it is clear that patristic theology of whatever school abused these [Johannine texts] by taking them out of context and giving them a meaning which it is evident that John never intended. Functional language about the Son and the Spirit being sent into the world by the Father was transposed into that of eternal and internal relationships between Persons of the Godhead and words like “generation” and “procession” made into technical terms which the New Testament usage simply will not substantiate.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/2, 202.

<sup>32</sup> Lyonnet, “The Annunciation of Biblical Mariology,” *Maria in Sacra Scriptura*, Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1967, 51, fn. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, “The Fourth Gospel and the Church’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Twelve More New Testament Studies*, SCM Press, 1984, 172.

Edward Schillebeekx concurs when he says forthrightly that “there is no basis in Johannine theology for the later scholastic theology of the procession of the Son from the Father within the Trinity per modum generationis (birth).”<sup>34</sup> In this connection it is hard to see how Psalm 2:7, “Thou art my Son; today I have become your Father,” can possibly lend support to the notion of an “endless today” as Barth, quoting with approval Cyril of Jerusalem, maintains.<sup>35</sup>

When Barth tells us that the Son of Man “was before he was,” he gives us an important Christological insight. The texts he cites (discussed earlier) reveal the basic theme of the foreordination of the Messiah, “crucified before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8) and “fore-known before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20). Had Barth been content to leave aside the further construct that the Son himself preexisted as Son of God, he would have remained safely within the outline of the scriptural text. However, his basic presupposition prevented this. For Barth, revelation is found not in the letters and words which fill the pages of the Bible, but rather in the Word behind the words and present in the Christian community. We may ask, however, what exactly this Word behind the words is. James P. Mackey discusses Barth’s approach to Scripture and remarks that:

when we are wondering about the origin of or the authorization for a particular doctrine, and someone points us to the Word behind the words, it never does any harm to enquire what precisely these very inspiring phrases are intended to denote. What is the Word behind the words? Answers to this question in terms of a “gospel within the Gospels” . . . are too obviously invitations to arbitrary selectivity.<sup>36</sup>

Has Barth not, in fact, staked everything upon one interpretation of a single verse in John (1:14)? Does not Barth perhaps fall under the strictures of James Barr who complains that:

traditional and orthodox theologies seldom worked according to the proportions of the biblical material. On the contrary, they commonly elevated to a key position in their structure elements

<sup>34</sup> Schillebeekx, *The Christ*, SCM Press, 1980, 875, fn. 57.

<sup>35</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1, 489.

<sup>36</sup> James P. Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, SCM Press, 1983, 44.

which had comparatively slight and even marginal representations within the biblical material . . . In this sense traditional orthodoxy is a monumental example of the picking and choosing that it deprecates in others.<sup>37</sup>

In adopting a theology of the “Word” and not remaining strictly within the “words,” Barth sometimes appears to lose touch with the scriptural text. His Christology is often magnificent and grandiose, but at times floats above the text in a way which makes one wonder whether it has abandoned even the spirit of that text. Warren Groff points to the danger of speaking too glibly about the Word behind the words: “Frequently expressions like ‘Word,’ ‘Event’ and ‘God’s Personal Self-Disclosure’ are pointed towards a ‘thing-in-itself’ which remains in obscurity behind the appearances. But one can distinguish between the appearances and the real only from some prior awareness of the real . . . Only from some more foundational Word can one mark off Word from words.”<sup>38</sup> In Barth that foundational Word sometimes seems to remain obscure. When, however, he discourses on the words of the historical Jesus he is on a firm footing, and often most engaging and illuminating.

This brief examination of one aspect of Barth’s monumental account of dogmatics has been helpful for me as an exercise in trying to discern and “tests the spirits.” Naturally one approaches the *Church Dogmatics* from a prior perspective, in my own case worked out over some thirty years following an initial disillusionment with the mainstream’s apparent failure to take the words of the Sermon on the Mount at face value. An investigation into the issue of war and peace led to an inspection of the further issues of eschatology and Christology. Somehow one department of theology affects all the others. When I learned that Barth did not disavow all violence and, while sometimes sounding like a pacifist, allowed for that one “*Grenzfall*” in which violent retaliation could be Christian, I felt a certain uneasiness. Is this another fateful question, “Yea, hath God really commanded us to love our enemies?” Despite Barth’s impressive account of the Incarnation, one feels at times that we are moving in an atmosphere different from the New Testament. I am intrigued by a question put to Barth by Oliver Buswell:

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<sup>37</sup> James Barr, *Holy Scripture, Canon Authority and Criticism*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Warren Groff, *Christ the Hope of the Future*, Eerdmans, 1971, 21.

I asked Professor Barth how he explained the prayers of Jesus and His sayings in which He spoke objectively of the Father and Son and of the Spirit. His reply was to the effect that in speaking of the Deity the difference between subject and object completely disappears. I said, "Is that not then mysticism?" to which he replied, "Well, you could call it mysticism."<sup>39</sup>

In my current teaching ministry I have wanted to raise the question whether a particular understanding of John 1:14 perhaps controls Barth's entire Christological system. If the balance of the other evidence of the New Testament is taken into consideration, an approach to the Christological problem unlike the one offered by Chalcedon makes a strong appeal. Its strength as a more biblical Christology has been shown by the recent work of James Dunn, John Robinson and Geoffrey Lampe, who do not feel that Barth entirely escapes the charge that his Jesus is a little less than a real human being.

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<sup>39</sup> Oliver Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, 124.