

# Dialectical Theology as Theology of Mission: Investigating the Origins of Karl Barth's Break with Liberalism

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**Abstract:** Based on a thorough investigation of Karl Barth's early writings, this article proposes a new interpretation of dialectical theology as fundamentally concerned with the issue of mission. Documents from 1914 and 1915 show that the turning point in Barth's thinking about mission – and about Christian theology in general – occurred, at least in part, in response to a largely forgotten manifesto published in September 1914. This manifesto appealed to Protestants around the world to support Germany's cause in the war on the grounds that they would be supporting the work of the Great Commission. Barth's reaction to this document sheds light on the missionary nature of dialectical theology, which pursues an understanding of God and God-talk that does not conflate the mission of the church with the diffusion of culture.

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The term 'dialectical theology' is generally associated with notions like Christocentrism, God as wholly other, the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity, the negation of the negation, the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) and 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*). These are all important concepts that have their place in articulating the theology that Karl Barth initiated. And yet, as important as questions of soteriology and epistemology undoubtedly are for Barth, documents from before and during his break with liberalism indicate that one of his central concerns was the missionary task of the church. A closer look at these documents opens up the possibility of seeing his dialectical theology from the outset as a theology of mission,<sup>1</sup> understood as a theology concerned with critically interrogating the relation between gospel and culture.

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1 The concept of mission is an ambiguous one, since it is claimed by a wide range of positions that are otherwise incommensurate. When used positively here, I mean it in the

The topic of mission is not at all foreign to Barth scholarship. Missiologists have long recognized the significance of Barth's April 1932 lecture, 'Theology and Mission in the Present'.<sup>2</sup> There has also been a growing recognition that Barth's mature dogmatics (i.e. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 4, §§62, 67, 72) presents a missionary conception of the church, in the sense of a church sent out to bear witness to Christ.<sup>3</sup> But the question of mission lies at the very origins of Barth's new theological paradigm; it is not a topic he only takes up in his later writings. Indeed, Barth understood that, in rejecting liberal theology, he was rejecting an imperialist and colonialist form of mission.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows I will (a) look at the role of a colonialist understanding of mission in Barth's protodialectical<sup>5</sup> years as the preparation for the turning point in

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sense of contemporary post-Christendom, anti-imperialist missiology, which views mission in terms of the *translation* from one cultural context to another, as opposed to a *diffusion* of a normative culture into other contexts or the *absorption* of other cultures into one normative culture. As we will see, Barth moves from a Christendom (or Constantinian) account of mission to a (largely) post-Christendom account, and the discovery of the latter coincides with his discovery of dialectical theology. To be sure, even Barth's mature theology of mission remains dated, since Barth still tends to assume that mission is related to those 'outside' of the church. But there is at least a clear trajectory toward seeing mission in terms of a witnessing activity that not only constitutes the church's essence but also differentiates the Christian community from other social bonds. In this article, the terms 'Christendom', 'Constantinianism' and 'imperialism' refer, in different ways, to a conception of mission that conflates the Christian message with a particular sociocultural context.

- 2 Karl Barth, 'Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart', *Zwischen den Zeiten* 10 (1932), pp. 189–215.
- 3 Two recent academic conferences have looked at Barth as a theologian of mission. The 2010 Karl Barth Conference, held at Princeton Theological Seminary on 20–23 June, was on the theme: '“The Church Is As Such a Missionary Church”: Barth as a “Missional” Theologian'. The 43rd Internationale Karl Barth Tagung was held on 16–19 July 2012, in Leuenberg, Switzerland, under the title: 'Mission Impossible: Kirche, Mission, Pluralität der Religionen nach Karl Barth'. The seminal work on this topic is John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).
- 4 I refer to this rejected position as 'pseudomissionary' because, even though it claims to be missionary, it contradicts the contextualized sending of the church that corresponds to God's mission in Jesus Christ.
- 5 The word 'protodialectical' is an attempt at a compromise between predialectical and dialectical. Christophe Chalamet has argued that there is no predialectical period in Barth's thinking, since his teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann, was already a dialectical theologian himself. I think there are good reasons to question this thesis, on the grounds that Barth's theology is not dialectical by virtue of using a formal dialectical method, but because of a certain *material content* – an eschatologically charged soteriology – that clearly differentiates Barth from people like Herrmann who make use of dialectical thought-forms but are not properly identified as members of the dialectical theology movement. At the same time, Chalamet is right to question the overly simplistic way in which many scholars separate 'liberal' and 'dialectical' theology, usually as a way of casually dismissing nineteenth-century theology. The topic of mission exposes just how

his thinking; (b) examine Barth's response to the pseudomissionary manifesto of September 1914, the 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', in order to gain insight into the nature of his dialectical theology; and (c) briefly explore how the theme of mission might reframe the discussion of Barth's theological development.<sup>6</sup> Despite the many changes in his thinking about theology and mission, what remains constant following Barth's turn to dialectical theology is the differentiation between gospel and culture that he grounds in the soteriological differentiation between God and the world. Insofar as dialectical theology precludes the conflation between the message of Christ and any cultural context, it is a genuine theology of mission.

### Mission in the protodialectical Barth

The purpose of this first section is to demonstrate why the events in the autumn of 1914 were such a profound catalyst in Barth's turn to dialectical theology. To do so, we need to see that the topic of mission was already on his mind. What follows is thus a chronological review of Barth's engagement with the question of mission in the years 1905–1914.

Mission was a topic of interest for Barth from the beginning of his academic career. His first student paper at the University of Bern in March 1905 examined religion in ancient India and concluded with a discussion of how missionaries were involved in 'an open conflict between the ancient Indian and Christian worldviews'.<sup>7</sup> The paper also compared 'the missionary methods of the Jesuits', which involved a thoroughgoing 'accommodation' to the culture, and the 'Basel Mission' in India, which saw an absolute conflict between Christianity and the caste system.<sup>8</sup> The following March, Barth attended a student conference in Aarau, where he heard a paper by missionary inspector Theodor Oehler on 'Modern Spiritual Trends in the Heathen World and Their Significance for Mission'.<sup>9</sup> Oehler represents well the Christendom understanding of mission in the European churches of that time, in which evangelizing is a process of civilizing. According to his lecture, 'the contact with European-Christian civilization has aroused original movements in the heathen

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predialectical Barth was before 1915, but the term 'protodialectical' more accurately conveys the complexity of his early theology. See Christophe Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* (Zürich: TVZ, 2005).

6 The first two sections of this article are a substantial revision and expansion of the material in chapter 2 of my study, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

7 See Karl Barth, 'Der Charakter der Religion des Alten Indiens', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905–1909* (Zürich: TVZ, 1992), p. 5.

8 Barth, 'Der Charakter der Religion des Alten Indiens', p. 6.

9 See Karl Barth, 'Moderne geistige Strömungen in der heidnischen Welt und ihre Bedeutung für die Mission', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905–1909*, pp. 122–3. Throughout this article I have chosen to translate *Heiden* as 'the heathen'.

lands of a *cultural, national and religious* nature'.<sup>10</sup> The year after that, in February 1907, Barth wrote a 158-page paper for Adolf von Harnack's seminar on church history under the title: 'The Missionary Activity of Paul according to the Presentation of the Acts of the Apostles'.<sup>11</sup> Barth reported in a letter to his parents after the seminar that Harnack began by saying: 'The work of Mr. Barth is a small folio, he has written 160 pages; I am amazed only how you found the time for it in Berlin!'<sup>12</sup>

In November 1908, having completed his university education, Barth returned to Marburg to work for Martin Rade as the editorial assistant of *Die Christliche Welt*. The previous year, Rade and Wilhelm Herrmann had assumed the editorship of *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*. Barth wrote an article for the journal in February 1909 on 'Modern Theology and the Work of the Kingdom of God', which was accepted for publication in May and was published in the July issue as part of a section on 'Theses and Antitheses'.<sup>13</sup> The article opens by noting how a group of students 'in a German university town with a "modern" theological faculty' were asked why it is that 'so conspicuously few students, after the completion of study, applied themselves to the work of foreign mission'.<sup>14</sup> Barth's thesis is that the two essential characteristics of modern theology – what he names 'religious individualism' and 'historical relativism' – do not prepare one as well for 'practical religious work' as conservative theology.<sup>15</sup> Not only does theological orthodoxy provide a more objective and stable basis for pastoral ministry, but the 'pietistically-affected circles' are full of 'evangelistic zeal', in comparison to which 'our conspicuously low religious activity . . . often seems almost shameful'.<sup>16</sup> Barth, however, does not see this as a reason to abandon the liberal theological tradition. He contends that this tradition is 'best' and 'truest', but if one is going to recognize its strength, one must also acknowledge its weakness, though not with any regret, 'because we cannot do otherwise'.<sup>17</sup> At this stage, Barth takes for granted the Christendom understanding of mission shared by both conservative and modern

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10 Barth, 'Moderne geistige Strömungen', p. 123.

11 See Karl Barth, 'Die Missionsthätigkeit des Paulus nach der Darstellung der Apostelgeschichte', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905–1909*, pp. 148–243.

12 Barth, 'Die Missionsthätigkeit des Paulus', p. 153.

13 See Karl Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905–1909*, pp. 334–66. Cf. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 68–73. Ernst Christian Achelis and Paul Drews responded to Barth in the following two issues, to which Barth replied in a concluding 'Antwort'.

14 Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', p. 341. By opening his article in this way, Barth seems to be responding in a way to Martin Rade, who gave a lecture on 1 October 1908 at the Protestant missionary society in Breslau on 'Mission to the Heathen as the Answer of Faith to the History of Religion'. See Martin Rade, 'Heidenmission die Antwort des Glaubens auf die Religionsgeschichte', in *Das religiöse Wunder und anderes: drei Vorträge* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1909), pp. 28–70.

15 Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', p. 341.

16 Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', p. 346.

17 Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', p. 347.

theologians. He further accepts the superiority of the modern liberal tradition. All of this would eventually change while Barth served in the pastorate.

Barth left Marburg in August 1909 to take up the position as assistant minister at the Swiss-German Reformed Church in Geneva. In the spring of 1910, Barth decided to hold evening confirmation talks for the boys and girls in the Genevan parish.<sup>18</sup> To his 'horror', they asked him to lecture on missionary history (*Missionsgeschichte*), a topic with which he was largely unfamiliar.<sup>19</sup> In order to rectify his ignorance, he consulted his brother, Peter, who had once been interested in becoming a missionary. Barth sent Peter a letter on 5 May asking for any materials on the topic. In June he received additional help from Hans Anstein, a pastor in the Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft (Protestant Missionary Society) in Basel.<sup>20</sup> Barth held six meetings on mission in 1910, three in the spring and three more in the fall (25 May, 8 and 22 June, 7 and 21 September, and 19 October). The first two presented general thoughts about the missionary responsibility of Christians, while the last four looked at specific missionary endeavors.<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that the third meeting on mission (22 June) took place at the same time as the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (14–23 June 1910), an event that will become more important for Barth later.

The notes from these confirmation talks appear to indicate that Barth's understanding of mission at this stage in his theological development was consistent with the wider liberal (i.e., Christendom) position espoused by the magisterial Protestant churches, though it is impossible to tell whether he was presenting his own theological viewpoint or simply restating the views of the materials that he received from others in his crash course in missionary history. He begins by defining mission as the 'spread' or 'diffusion' (*Ausbreitung*) of Christianity, a position suggestive of Schleiermacher's claim that the consummation of the church will occur when 'Christianity has spread [*verbreiten*] over the earth'.<sup>22</sup> The basic content of mission consists, Barth says, in the idea that 'we have something good, the best, in our Christianity, and since the heathen are people like us, we must give it to

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18 The confirmation talks took place on Wednesday evenings, beginning on 25 May 1910 with a discussion of mission and concluding on 25 June 1911 with a series of lectures on Romans, after which Barth was called to Safenwil. At the start, boys and girls alternated Wednesdays, and the boys were the audience for the mission discussion. By October, however, it became clear to Barth that the division between boys and girls was no longer going to work, and in November, after completing the series on mission, they started meeting together. See Karl Barth, 'Konfirmanden-Abende' and 'Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914* (Zürich: TVZ, 1993), pp. 46–58, 71–125.

19 Barth, 'Konfirmanden-Abende', p. 47.

20 Barth, 'Konfirmanden-Abende', pp. 47–8.

21 Barth, 'Konfirmanden-Abende', p. 53.

22 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube: Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt (1830/31)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), §157, p. 456.

them'.<sup>23</sup> By 'heathen' Barth means the people of Asia and Africa – represented especially by Bali and Cameroon, which he discusses in detail based on the information he received from others.

Barth goes on to address three popular objections to missionary activity. The first is that mission 'disrupts the colonial trade'. Unfortunately, Barth does not respond by insisting that what is being opposed here should actually be welcomed and affirmed. He instead says that missionaries often help the colonizers – something he apparently views as a virtue – because Christianity makes people 'good workers'. The missionaries only disrupt certain excesses, such as the 'thirst for pleasure' or treating the 'natives' as 'objects of exploitation'.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, according to Barth, 'Christianity does not disrupt colonial work but converts it'.<sup>25</sup> The second objection is that mission work 'actually brings European culture to the heathens'.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately – and here we see just how profoundly predialectical Barth is at this stage – Barth defends the spread of European culture through missionary work. If by 'culture' one means technology, then the 'Indians and Chinese already have culture', and theirs is 'much older than that of Europe (paper, gunpowder, Indian philosophy)'. But this is not the true meaning of culture, according to Barth, since 'culture is only where [there is] life and education, where [there are] right *people*'. And in this sense, he says, India and China do not have genuine culture. Resorting to racist, orientalist tropes, Barth claims that the examples of 'heathen culture' noted above are actually just the opposite; they are evidence instead of 'the arrogance and cruelty of the Chinese, the lazy contemplativeness of Indians'.<sup>27</sup> If culture is the process of forming 'right people', and if religion 'shows how to become a right person', then it follows, so Barth suggests, that the proper work of mission is the spread of civilized culture, which in this case means *Western* culture. Of course, he tries to avoid the problem of cultural-historical difference altogether by arguing that 'humanity is a unity', and therefore the 'goods of culture must be held in common'.<sup>28</sup> The essentialist definition of humanity effectively allows him to equate evangelization with civilization while evading the problem of imperialism, since the concepts of 'culture' and 'rightness' are treated as if they are universally meaningful and normative.<sup>29</sup> This merely reveals a lack of critical awareness regarding his own

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23 See Karl Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, p. 60.

24 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 61.

25 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 62.

26 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 62.

27 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 62.

28 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 62.

29 Theo Sundermeier, a missiologist and intercultural theorist, draws a direct connection between the idea, based on a certain doctrine of creation, that 'all people are . . . the same' and the 'terrible' history of colonialism. The view that all genuine human beings are equal begs the question who 'counts' as a human being. If someone is a 'potential human being', then he or she 'must be made into a human being through religion, through education, through civilization'. And if someone is deemed not human at all,

context and presuppositions. The final objection that Barth discusses is the notion that 'mission implies the intolerance of other religions'.<sup>30</sup> Barth says that this used to be the case before 1700, but now people understand that there are 'traces of truth everywhere, God is everywhere clearly at work'.<sup>31</sup> But he goes on to say that Christianity is concerned with the 'inner life of others', and thus 'the urge to expand, to pass on' religion, is the only true tolerance, the '*tolerance of love*' rather than the 'tolerance of indifference'.<sup>32</sup> As these lecture notes indicate, Barth's theology of mission at this stage is shaped by the dominant liberal-colonialist paradigm of his day.

Over the course of two weeks in February 1911, Barth went to hear John Mott speak. At the time, Mott was the General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, and in June 1910 he presided at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Mott popularized the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions by using it as the title of his 1900 book, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*,<sup>33</sup> and in 1910, immediately following the Edinburgh conference, he published *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*, which summarized the Anglo-American vision for evangelizing 'the non-Christian world'.<sup>34</sup> It was while riding on the waves of missionary enthusiasm after Edinburgh that Mott went on a speaking tour in 1911 in the university towns of Switzerland to mobilize young Christians to join the movement – in Geneva on 5 and 7 February, Bern on 11 February and Basel on 16 and 17 February. While Barth was unimpressed, he admits in his review of the lecture that he tends to associate 'America' with 'humbug'.<sup>35</sup> Barth was especially irritated by Mott's sloganistic claim regarding the 'evangelization of the *world in this generation!*' which struck him as a

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then he or she 'belongs in another category, namely that of things'. Such a person can be killed or sold as a slave. See Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen: Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 73.

30 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 62.

31 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 63.

32 Barth, 'Evangelische Missionskunde', p. 63.

33 John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900). The watchword 'the evangelization of the world in this generation' is often wrongly attributed to Arthur T. Pierson. William Hutchison points out that the phrase was first coined by Royal Wilder in his 1861 work on missionary schools in India. See Royal G. Wilder, *Mission Schools in India of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1861), p. 420: 'I verily believe the Church of Christ is able to evangelize the heathen world in one short generation.' Cf. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 99 n. 11. I am grateful to John Flett for this information.

34 John R. Mott, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1910).

35 See Karl Barth, 'John Mott und die christliche Studentenbewegung', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, p. 270.

particularly American ‘universalism’.<sup>36</sup> Whether Mott was a catalyst in Barth’s rethinking of mission is hard to say. What we do know is that Barth left Geneva for Safenwil in July 1911, and from that point on, his views began to change.

In the first few years following his move to Safenwil, Barth said little about mission. The topic appeared briefly in a couple of sermons in 1913 (15 June and 21 September), but these were minor comments. Instead, he turned his attention to what was then called ‘inner mission’, which refers to a movement to care for the poor and sick started by Johann Hinrich Wichern in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> The mission is ‘inner’ because it pertains to the people within one’s home country, who are presumably already Christian by birth. (It was assumed that mission by definition is an overseas movement and is thus essentially ‘outer mission’.) While Barth does not say much about inner mission,<sup>38</sup> he is well known for his socialist activism in Safenwil, and the connection between inner mission and the social movement was already established.<sup>39</sup> On 17 December 1911, Barth lectured in Safenwil on ‘Jesus Christ and the Social Movement’. Near the beginning of the lecture he says that just as people speak of ‘Jesus and Reformation’ or ‘Jesus and mission’, so now we should speak of ‘Jesus and the social movement’.<sup>40</sup> In a way, this signals the transition in his theology. His concern for the social welfare of the people – and thus his concern for a gospel that liberates rather than oppresses – becomes the critical lens by which he assesses the work of the church. Barth’s involvement in the movement for social justice thus prepared the soil for his dialectical turn.<sup>41</sup> Evidence for this appears in the summer of 1914, on the eve of the war.

36 Barth, ‘John Mott und die christliche Studentenbewegung’, pp. 280, 276.

37 See Johann Hinrich Wichern, *Nothstände der protestantischen Kirche und die innere Mission: Zugleich als zweite Nachricht über die Brüder des Rauhen Hauses als Seminar für innere Mission* (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1844); Johann Hinrich Wichern, *Die innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche: Eine Denkschrift an die deutsche Nation, im Auftrage des Centralausschusses für die innere Mission* (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses zu Horn, 1849).

38 In the years before the war, he refers to the notion in two places: in his 1910 confirmation talks and in his 1913–14 notes on the worker question. See Barth, ‘Evangelische Missionskunde’, p. 60; Karl Barth, ‘Die Arbeiterfrage’, in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, p. 629.

39 See Paul Göhre, *Die evangelisch-soziale Bewegung: Ihre Geschichte und ihre Ziele* (Leipzig: F.W. Grunow, 1896), pp. 3–6. The first chapter is devoted to Wichern and inner mission. Wichern himself comments on socialism and communism in his 1849 book on inner mission, arguing that these political movements long for the kind of freedom and redemption that finds fulfilment ‘only through the gospel’ (Wichern, *Die innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche*, p. 137).

40 See Karl Barth, ‘Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung’, in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, pp. 380–409, here p. 389.

41 There is thus a grain of truth – and perhaps much more than a grain – in the famously controversial thesis of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt that Barth’s theology developed out of his involvement in socialist praxis. See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1972). Indeed, the



On 21 July 1914, Barth called together a meeting of religious-socialist pastors in Safenwil.<sup>42</sup> Hermann Kutter was invited to be the speaker, but he cancelled on the eve of the gathering, leaving Barth to fill in at the last minute.<sup>43</sup> Barth was already working on a review of the 1913 volume of Friedrich Naumann's *Die Hilfe für Die Christliche Welt*, which would appear in the 15 August issue. Since he had those notes on hand, he decided to speak on the topic of Naumann's politics. Barth's lecture began with a section on 'Naumann's political worldview', the goal of which, according to Barth, is the 'expansion of German industry, democracy and world power'.<sup>44</sup> He proceeded to expand on each of these points. On the topic of world power, we read in Barth's notes: 'World power, demanded by an industrial and democratic ideal. *Germanism, belief in the special mission of Germany*, in each case: we want power. Hence empire, military, navy, expansionary politics [*Expansionspolitik*].' In the initial manuscript version, instead of 'expansionary politics', Barth had written, 'colonialist politics' (*Kolonialpolitik*).<sup>45</sup> While these notes might appear descriptive in nature, they are already critiques in themselves. The emphasis on *German* power and *Germany's* mission, in particular, would have carried a strongly pejorative connotation for Barth's Swiss audience. He goes on to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Naumann's political vision and then outlines its three main motifs: (1) aestheticism, (2) a moralistic misunderstanding of the gospel and (3) Lutheranism.<sup>46</sup> From Barth's perspective, each of these keeps the gospel at arm's length from the social situation and so preserves the unjust conditions of the status quo. For this reason, he writes, 'the heart of the problem for us' is that 'Naumann does not get involved in the practical questions'.<sup>47</sup>

Naumann's views were not unique. The nationalist ideology of Germanism – that is, the belief in Germany's special vocation, realized through colonial expansion – was widely held following the unification of Germany in 1871. It was a belief shared by many of the church leaders at that time. In 1879, Friedrich Fabri, the chief inspector of the Rhenish Missionary Society, published his argument for why Germany needs colonies. He concluded by arguing that 'a nation [*Volk*] that has reached the highest development of political power can only maintain its historical position with success so long as it recognizes and proves itself *as the bearer of a*

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present article aims, in a way, to reframe the truth of this claim (namely, that Barth's dialectical theology is essentially concerned with the sociocultural situation) as a fundamentally *theological* concern by subsuming the question of politics within the question of mission. In this way we are also able to integrate Marquardt's thesis into a broader perspective on the nexus of influences in Barth's theological development, since mission is intrinsically connected to issues of soteriology and epistemology.

42 These included Guido Ammann, Lukas Christ, Max Dietschi, Adolf Kistler, Paul Schild, Ernst Staehelin, Eduard Thurneysen and Gottlob Wieser.

43 See Karl Barth, 'Politik, Idealismus und Christentum bei Friedrich Naumann', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1914–1921* (Zürich: TVZ, 2012), p. 48.

44 Barth, 'Politik, Idealismus und Christentum', p. 49.

45 Barth, 'Politik, Idealismus und Christentum', p. 50. Emphasis mine.

46 Barth, 'Politik, Idealismus und Christentum', pp. 58–9.

47 Barth, 'Politik, Idealismus und Christentum', p. 60.

cultural mission [Cultur-Mission]'.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, 'if the new German empire is to establish and preserve its newly acquired position of power for the long term, it will have to understand its power as a cultural mission and no longer hesitate to carry out its *colonizing vocation* anew'.<sup>49</sup> Three years later, in December 1882, the German Colonial Union (Deutscher Kolonialverein) was founded, followed in March 1884 by the Society for German Colonization (Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation). The Berlin Conference that launched the so-called 'scramble for Africa' began shortly thereafter on 15 November 1884. That same year saw the establishment of German South-West Africa and German West Africa. In 1885 the German empire spread to eastern Africa and Oceania. And on 10 May 1886, Karl Barth was born to Johann Friedrich ('Fritz') and Anna Katharina Barth.

Barth thus grew up within a religious context shaped by nationalist and colonialist fervor. My review of his early writings has shown that mission, in various forms, was a constant theme of his work. Early in his career he took for granted the colonialist understanding of mission as the diffusion of European culture. In the years immediately preceding the war, Barth became actively involved in socialist politics. This seems to have given him a new critical sensitivity to the problem of imperial power. And in 1914 we see him exercise this critical faculty, initially with respect to Naumann, and more fully in response to the start of the Great War. It is to the war – and the Christian manifesto written in support of it – that we now turn.

### The *other* manifesto

The story of Barth's 'conversion' from liberal theology to dialectical theology has been told many times before, including by Barth himself. As he and others tell it, his mind changed in October 1914 when 'ninety-three German intellectuals presented to the public their profession in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his advisers'.<sup>50</sup> The 'Aufruf der 93 an die Kulturwelt' (Appeal of the 93 to the Cultural World) – more commonly referred to as the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three – was indeed a decisive moment of both historical and symbolic significance. Barth was particularly shaken by the presence of Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann on the list of signatories.<sup>51</sup> Yet as important as this document

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48 Friedrich Fabri, *Bedarf Deutschland der Colonien?: Eine politisch-ökonomische Betrachtung* (Gotha: Perthes, 1879), p. 111. At that time, many words that are now spelled with a 'k' began with a 'c', such as *Cultur* (as opposed to *Kultur*).

49 Fabri, *Bedarf Deutschland der Colonien?*, p. 112.

50 Karl Barth, *Evangelische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zollikon-Zürich: TVZ, 1957), p. 6. Barth says that the capitulation occurred in August 1914, but the manifesto appeared on 4 October. The incorrect date is likely due to his conflation of the manifesto's release with the start of the war in August (Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August and began its campaigns shortly thereafter).

51 See 'Aufruf der 93 an die Kulturwelt', in Gerhard Besier, ed., *Die protestantischen Kirchen Europas im Ersten Weltkrieg: Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 78–83.

was, there was an earlier manifesto that, based on Barth's writings from that time, was even more significant for his change of mind.<sup>52</sup> It, too, was signed by von Harnack and Herrmann. But whereas the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three was a general document signed by German intellectuals from all fields of scholarship, the 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren: An die evangelischen Christen im Ausland' (Appeal of German Churchmen and Professors to Protestant Christians in Foreign Lands) – which we could call the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine – was a specifically *ecclesiastical* statement signed by church leaders, theologians and missionaries.<sup>53</sup> This 'other manifesto' appeared on 4 September 1914, exactly one month *before* the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three. Other notable signatories included: Friedrich von Bodelschwingh the Younger, who was later a supporter of the Confessing Church and the first Reich bishop in 1933, before he was forced to resign after two months and replaced by the German Christian supporter, Ludwig Müller; the highly regarded New Testament scholar, Adolf Deissmann, who was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; the German missiologist and pioneer of mission historiography and the ecumenical movement, Julius Richter; Johannes Warneck, the son of Gustav Warneck (who established missiology as an academic discipline) and himself a missionary in Indonesia with the Rhenish Mission; and the German Lutheran theologian Georg Wobbermin, who was later a strong partisan of Nazi ideology and the German Christian movement.

Like many other documents from that time, the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine insists that Germany bears no responsibility for the war. The authors declare that Germany has only 'now drawn the sword' because it was forced 'to defend against an outrageous attack'.<sup>54</sup> The war has been 'wickedly forced upon our people',<sup>55</sup> and thus 'if Christian Europe forfeits a precious piece of its position in the world, . . . *the guilt does not fall on our people. . . . [W]e may and must deny responsibility by our people and its government for the terrible crime of this war.*'<sup>56</sup> These were commonly held views by German intellectuals in that period.

What is remarkable about this manifesto is the way it justifies German military aggression on specifically *missionary* – in truth, pseudomissionary – grounds. The

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52 The fact that Barth remembered the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three as being of special significance in his 1957 retrospective, *Evangelische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, is not surprising, given that this document quickly became (in)famous throughout the world after its publication. The earlier manifesto was easily overshadowed and forgotten.

53 See 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren: An die evangelischen Christen im Ausland', in Besier, *Die protestantischen Kirchen Europas*, pp. 40–5. Originally published in the *Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung* 47 (1914), pp. 842–4.

54 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 40.

55 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42.

56 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', pp. 43–4. The authors explain the aggressive actions of Germany as the 'understandable agitation of a people' who could not remain neutral 'under the pressure of relentless adversity' ('Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42).

opening paragraph sets the agenda. It describes the present moment as the 'incomparable world-historical period' in which two things are the case: on the one hand, it is the period 'in which Christendom [*Christenheit*] has built the bridge to the whole of non-Christian humanity and a decisive influence has been entrusted to it'; on the other hand, it is the period in which 'the Christian nations [*Völker*] of Europe are about to tear each other apart in fratricidal wars'.<sup>57</sup> For the authors of this document, these two points are intimately connected. Here we see the basic thesis of the document: the war is a missionary problem. And that is because, for these church leaders and theologians, mission has to do with 'the task of colonization in the primitive world', in which Germany has 'gained a modest share' by 'develop[ing] the gifts that God had given it'.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the eurocentric and racist assumptions regarding the 'primitive' nature of the global South – going so far as to say that the 'natives' of Central Africa 'were pacified only a few years ago'<sup>59</sup> – the manifesto shares the Christendom assumption that one can speak of Christian peoples (or nations) and non-Christian peoples (or nations), and thus mission within this Constantinian framework is the conversion of a non-Christian nation into a Christian nation.

The manifesto identifies two specific problems with the war. First, it presents an ineffectual Christian witness. A war between so-called 'Christian nations' is, superficially at least, a war within the church, a war between fellow 'missionaries'. The concern is that this reflects poorly on Christianity. Among other things, the Orientalism and paternalism of the text is particularly evident at this point. According to the authors, 'primitive peoples learned to know Christianity as the religion of love and peace in contrast to tribal feuds and the savagery of their chiefs'. But 'now they are being guided into armed warfare by the people who brought them this gospel'.<sup>60</sup> This statement, in particular, illustrates the conflation of nation and

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57 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 40.

58 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 40.

59 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42.

60 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42. The manifesto is referring to the situation in the German protectorates of Togoland and Cameroon. Both Togoland and Cameroon were established in 1884 as part of German West Africa, and both were also sandwiched between French and British colonies. The African campaigns, some of the earliest in the Great War, began when French colonial forces invaded Togoland on 6 August, which was 'the first occupation of German territory by any Allied army'. On 12 August, the British fired their first shots in the war – ten days before firing a shot in Europe – in an encounter with German forces in Togoland. See Byron Farwell, *The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918* (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 26. The French and British forces invaded the German protectorate of Cameroon on 22–24 August. This is probably what the authors of the manifesto have in mind when they state that 'the war has been ruthlessly transferred into Central Africa' ('Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42). Around the same time, the German forces in German South-West Africa began a campaign against the British forces in southern Africa. The colonial forces in German East Africa carried on one of the longest campaigns in the entire war, extending even beyond the armistice.

religion. But the problem of witness extends beyond the people involved to the actions being taken. According to the authors, who assume that a war involving Christians will be more 'civilized', one sees 'cruelties and shameless actions as have not been displayed in many a pagan and Mohammedan war'. This leads them to ask: 'Are these the fruits by which the non-Christian peoples are now supposed to recognize whose disciples are the Christian nations [*Nationen*]?'<sup>61</sup> The European nations themselves are supposed to be the disciples of Christ. A war between them thus jeopardizes the success of their evangelizing efforts, since it diminishes the appeal of 'Christian' culture.

This brings us to the second problem with the war, which is more straightforward: the war has ruined or at least threatened the colonies.

The thriving mission-fields are being trampled . . . The mission-fields, which the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh described as the most important in the present day – Central Africa, with its competition between Christianity and Islam for the black race, and East Asia in the process of restructuring its life – are now the scenes of bitter fighting by the peoples who specifically bore the responsibility of carrying out the Great Commission.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear, based on context, that by 'mission-fields' the manifesto means colonies. In this case, 'Central Africa' likely refers to German West Africa, particularly Cameroon, while 'East Asia' refers to German Samoa, which was invaded by New Zealand on 29 August.<sup>63</sup> In 1914, Germany was only thirty years into its scramble to colonize the global South and East, and there is a palpable sense of frustration in the manifesto that it may all be undone so quickly. The frustration is, of course, geopolitical and economic, though the authors cover this in the pious veneer of concern for world evangelization, which in this case amounts to the same thing. According to the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine, by impeding the work of German colonization, the war in turn threatens the work of the Great Commission.

The express purpose of the manifesto is to win support for Germany's position in the war, on the grounds that to support Germany is to support the church's mission to evangelize the world. The authors of the document turn to Christians abroad 'not for the sake of our people, . . . but *for the sake of the unique world-task of Christian peoples in the decisive hour of world-mission*'.<sup>64</sup> Here we see a strategic reference to the watchword from the Edinburgh conference that Mott used as the title of his book in 1910. The clear implication is that the failure to ensure Germany's victory over the British, French and Russian forces would be an abdication of missionary responsibility and thus a failure to fulfill the expectations of that conference. A final allusion to the watchword appears again at the end of the manifesto, where the German church leaders present their most forceful plea:

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61 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42.

62 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', pp. 42–3.

63 John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), p. 205.

64 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 43.

We appeal to the *conscience* of our Christian brothers in foreign lands and place before them the question regarding what God expects of them now, and what can and must occur so that Christendom will not be deprived by blindness and wickedness of its power and legitimacy in the carrying out of its service as messengers to non-Christian humanity in God's great hour of world-mission.<sup>65</sup>

In short, the future of Christendom rests on the success of the German empire, which is why the manifesto can denounce the Czar as proclaiming war 'against Germanism and Christianity', as if the two go hand-in-hand.<sup>66</sup>

The earliest evidence that Barth had encountered the 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren' appears in a letter to Martin Rade on 1 October. Barth had earlier expressed frustration to Rade about the support for the war published in *Die Christliche Welt*. In this letter, Barth acknowledges that Rade stands closer to him than others in Germany. He then lists the people he has in mind, including Gottfried Traub, Paul Natorp, Ernst von Dryander, Adolf von Harnack, Rudolf Eucken and, lastly, the 'Berlin mission leaders' (*Berliner Missionsleute*), a reference to the manifesto.<sup>67</sup> Admittedly, it is not entirely clear that Barth has actually read the document at this point, though it seems likely. A month later, on 4 November, he refers to both manifestos by name in a letter to Herrmann (both of the documents, Barth tells his former teacher, 'give your name'). He then says, referring to the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine, that 'one of these documents concludes with the opening petition of the Our Father. Why do the German Christians not continue to the fifth petition [i.e., 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us']?!'<sup>68</sup>

Shortly after reading the 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', Barth delivered a sermon on 18 October 1914. The text was Romans 8:38–9. Barth begins the sermon by noting how the newspapers are praising the patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice of the German soldiers. The war gives the people a sense of national unity and common mission, so that it seems as if 'this war is a sacred matter'.<sup>69</sup> Even though 'as Swiss and as Christians', his parishioners need not get caught up in this 'war fever' (*Kriegsbegeisterung*),<sup>70</sup> Barth asks whether they should not recognize the unity, bravery and selflessness of the soldiers to be a gift from God?

65 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 44.

66 'Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren', p. 42.

67 Karl Barth to Martin Rade, 1 October 1914, in *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1981), p. 100.

68 Karl Barth to Wilhelm Herrmann, 4 November 1914, in *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel*, p. 115. In a letter to Thurneysen on 5 November, Barth says that Wilhelm Herrmann sent him 'three envelopes full of German-Protestant printed matter' fourteen days ago. This package probably included both manifestos, though Barth most likely had already read the earlier manifesto by that time. See Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, 5 November 1914, in *Karl Barth – Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band I: 1913–1921* (Zürich: TVZ, 1973), p. 19.

69 Karl Barth, *Predigten 1914* (Zürich: TVZ, 1999), pp. 519–20.

70 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 518.

And thus should we not understand the war as ‘a revelation of God, indeed not as a revelation of God’s judgment but of God’s good will toward humanity?’<sup>71</sup> Barth could be thinking here of his private correspondence with Martin Rade from late August and September. In a letter dated 5 September, Rade argued that God was the author and ground of the unity experienced by the German people.<sup>72</sup>

In answer to his own questions, Barth declares an emphatic ‘*but!*’<sup>73</sup> He issues a call to ‘struggle against the blindness’ that has overtaken even the most educated people in Germany. He especially criticizes ‘one Marburg professor’, namely, Paul Natorp, for making use of Luther’s line about a ‘world full of devils’ from the hymn, ‘A Mighty Fortress’, to characterize the contrast between Germany and the rest of the world.<sup>74</sup> He then discusses three groups of people – all identified as men (*Männer*) – that should have remained free of the war fever. First, ‘there are the men of *education*, of science’, who have now ceased to work for the benefit of ‘all humankind’.<sup>75</sup> Next, ‘there are the men of *social democracy*’. They used to speak out for peace among the nations, but the war fever overpowered them, and as a result ‘there are no more socialists in Germany who hate war, but only Germans who hate the French and the Russians’.<sup>76</sup> Finally, Barth singles out ‘the men of the Christian *churches*, Catholic and Protestant. They talked every Sunday about Jesus, about the man who said to his disciples, in the very moment when it would have been the most just thing: Put your sword back into its sheath (John 18.11)!’<sup>77</sup> They also talked, Barth adds, about God sending sun and rain upon the just and unjust alike. But now the Germans have replaced the ‘gospel of love’ with a ‘gospel of hate’, and German church documents ‘gush with warmongering’. To be sure, the problem does not lie only with Germany. Barth also notes that, on 13 September at the Notre Dame Cathedral, Archbishop Léon-Adolphe Amette called for Christians to struggle against the Germans and concluded with the words: ‘Long live God, long live the church, long live France!’<sup>78</sup>

It is at the end of this litany of betrayals that Barth explicitly mentions the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine:

A number of the most well-known churchmen in Germany, including two of my favorite teachers, have issued an appeal ‘to Protestant Christians in foreign lands’. It is full of accusations, full of excuses for its own cause. Only once does it speak of the repentance that the German people also need. But then it

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71 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 523.

72 See Martin Rade to Karl Barth, 5 September [October] 1914, *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel*, p. 110. Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 113 n. 87. Schwöbel notes that Rade’s letter is actually from October but was backdated to September.

73 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 524.

74 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 524.

75 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 526.

76 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, pp. 526–7.

77 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 527.

78 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 527.

immediately suggests that they have already repented, and all the blame is cast solemnly and solely on the enemies. In this way Christians, *serious and pious* Christians, have become soldiers. How you have fallen from heaven, O beautiful morning star!<sup>79</sup>

The reference to Isaiah 14:12 in the last sentence – often interpreted in late Judaism and Christianity as a text about the fall of the angel Satan – powerfully captures the breach of trust that Barth experienced upon reading this document. The very theologians Barth believed were most immune to the warmongering, imperialist delusion that had overtaken German culture were now themselves issuing an appeal to Christians to support what Barth himself had criticized several months earlier in his lecture on Naumann as the false ‘belief in the special mission of Germany’.

We see indirect evidence of the manifesto’s impact in a talk that Barth gave on ‘Krieg, Sozialismus und Christentum’ (War, Socialism and Christianity) on 6 December 1914.<sup>80</sup> Barth observes how both Christians and socialists are talking about ‘holy war’, even describing political enemies as the enemies of God. This is the attitude ‘of Christian papers, public authorities, persons in power. The church. Communities. Mission leaders [*Missionsleute*]’.<sup>81</sup> He proceeds to offer a list of names, including Archbishop Amette. But it is the mention of missionaries in this list that is of particular interest. The editors of this volume in the Gesamtausgabe point out that Barth was probably thinking of the ‘Aufruf deutscher Kirchenmänner und Professoren’. Given Barth’s reference to the *Berliner Missionsleute* in his letter to Rade on October 1, this is almost certainly correct. In any case, it is clear from Barth’s statements during this time that the problem of war and the question of mission were ineluctably linked in his mind after the summer of 1914. In Safenwil on 13 September 1914, shortly after the publication of the manifesto but apparently before he had read it, Barth preached another one of his blistering sermons, this time an indictment of the European nations and their false piety:

These peoples – and we all belong to them, every one of us – probably heard the gospel of Jesus thousands of years ago, but with only half an ear. They built churches for Jesus and hired pastors and founded institutions and sent missionaries to the poor heathen, but all of this was little more than words and outer varnish, since in reality they themselves were still poor heathen. The gospel says: throw everything away to have God completely! We European people said: we want to have it good. The gospel says: love your neighbor as yourself! We put money in place of the neighbor. The gospel says: those who want to follow me must deny themselves; we said: in this world what is valid is the gospel of power and unbridled competition. The gospel says: you are all brethren [*Brüder*]! We said: each person is his or her own neighbor. The gospel

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79 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 528.

80 Karl Barth, ‘Krieg, Sozialismus und Christentum’, in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1914–1921*, pp. 86–96.

81 Barth, ‘Krieg, Sozialismus und Christentum’, p. 89.



says: the reign of God is coming, so wait for it and prepare yourselves to enter. We responded by straightening up our world empires, each one based on deceit and violence, on guns and bayonets.<sup>82</sup>

Here we see Barth directly connecting the work of the mission agencies and the colonialist scramble for world power, even before reading the manifesto that would solidify his loss of faith in the theology he was taught in the German academy. The fact that the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine explicitly uses mission to support Germany's scramble for colonies must have come as something of a shock. Later, having read the manifesto, he preached a similar message on 7 March 1915, declaring: 'What becomes of mission when the concern is power and advantage? Christ must be silent.'<sup>83</sup>

The Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine encapsulates the key factors involved in Barth's turn to a new theological paradigm. Not only was it signed by his liberal teachers, but it makes a theological – indeed, missiological – case for supporting Germany in the war. And, as we have seen, the problem of the church's mission in the modern world was especially on Barth's mind. That is not to suggest that this document was the first or only catalyst in his change of mind, or that the change occurred immediately. McCormack's comment regarding the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three is just as applicable to the earlier manifesto: 'It makes it appear that the break occurred more or less overnight and that is not the case.'<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Barth's letter to Martin Rade on 31 August shows that he was scandalized about the Christian response to the war before either manifesto was published.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, Christoph Schwöbel, the editor of the Barth–Rade correspondence, rightly observes in his introduction to the letters that 'the beginning of "dialectical" theology' was determined by a 'missionary consciousness' (*Missionsbewußtsein*) that gave it freedom from the established church factions.<sup>86</sup> Given our review of Barth's writings, it is clear that this missionary consciousness was much stronger than even Schwöbel realized.

While the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine was only one historical moment among others contributing to the rise of dialectical theology, it brings to expression more clearly and forcefully the issues to which Barth was responding. In this regard it deserves to be remembered as more symbolically significant than the more famous Manifesto of the Ninety-Three, which is commonly referred to as the turning-point,

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82 Barth, *Predigten 1914*, p. 479.

83 Karl Barth, *Predigten 1915* (Zürich: TVZ, 1996), p. 96.

84 McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 112.

85 Barth expresses disbelief that everything published in *Die Christliche Welt* could operate under the assumption 'that Germany is right in this war'. He criticizes the way 'patriotism, war lust and Christian faith are mixed up in a hopeless mess', such that 'the Christian world in this decisive moment ceases to be *Christian*'. Karl Barth to Martin Rade, 31 August 1914, in *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel*, p. 96.

86 Christoph Schwöbel, 'Einleitung', in Barth and Rade, *Karl Barth – Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel*, pp. 10–11.

thanks in large part to Barth's own autobiographical reflections.<sup>87</sup> The task for future Barth scholarship is to assess what implications this might have for understanding Barth's later work. In what follows we will briefly explore how we might reframe the conversation about his development along these lines.

### Dialectical theology as missionary theology

Barth perceived the capitulation of liberal theologians to German war fever, along with the confusion of God's will with the culture's will for colonialist power, as a *missionary* problem. To be sure, it was not *only* a missionary problem, but mission was indeed at the heart of the issue. Dialectical theology, as a response to this problem, can be understood as a way of addressing the dispute between the pseudomission of Germany (or any other nation) and the genuine mission of God.

Even if the manifesto was only one historical factor among others in Barth's theological development, it remains the case that dialectical theology originated out of a dispute over the relation between gospel and culture – a dispute that this document highlights and whose influence upon Barth was clearly profound. Barth does not frame his positive response to liberalism in missionary terms; he focuses instead on the eschatological nature of God, with the help of Paul, the Blumhardts, Franz Overbeck and Kierkegaard.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, recognizing that this manifesto was one of the catalysts for this response provides us with a hermeneutical key for discerning the missionary logic throughout Barth's dialectical theology. Though a full interpretation of his theology as a theology of mission is beyond the scope of the present article, we will simply suggest here that Barth's career can and should be understood as the consistent attempt (a) to critically oppose the church's capitulation to a culturally captive Christianity and (b) to construct a positive alternative account of knowing and following God that is not liable to such captivity and is, for that reason, a theology of mission. Put another way, a theology is genuinely *missionary* if it makes the crosscultural movement of the gospel internal to its message and logic – that is, if it funds the freedom of the gospel for new situations. Seen from that perspective, Barth is a profound theologian of mission from the beginning. Taking this interpretation of Barth as our starting-point, we will reflect on how this might reframe the conversation about his theological development.

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87 See, for instance, Wilfried Härle, 'Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen und Karl Barths Bruch mit der liberalen Theologie', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72 (1975), pp. 207–24.

88 Barth's eschatological theology is itself indirectly a theology of mission, since it is the eschatology that establishes the differentiation between gospel and culture that funds the missionary freedom of the church. Barth's turn to eschatology *is* his turn to an anti-imperialist understanding of mission.

The study of Barth over the past twenty years has been dominated by questions concerning the development of his theology.<sup>89</sup> My thesis does not fundamentally change the genetic-historical analysis worked out by others, but it provides a new way of framing the progression of Barth's thought. We can now organize his development in terms of the relation between gospel and culture. There are five main stages. Instead of liberalism, as correct as that may be in general, the first stage in his thought is the *imperialist diffusion* of a cultural-religious synthesis worked out by modern liberal Protestantism, a view that was largely taken for granted within the German academic environment. This is the position represented by his earliest writings, which we reviewed above.

Following his reaction to the events and discourse associated with the war, which come into focus in the September 1914 manifesto, Barth entered a period that we can call *eschatological anti-imperialism*. This characterizes the theology of the two versions of *Der Römerbrief* (1919 and 1922), where the eschatological reign of the wholly other God shatters every cultural-religious synthesis. The anti-imperial theme has been well documented, so I will not belabor the point here.<sup>90</sup> What has not received much attention is the fact that the topic of mission appears in a number of important passages in both editions of Barth's commentary, but especially in the second. He says, for instance, that the summons to obedience that defines faith 'is mission, and outside of it there is no other mission', which already signals his intention to rethink what mission means.<sup>91</sup> He states that 'mission presupposes a sending', and thus 'you are doing the opposite of mission by doing mission without being sent'.<sup>92</sup> In commenting on the passage about the Gentiles who do the law without knowing it, which he connects to people of 'various other religions and experiences', Barth says there is no reason 'to regard such people only as objects of mission'.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, in a remarkable passage that seems to have been written with the likes of Mott in mind, he writes:

The children of the world, the unholy, the unbelievers in all their naked shame, perhaps even in all their free serenity, are *not* objects of our preaching and pastoral care, of our evangelization, mission, apologetics and rescue activities, *not* objects of our 'love', because they have been sought and found by the mercy of God long before we arose to show them mercy; they stand already in the light of the righteousness of God, already partaking of forgiveness, already participating in the power of the resurrection and the power of obedience,

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89 The work that initiated the anglophone conversation on this topic is McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.

90 See, for example, Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

91 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung) 1922* (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), p. 53.

92 Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)*, pp. 105–6.

93 Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)*, p. 99.

already terrified of eternity and already hoping for it, already existentially thrown onto God!<sup>94</sup>

Barth makes his polemic against modern conceptions of mission still clearer in another passage where, in commenting on Romans 3:22b–24, he explicitly brings his eschatological understanding of God to bear on this question:

[Paul] is the prophet of God's reign, because he is the apostle to the gentiles, in contrast to what was later called 'mission', where this relationship is unclear. The mission of Paul does not focus on differences, but rather it demolishes all differences . . . The praying Pharisees may well be missionaries, but not missionaries of God's reign. The unfamiliar *connection* (between person and person) must be clarified and ascertained by the unfamiliar, beneficial *separation* (between God and the person), in which God's righteousness is recognized.<sup>95</sup>

This passage demonstrates especially well both Barth's opposition to the imperialism that was generally understood as 'mission' in his day and his appeal to eschatology (the inbreaking reign of God) as the response to that view of mission. The missionary nature of dialectical theology at this stage in Barth's thought is largely negative in nature: the missionary connection between people is defined in terms of the radical *separation* between God and the world, a separation that precludes any conflation between the gospel and culture.

Beginning in 1924, with his first dogmatics cycle in Göttingen, Barth turned to Christology – aided by a highly actualistic and eschatological doctrine of revelation and election – to accomplish the anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist goal of dialectical theology. We might describe the period 1924 to 1929 as one of *actualistic christological anti-imperialism*. More positively expressed, his theology during this time highlights the revelatory word of the transcendent God who comes to the world in Jesus Christ as the basis for a faith and theology that is free from cultural captivity. We could therefore also call this the period of an *anti-imperialist christological revelation*. While Barth's theology during this third period is more positive in nature, it is missionary primarily in the negative sense of being opposed to a liberal synthesis with modern culture. The topic of mission only appears in the three volumes of his Göttingen dogmatics in relation to the mission of the Son in the incarnation.<sup>96</sup>

94 Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)*, p. 494. A few lines later, Barth makes a reference to the idea of the 'poor heathen', which the editors of this volume, Cornelis van der Kooi and Katja Tolstaja, connect to the passage quoted above from Barth's sermon on 13 September 1914.

95 Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)*, p. 140.

96 Consequently, Barth does not use the word *Mission* in these lectures but speaks instead of *Sendung*. For example, he writes: 'revelation is mission [*Sendung*], the becoming-human of the Son; *Jesus Christ* is revelation'. Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil 3: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung / Die Lehre von der Erlösung 1925/26* (Zürich: TVZ, 2003), p. 23.

The fourth stage, stretching the ten years between 1929 and 1939,<sup>97</sup> is a time of major transition in Barth's theology, prompted in particular by his move to Münster in October 1925.<sup>98</sup> While the Münster dogmatics cycle of 1927 still falls within the theology of the third period, Barth's encounter with Roman Catholics in late 1927 began to make the problem of natural theology – and not simply cultural theology (*Kulturtheologie*) – existentially pressing to him in a way that it was not before.<sup>99</sup> The turning point came in February 1929 with Erich Przywara's visit to Barth's seminar, followed later that year by Emil Brunner's turn to 'eristic theology'.<sup>100</sup> From that point on, Barth became increasingly concerned about natural theology and natural revelation, best exemplified by the campaign he waged in the 1930s against the concept of the *Anknüpfungspunkt* or 'point of connection'. In 1932, the same year in which he called the *analogia entis* the 'invention of the antichrist', Barth gave his

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97 In identifying this as a distinct period in Barth's development, I register agreement with Keith Johnson's argument for a 'middle dogmatic stage' beginning in 1929, though I disagree with Johnson's characterization of what makes this stage unique. See Keith L. Johnson, 'A Reappraisal of Karl Barth's Theological Development and His Dialogue with Catholicism', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14 (2012), pp. 3–25, esp. pp. 16–20. For an explanation of where I depart from Johnson, see Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing*, section 2.4.1.

98 For insight into Barth's Münster years, see Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Karl Barth in Münster 1925–1930* (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), esp. pp. 37–46; Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for His Doctrine of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 33–47.

99 The 'Münster circle' included Bernhard Rosenmöller, Gottfried Hasenkamp, Robert Grosche, Ernst Böminghaus and Annemarie Nossen. See Benjamin Dahlke, *Die katholische Rezeption Karl Barths: Theologische Erneuerung im Vorfeld des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 53–4.

100 Barth's conflicts with Przywara (1929–32) and Brunner (1929–35) over the *analogia entis* and *Anknüpfungspunkt*, respectively, were fundamentally disputes over the nature of the church's mission. According to Keith Johnson, Przywara understood the *analogia entis* to be a 'missionary principle' that helps the church to engage German culture positively as the place where God is presently at work. The *analogia entis* accomplishes this task because 'it attempts to meet the world on its own ground rather than insist that the world move to its ground'. See Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), p. 78. It is little surprise that 'in Przywara's *analogia entis*, [Barth] discovered a sophisticated version of the same error' he had seen 'in 1914' (Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, p. 153). For his part, Brunner explicitly connects his understanding of the *Anknüpfungspunkt* to the missionary task of the church. See Emil Brunner, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie', *Zwischen den Zeiten* 7 (1929), pp. 255–76; Emil Brunner, 'Die Frage nach dem "Anknüpfungspunkt" als Problem der Theologie', *Zwischen den Zeiten* 10 (1932), pp. 505–32; Emil Brunner, *Natur und Gnade: Zum Gespräch mit Karl Barth* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934). In each case, Barth encountered a theological position that claimed mission as its ground and aim, but then sought to find a point of connection or continuity between God and the world. The liberal theologians found it in German civilization; Przywara in human consciousness and experience; Brunner in the faculty of reason. In response, Barth rendered a verdict in the form of, respectively, the 'No-God' in *Der Römerbrief* (1922), the 'invention of the antichrist' in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 1.1 (1932) and the famous *Nein* (1934).

lecture on mission in the present situation at the Brandenburg Mission Conference in Berlin on April 11, in which he criticized the German missiologist Bruno Gutmann for advocating the missionary analogue to the *analogia entis*. Barth found expressed in Przywara (explicitly) and in Gutmann (implicitly) the Thomistic axiom, 'gratia non destruit sed supponit et perficit naturam' (grace does not destroy but supports and perfects nature).<sup>101</sup> His mission lecture criticized both the German and Anglo-American missiologies for effectively positing 'the identity between Christ and one's own conception of Christ', such that 'Christ is absorbed into some conception of Christ and disappears'.<sup>102</sup> Barth has identified the basic imperialist-Constantinian logic that defines so much of the modern missionary movement, whereby the gospel (or Christ) is absorbed into culture (or one's view of Christ).

The heart of the issue, at this stage in his thinking, is the problem of the *Anknüpfungspunkt*, which becomes explicit at several points in the lecture. He states that 'the real point of connection does not reside in the realm and in the power of human language'. Whereas 'the relation between person and person, and thus the relation between the missionary and the heathen, is a continuous one, the relation between God and the human person, which is the concern in the church and in mission, is a discontinuous one', and therefore 'grace, wherever and however language might connect [*anknüpfen*] to it, is a wonder and not a bridge we build, and it is to be proclaimed as a wonder and not as elevated nature'.<sup>103</sup> The point is that the missiological debate is inseparable from larger questions about natural theology and the relation between creation and redemption; conversely, debates regarding those latter issues are always also missiological, even if only implicitly. If dialectical

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101 In his 1929 Dortmund lectures, Barth responds indirectly to Przywara by summarizing (and criticizing) the latter's position as follows: '“Gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam.” *Analogia entis*: thus each existing being as such and also we human beings as existing beings participate in the *similitudo Dei*. The experience of God is for us an inherent possibility and necessity.' See Karl Barth, 'Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie', in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925–1930* (Zürich: TVZ, 1994), pp. 344–92, here p. 364. In the 1932 Berlin lecture on mission, Barth writes:

Does not the arbitrariness of Gutmann's position betray itself in the lovely but theologically quite dubious onesidedness with which he and so many contemporaries can dare to make the article of creation into the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* [article on which the church stands or falls]? . . . Does not the truly ingenious Gutmann literature not read consistently as a single variation on the charming song of the old serpent: *Gratia non tollit sed supponit et perficit naturam*? (Barth, 'Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart', p. 211)

102 Barth, 'Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart', p. 211.

103 Barth, 'Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart', pp. 214–15. This is basically identical to the statement in *Der Römerbrief* (1922) quoted above, where Barth says that the 'connection (between person and person)' has to be clarified by the 'separation (between God and the person)' (Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (*Zweite Fassung*), p. 140).

theology is concerned with protecting the soteriological differentiation between God and the world, then dialectical theology is as such a theology of mission. Given all of this, we can describe this fourth stage neologically as *christological anti-connectionism* (i.e. anti-*Anknüpfungspunkt*). In this way we indicate that Barth was less directly concerned with the imperialist theopolitics of the German church and more concerned instead with the theological and philosophical presuppositions that make imperialist and colonialist activities possible.

Barth's christological anti-connectionism continued until the late 1930s, when his theology took its final and most significant turn. Until this point, his dialectical theology operated with an actualistic (or eschatological) soteriology, meaning that his doctrine of election located the moment of election in the present-tense event of faith. Election was actualistic in the sense that it was always decided anew in each moment and was thus coterminous with revelation. This actualistic understanding of salvation provided the basis for his anti-imperialist and anti-*Anknüpfungspunkt* accounts of mission: because election was never fixed – because it was always destabilizing the human person – it precluded the attempt to fix the gospel in terms of a particular cultural framework, philosophical conceptuality or view of nature. Barth began to rethink his doctrine of election after hearing Pierre Maury in 1936 at the International Calvin Congress in Geneva, though the change did not fully occur until 1939, when Barth began to lecture on the doctrine of election.<sup>104</sup> The result was a radically Christocentric soteriology, which relocated the event of election and reconciliation from the present-tense event of faith to the past-tense history of Jesus, from the eschatological moment of revelation to the protological decision of election. I cannot go into any detail here regarding the implications this had for Barth's understanding of mission, but it was evidently profound, given the substantial work he did on the topic in the fourth volume of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. For now it will suffice to observe that Barth replaced a consistently destabilizing theology with a theology stabilized in the person of Jesus Christ. This then allowed him to develop a more robust and positive account of mission, since it was no longer concerned primarily with opposing false accounts of mission. The result is that the triune God is essentially missionary in God's own eternal being (*in se*), and not merely in God's economic acts in history.<sup>105</sup> The God who sends Godself into the world in Christ correspondingly sends a community into the world in obedient service.<sup>106</sup> And because the mission of the community flows out of the mission of God, the community exists in an anti-imperial freedom from every cultural context that makes

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104 See Bruce L. McCormack, *Theologische Dialektik und kritischer Realismus: Entstehung und Entwicklung von Karl Barths Theologie 1909–1936* (Zürich: TVZ, 2006), pp. 21–2. Cf. Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 159–64.

105 See Flett, *The Witness of God*, pp. 198–211.

106 See Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols. (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A.G., 1932–70) [hereafter *KD*], §72.

it truly free *for* every context.<sup>107</sup> We can therefore name this final stage in his thinking a *Christocentric-trinitarian theology of mission*.

To conclude, this article has demonstrated the significance of mission in Barth's early years and the decisive role that the issue of mission played in his turn to dialectical theology, thanks in part to the Manifesto of the Twenty-Nine in September 1914. Taking this document as a key to the inner logic of Barth's theological program, we are able to interpret his entire life's work in terms of his understanding of the church's missionary task. What makes his theology dialectical is precisely the way it buttresses this task and protects it from new forms of cultural captivity. Initially, Barth approached mission in largely negative terms, as a rejection of the imperialist-colonialist theology of his liberal teachers; later he rejected the connectionist theology of his contemporaries that located the possibility of the church's mission in nature. It was only after revising his doctrine of election that he developed his own positive theology of mission. Throughout these developments, we can see that Barth is a consistently missionary – and thus dialectical – theologian. While this new interpretive angle will hopefully shed further light on other aspects of Barth's work, it also means that only those who are guided by and oriented toward the crosscultural and intercultural mission of God are genuinely developing dialectical theology today.<sup>108</sup>

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107 According to Barth, the community has a 'wonderful freedom' with respect to 'peoples, states, and other natural and historical associations and societies' (i.e., cultures), which gives it the '*freedom to adopt its own form*' within these contexts without 'identifying itself with any of them' (*KD* 4.3, p. 848). What remains constant is that the community of faith 'is a *confessing and missionary church*' (*KD* 4.3, p. 849). Cf. Flett, *The Witness of God*, p. 282.

108 I am grateful to John Flett, Travis McMaken and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any errors are my own.