Hearing the Word of God: The Language of Sound and the Preacher's Voice in Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex relationship between language, sound, and hearing in dialectical theology, a new paradigm in the field of early twentieth-century Protestant theology. In their attempt to overturn the then dominant liberal theology, dialectical theologians turned to a language of sound and hearing, which found its most elaborate form in the work of Karl Barth. Alongside their break with liberal theology, dialectical theologians also distanced themselves from the methods and findings of the humanities—especially their hermeneutical and rhetorical legacy, which had been very much embraced by liberal theology. Nevertheless, as Barth's sermon practices make evident, this legacy reemerged in the shape of traditional techniques and principles of rhetorical composition in Barth's late prison sermons. Moreover, the elocutionary style of preaching in these and probably some earlier sermons also reveals the impact of modern acoustic media on the ongoing relevance of the humanities for theological practice. This testifies to the close, yet often clandestine interconnection between theology and the humanities, and challenges histories of the humanities that do not account for their entanglement.

The *studia humanitatis* and the *studia divinitatis* are interconnected, so that we cannot have a true and complete knowledge of one without the other."[1] It was in 1406 that Coluccio Salutati thus asserted the mutual dependency of theology and the academic disciplines that would later be subsumed under "the

1. Coluccio Salutati to Frà Giovanni Dominici, winter 1406, in *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, vol. 4, ed. Francesco Novati (Rome: Tipografi del Senato, 1905), 216. Here and throughout, translations are mine unless otherwise attributed.

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humanities." Ironically, as a prominent promoter of the *studia humanitatis* (comprising grammar, history, poetry, rhetoric, and moral philosophy), Salutati himself played an important role in setting off a process often conceived of as a separation between the studies of the divine and the human realm. As a consequence, theology—once the undisputed "queen" of sciences—was allocated an ambiguous position within the field of academia, depending on geographical, historical, and scientific traditions. Whereas the Anglophone world mainly follows the early modern distinction and does not consider theology as one of the humanities,[2] the German category of *Geisteswissenschaften*—a negatively defined concept[3] that only emerged much later, but roughly maps onto the humanities—mostly includes theology. This ambiguity may be one of the reasons why the history of academic theology and its entanglements with humanities' disciplines have rarely been studied by historians of the humanities.

SKETCHING THE ROOTS OF AN ENTANGLED HISTORY

Taking up Salutati's words, this article calls for further research into what is still an unexplored field: the historical entanglements of academic theology and the humanities and the shifts in their relations over the centuries. The complex paths of their reciprocal intellectual exchange are not always made explicit by references or citations that would lay indebtedness open, but rather remain concealed or clandestine, yet their shared history does not conform to a logic of clear-cut separation or ever-increasing differentiation. Rather than attempting to fill this lacuna in the history of the humanities, I will confine myself to providing a very brief sketch of the historical roots of this relationship, before turning to Barth's theology and its own entanglements with the rhetorical legacy.

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2. Thus, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, in *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), see the decisive steps in "the transition from 'humanism' to 'the humanities'" in "the final *secularization* of humanist teaching" (168), "secularization" here referring to both a turn toward pragmatism in academic teaching and a break with scholastic theology, notably with sixteenth century Ramism. More recently, in Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn, eds., *The Making of the Humanities*, 3 vols (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010–14), theology is also not included among the humanities' disciplines. For James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), on the contrary, theology—or, more precisely, "biblical philology"—continues to impact the modern humanities, even after 1860.

3. Wilhelm Dilthey defined the *Geisteswissenschaften* as comprising all disciplines that are not (natural) sciences; see *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften: Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1883), 3–20.

The study of language and the disciplines concerned with it are vital for such an endeavor, since they have played a crucial role in the entangled history of theology and the humanities, from early modern times to recent years. In particular, this is the case with the rhetorical and hermeneutical traditions, which have themselves been closely interwoven since antiquity. Thus, ancient authors such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, to name only the most influential ones, conceived of rhetoric not as a mere set of methods, or a simple means to affect and persuade others by speech, but as a comprehensive theory of language and understanding. The conditions in which a (spoken) text was embedded or to which it owed its existence (situation, space, and time of the speaker and audience) were part of a general reflection, and the ancient rhetorical principle of appropriateness (the *préton* or *aptum*)—dependent upon the speaker's skill in judging (*iudicium*) the appropriateness of style, content, and affects, as well as their strategic combination—had to account for these conditions. Elements of the *aptum* included the excitement of emotions (*pathos*) in the public and the presentation of the speaker's own person (*ethos*), both of particular relevance in reaching such appropriateness.

When early modern hermeneutics was established as a key discipline for both the humanities and (Protestant) theology, it took up this rhetorical tradition in the endeavor to understand (written) texts according to the cultural, social, philological, or historical conditions and contexts. The modern "hermeneutic discipline," John Arthos writes, "emerged out of the womb of the rhetorical tradition and borrowed its idioms and imperatives from its older sibling."[4] The rhetorical legacy weighed heavily on the respective histories of theology and the humanities, as well as on their entanglements. And if the complex history of their relation is marked by various shifts, breaks, and discontinuities, and is too complex to be subsumed under one logic, the heritage of ancient rhetoric (and with it, hermeneutics) is a common thread running through this history.

As for the humanities, the study of music, art, or literature was deeply informed by rhetorical theories on figures, invention, and affects. And from the very beginning through the eighteenth century, the establishment and evolution of critical methodology in history and philology was deeply influenced by ancient rhetorical treatises. Thus, Salutati defines history as a subject of literature and emphasizes its close relation to rhetoric, and Giorgio da Trebisonda, in his *Rhetoricum libri V*, categorizes history as a subgenre of rhetoric.[5] Early eighteenth century literary criticism still referred to

4. John Arthos, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (London: Routledge, 2015), 466.

5. Coluccio Salutati to Juan Fernandez de Heredia, in *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, vol. 2, ed. Francesco Novati (Rome: Tipografi del Senato, 1893), 295; Giorgio da Trebisonda, *Rhetoricum libri quinque*, vol. 5 (1433; Paris: Christian Wechel, 1808), 169v–172v.

Quintilian as the key reference for what they called *ars critica*,[6] revealing the early Enlightenment as a "rhetorically defined culture of thinking, essentially taking up humanistic impulses."[7] Even when Enlightenment thinkers such as Johann Andreas Fabricius or Johann Christoph Gottsched made rhetoric into a subservient instrument of argument and reason, its influence did not vanish, but was rather transformed and differentiated, soaking into various cultural practices. Though it lost its central role in education, school curricula, and universities by the nineteenth century at the latest, rhetorical knowledge on affect reemerged as "Beredsamkeit (eloquence)" in romantic aesthetics and its "Gemütherregungskunst (art of affecting the tempers)."[8] Of particular interest for our concerns, Adam Müller's *Zwölf Reden über die Beredsamkeit und deren Verfall in Deutschland* aimed at reviving rhetoric as a broad cultural theory and practice of political importance that should take its inspiration from Christian faith: "a sacred, a Christian eloquence."[9]

As for theology, its disciplines also underwent the impact of historical and philological methods that established a dominant paradigm in early modern academia. Not only was the study of rhetoric a prerequisite to accessing the higher university faculties, such as theology: with Philip Melanchthon's *Elementorum rhetorices* and Matthias Flavius Illyricus's *Clavis scripturae sanctae* the transfer of the *productive* tasks of the orator into the *receptive* ones of the interpreter became, along with knowledge from the other trivium disciplines, the dominant method of understanding the divine word, by textual examination of the biblical scripture.

Following this brief overview of the intricate ways in which rhetorical and hermeneutical traditions influenced the respective histories of the humanities and of theology, the empirical study will now concentrate on a rather narrow historical setting, but one in which the relation of theology and the humanities—and the crucial role of language-concerned disciplines, sound, and hearing—comes to the fore. My examination of the ongoing, though clandestine influence of the humanities' rhetorical and hermeneutic legacy in early twentieth century theology tentatively sounds out a field of

6. See Fee-Alexandra Haase, "Ars Critica: Der Rhetoriklehrer Quintilian als Vorbild für Begriffe und Aufgaben von Kritik in neulateinischen Reden und Schriften Deutschlands im 18. Jahrhundert," in *Berichte zu Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 25 (2002): 41–49.

7. Gert Ueding and Bernd Steinbrink, *Grundriß der Rhetorik: Geschichte, Technik, Methode* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011), 102.

8. Novalis, *Aus den Fragmenten und Studien: 1799/1800*, in *Novalis: Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Munich: Hanser, 1978), 801.

9. Adam Müller, *Zwölf Reden über die Beredsamkeit und deren Verfall in Deutschland* (1816; Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1967), 188.

research that is still terra incognita, and points to possible paths for future studies. It does so through the prism of *Dialektische Theologie* (dialectical theology), a mainly Protestant academic movement in the German-speaking world that, in the aftermath of World War I, established a new and original position within theology, against the dominant paradigm of liberal theology, which had become established in the nineteenth century and was strongly influenced by humanities disciplines.

In the following section, I will examine how, in their attempt to reclaim the autonomy of theological reflection from humanities paradigms introduced by liberal theology, several dialectical theologians deployed a language of sound and hearing. The most elaborate theological model of such language is that of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), the best-known and most important protagonist of dialectical theology. Yet, the role of sound and hearing in Barth is paradoxical, as becomes evident in the last section of the article: in his late works, sound and hearing—or more precisely, the acoustic qualities of language in sermon practices and modern acoustic media—reintroduced the heritage of the humanities into dialectical theology, by smuggling in the rhetorical legacy from which Barth himself and others had wanted to free it. Even a theological position as critical of the humanities as Barth's dialectical theology could not avoid the legacy of their shared history: the histories of humanities and theology being interconnected, neither can be understood without the other.

HEARING IN DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY

In the second half of the nineteenth century, German-born liberal theology had become predominant in (Protestant) academic theology in most Western European countries and the United States. Although orthodox Lutherans or Calvinists held strong positions, and the thinking of the new free church, Pentecostal, and evangelical movements had gradually seeped into the discipline, liberal theologians held key positions in universities and held sway over the discourse in the subdisciplines of systematic (or dogmatic), exegetic, historical, and practical theology. Liberal theology encompassed different schools, embracing the Enlightenment's critical reason, religious studies, and other approaches embedded in the humanities disciplines, such as historical-critical or philological methodology—to the point, as orthodox theologians argued, of being swallowed up by the humanities and losing its own identity.

Challenging liberal theology and the entire field of theology, dialectical theology (mostly known as neo-orthodoxy in the anglophone world) emerged in the early twentieth century. Prefigured during World War I, it was to succeed in establishing a new, original position in this field during the interwar period, first among German-speaking scholars, but soon finding adherents in other countries, and would go on to influence both Protestant and Catholic theology substantially throughout the twentieth century.

Having initially embraced the liberal theology of their teachers, dialectical theology's most important thinkers, such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, Emil Brunner, and Eduard Thurneysen, both built upon and broke with the dominant liberal positions in theology, which conceived of faith as springing from, or at least manifesting itself in, the transcendental human subject and its faculties of reason, rational cognition, and ethical progression. For liberal theologians, the Christian God could not be found in the undisputed, eternal authority of dogma or Church traditions, but in the changing or progressing historical forms taken by religion, human personality, or culture; some also counted non-Christian religions and cultures as part of the progress toward faith and revelation.

Dialectical theology, in contrast, aimed to reconfigure the discipline, and to reestablish a theological thinking in its own right, by shifting the focus of theological reflection to the notion that faith comes from God alone—more precisely, from a God who is beyond human reach and cognition: the unknowable and ungraspable *deus absconditus*. Dialectical theologians denounced the notion that either human knowledge or religious ritual (Christian or other) could play a role in attaining faith and revelation. As Barth "dialectically" put it in his important 1922 essay "The Word of God as the Task of Theology": "As theologians, we ought to speak of God. But we are humans and as such cannot speak of God. We ought to do both, to know the 'ought' and the 'not able to,' and precisely in this way give God the glory. This is our plight. Everything else is child's play in comparison."[10] These words—Barth's thinking in a nutshell—make it clear that the momentum of dialectical theology comes more from a paradoxical despair (inspired by Kierkegaard) than from a Hegelian dialectics that could be resolved by some kind of sublation.[11] True faith springs from a dilemma that cannot be solved but must be endured.

Dialectical theologians also questioned the central importance their liberal colleagues assigned to the historical, critical analysis of biblical forms, styles, and genres, which was heavily indebted to hermeneutic methods and findings stemming from the humanities. Liberal theologians had turned to the study of the historical Jesus, examining Jesus's life as a historic person as distinct from his salvatory role as the Christ, which they saw grounded less in his miracles and deeds than in the ethical and theological truths that he proclaimed. They deemed those truths to be, at least partly, compatible with rational reason. The liberal theologian's job was to unwrap them from

10. Karl Barth, "The Word of God as the Task of Theology" (1922), in *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 177. The German original can be found in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe* [hereafter *KBGA*] (Zurich: TVZ, 1971), 19:151, which is also accessible via the digital Karl Barth Library (subscription only) at https://dkbl.alexanderstreet.com/.

11. See Sean A. Turchin, "Kierkegaard's Echo in the Early Theology of Karl Barth," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 17, no.1 (2012): 323–36.

their historical manifestation, using exegetical methods borrowed from philology and history, and then to transfer them to the present day: post-Enlightenment nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Proponents of dialectical theology would argue that this approach reduced the Christ to a mere historical figure, though they did not deny and mostly subscribed to the historical and critical methods established by liberal theology. The theologian's main task, however, lay elsewhere, far beyond historical hermeneutics.

It comes as no surprise that several dialectical theologians, in their attempt to overcome what they regarded as a theology reduced to the humanities, hermeneutics, and the Enlightenment, broke with the latter's inclination toward vision-based concepts, metaphors, or models, and instead turned to acoustic phenomena of sound and hearing.[12] Metaphorically or as a theoretical model, these were to emphasize the radical divide between the human and divine spheres and the complete otherness of the Word of God.[13] Friedrich Gogarten, for example, wanted theology to be concerned with *überhören*—listening over, not hearing—human voices, "in order to hear instead, in the silence beyond conversation, the voice of God."[14] This should not be mistaken for a kind of spiritual or mystical hearing, to which dialectical theology was as little inclined as to any knowledge of God based on dogma, tradition, or church authority. The kind of hearing Gogarten suggested was a highly abstract, some would say intellectual, gesture of humility and self-denial, without any sensory object.

Sound was also an important issue for Rudolf Bultmann, whose theological program of "existential interpretation" and "demythologizing" was, alongside Barth's stance, the second highly influential (and later, rival) position within dialectical theology.[15] When Bultmann called for theology to turn toward the believer's "historical situation," he did not—as one might have expected—regard Christian faith as primarily springing from a critical exegesis and reconstruction of the historical contexts of the biblical texts. Rather, argued Bultmann, the *kerygma* (the promulgation of the gospel) sent by God directly addresses the believer's *existential* situation. Faith, here, is not an enduring status, but something to be realized anew again and again. To emphasize this

12. I translate the German *Hören* as "hearing" (not "listening") in order to emphasize the absence of any human activity in dialectical theology's understanding of *Hören*, particularly in Barth.

13. On notions of hearing in modern theological thinking, see Ulrich Lincoln, *Die Theologie und das Hören* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

14. Friedrich Gogarten, "Die Entscheidung," *Zwischen den Zeiten: Eine Zweimonatsschrift* 1, no. 2 (1923): 34.

15. On the tensions among dialectical theologians, see D. Timothy Goering, "System der Käseplatte: Aufstieg und Fall der Dialektischen Theologie," in *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 24, no. 1 (2017): 1–50.

existential dimension in faith, Bultmann sets Greek vision against biblical hearing, arguing that "the historical situation cannot possibly be 'seen' in the Greek sense as an objective fact; it can only be heard as a summons."[16]

The most detailed reflections on theological acoustics, however, come from Barth. His concern with hearing led him to a theological theory of hearing in its own right, and he also addressed the linguistic relationship between hearing and the scriptural form of the biblical text, a problem that Bultmann and others mainly ignored.

BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF ACOUSTIC WITNESS

Barth's thoughts on hearing the Word of God, as well as his rejection of all human participation in the process of hearing, go beyond Bultmann. For Barth, the search for a new theology also meant the search for a new language—a language that would make it possible to reflect theologically upon and reemphasize the radical divide between *Gotteswort* (the Word of God) and *Menschenwort* (the human word). Any notion of faith as resulting from hermeneutical endeavor, an existential or psychological event, or individual or collective ritual was misleading, so he claimed, because the word of God radically transcends human comprehension: "The fact that [the Word of God] can be said and heard does not mean that it is put at the power and disposal of those who say and hear it. What it does mean is that since it is said and heard by them, it can make *itself* said and make *itself* heard."[17]

To understand this emphasis on the self-sufficiency of divine language, we must examine Barth's antihermeneutical hermeneutics. Barth distinguishes three steps in the hermeneutic process, *Hören* (hearing), followed by *Verstehen* (understanding), and, finally, *Exegesis* (interpretation).[18] This sequence does not imply a hierarchical order, since hearing is much more than a methodical precondition or first hermeneutical step; rather, it is a prolegomenon to hermeneutics that both precedes and transcends any process of "understanding" and "interpretation." To a certain degree, Barth was an antihermeneutical thinker, for whom the language of the divine word originates in, and ultimately always refers to, the inconceivable: "According to Scripture, His working is the working of His Word. . . . Everything distinct from that is directly or indirectly our own working. . . . There is no alternative: when we ask how a man comes to

16. Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 187.

17. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 1.2:469; translation emended. The German original can be found in Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* [hereafter *KD*] (Zurich: TVZ, 1932–67), 1.2:519.

18. Barth's hermeneutic principles are expounded in detail in *Church Dogmatics* 1.2:457–72 (*KD* 1.2:505–23).

hear the Word of God, to believe in Christ . . . at once we must turn back and point to the inconceivable, whose conceivability is obviously the question; and we must say that it is because of the inconceivable itself and as such, that it can become conceivable to men. The Word is what makes us hear the Word."[19] Barth does not regard the phenomenon of hearing as a closable semantic or semiotic process in which something is signified by something else (a concept by a sign, a signified by a signifier), but rather, to quote Ulrich Lincoln, as a "bodily medium in which something becomes present or makes itself present. . . . Hearing proves to be an *absolutely transparent medium*."[20]

For Barth, the Word of God and the human word are two profoundly separate systems of language that do not directly communicate with each other: the Word of God is entirely closed off from the word of man, being circular, self-contained, and autopoietic. This is what Barth means when he says that "only God Himself can speak of God" and denies any "possibility that God himself speaks when the human speaks of him," whether in existentialist, dialectical, or other theological languages. This possibility "is not contained in the dialectical way as such. It arises where even this way *comes to an end*."[21]

In terms of both theology and linguistics, this is a very radical and original position. Theologically, it breaks with the powerful orthodox Lutheran dogma regarding the Christian *Menschenwort* and the "transubstantial" theory of language, which goes back to Luther himself, according to whom "our text, 'This is my body,' etc. comes not from men but from God himself, spoken by his own lips and set down in these very letters and words."[22] Linguistically, Barth's conception of human language foreshadows structuralist and deconstructionist notions. His idea that the human word belongs to the realm of earthly illusion and error, mistaking worldly representation for divine presence and denying the separation from which it springs, evokes Derrida's later thinking on *différance*.[23] So does Barth's understanding of the text as a witness or trace that cannot in reality make its object or referent present. Contrary to Derrida, however, Barth's witness originates in an acoustic phenomenon. Barth says that human language, even the biblical word, has no way of evoking the presence of the Word of God. This is where he introduces the concept of acoustic witness, in order to avoid the Bible (which originates in God) being identified with the Word of God. For Barth,

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19. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.2:247; translation emended (*KD* 1.2:270).

20. Lincoln, *Theologie*, 167; emphasis added.

21. Barth, "Word of God," 196 and 194.

22. Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528), in *Word and Sacrament III*, trans. and ed. Robert H. Fischer, Luther's Works 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 304.

23. See Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

the unique status of the Bible's written text results from its being *heard*: "Holy Scripture is the record of a unique hearing of a unique call and a unique obedience to a unique command, which is why it was able to become the Canon, and again and again it can become the living Canon, the proclaimer of revelation, the call and command of God, God's Word to us."[24]

Only when it is kept in mind—or rather, in the ear—that this "record of a unique hearing" is not the Word of God can the hearing of the written word become a revelation of the Word of God: "If what we hear in Holy Scripture is witness, a human expression of God's revelation, then . . . what we hear in the witness itself is more than witness, what we hear in the human expression is more than a human expression. What we hear is revelation, and therefore the very Word of God."[25] The Bible is *not* the Word of God. It is the written trace of that Word and of its divine sound, and before and beyond all hermeneutic attempts to understand that written trace, it is the linguistic constellation of differing—or différance—of which, according to Barth, the Bible speaks.

Barth's theological reflections on language thus reveal structures that would later be subject to structuralist, poststructuralist, and deconstructionist studies in the humanities. Even though explicit reference from either side has not been found to date,[26] sounding out such clandestine connections promises to be fruitful for the history of the humanities, which—like the history of science—has hitherto largely neglected academic theology. This could inspire further research on crosslinks and circulations between theology and the humanities that goes beyond well-known cases such as the influence of Jewish theological thinking or Christian negative theology on Derrida or Levinas.

Conversely, a deconstructionist approach helps us to explore Barth's work on language and sound, as I will demonstrate in the following. Going beyond a history-of-ideas approach and introducing methods from practice theory, media history, and literary deconstruction, the next section examines sermon practices and the influence of new media on Barth's use of sound, and asks how these sound-historical contexts reintroduced a rhetorical knowledge preserved by the humanities into dialectical theology—which is to say, into a theological position that applied notions of sound precisely as a way of buttressing its antihumanities claim.

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24. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1:115; translation emended (*KD* 1.1:118).

25. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2:473 (*KD* 1.2:523).

26. This is also affirmed by Philipp Stoellger, "Barth und die Postmoderne: Perspektiven auf eine prekäre Konstellation," in *Karl Barths Theologie als europäisches Ereignis*, ed. Martin Leiner and Michael Trowitzsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 399–400.

THE "ARDUOUSNESS OF PREACHING": DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY'S ANTIRHETORICAL HOMILETICS

Barth often described the crisis that gave birth to dialectical theology as twofold: the external, political crisis of his teachers' ethical and theological bankruptcy during World War I, and his own internal, theological crisis. Both can be dated to 1914. At that time, Barth was based in Safenwil, a small Swiss town with a high percentage of poor textile-industry workers, where he worked as a pastor from 1911 to 1921. The war, his congregation's misery, and theological scruples left him increasingly critical not only of his teachers' involvement in producing propaganda, but more generally of a Protestantism that supported state policies and capitalist structures. Throughout his life, Barth remained a politically committed, decidedly leftist theologian.[27]

As for his inner crisis, the first textual traces of Barth's turn from liberal theology to what would become dialectical theology appear in five sermons he gave in Safenwil in summer 1914, shortly before the outbreak of war.[28] In them, he struggles with the question of how to give voice to a Word for which humans have no language—a question that permeated Barth's academic theological work, but also tormented him when preaching to his congregation. For Barth, preaching was not a mere working routine that he was obliged to perform every week at Safenwil, nor was it simply a translation of his more abstract theological reflections into practice when he took the pulpit as a professor in Göttingen from 1922 on.[29]

Barth placed service and sermon at the center of his theological endeavor, a reverence shared by Luther, Schleiermacher, and other famous Protestant theologians. And if his break with existing theologies arose from a desperate struggle to find a language for the Word of God, that struggle itself originated in a desperate struggle to preach, to find a way of putting the Word of God into the human words of a sermon. In a letter of December 11, 1921, when he was already a professor at Göttingen, he confessed: "Last night, till 2.15 a.m., I experienced the whole arduousness of preaching [*Predigtverlegenheit*] again, and it's probably a good thing for me to be immersed in this purgatory

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27. In the 1930s, already a central figure in Protestant theology, Barth refused to pledge allegiance to Hitler, lost his professorship, returned to Switzerland, and participated in Protestant opposition to the Nazis. He was one of the founders of the Confessing Church, the group resisting the nationalist "German Christian" majority who willingly accepted and promoted the alignment of German Protestantism with the Nazi regime. Barth authored the Confessing Church's founding document, the *Barmer Erklärung*.

28. For a detailed theological analysis, see Axel Denecke, *Gotteswort als Menschenwort: Karl Barths Predigtpraxis—Quelle seiner Theologie* (Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), 78–96.

29. On the importance of Barth's preaching for his theology, see Denecke, *Gotteswort*; Hartmut Genest, *Karl Barth und die Predigt: Darstellung und Deutung von Predigtwerk und Predigtlehre Karl Barths* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1995).

from time to time so as to remember what it's like."[30] Barth's painful *Predigtverlegenheit* implied a struggle with language that was "both theologically and existentially distressing," as Axel Denecke notes, and was a key impulse for his theological endeavors, "giving rise to his need to search for a new language and a new theology."[31]

This search for a new language presupposed a break, not only with the academic language of the liberal theologians, but also with the rhetorical and hermeneutical practices of their homiletics. The romantic revival of rhetorical tradition and Adam Müller's call for "Beredsamkeit [eloquence]" had also resonated with Protestant theology, and Müller himself was strongly inspired by Christian thinking, notably in the person of his friend Franz Theremin, theologian and later preacher at the Prussian court, who authored a book on eloquence himself: *Die Beredsamkeit eine Tugend, oder Grundlinien einer systematischen Rhetorik*. Liberal theology—its commitment to rationality, critical reason, and enlightenment notwithstanding—also took up this call. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, its founding figure, had become famous for his preaching in the Berlin *Dreifaltigkeitskirche*, with his eloquence in line with his claim to give his enlightened hermeneutic approach to theology also a sensory and affective dimension. Yet, famously lampooned as a "theology of rhetoric" by August Friedrich Christian Vilmar in 1857, as opposed to a "theology of deed [*Theologie der Thatsachen*]," [32] liberal theology was also accused of reducing theology to questions of rhetoric and hermeneutics.

A similar attack on liberal theology and its rhetorical legacy issues from Eduard Thurneysen, Barth's close friend and co-campaigner, when he reminds the preacher: "The word, too, the human word must be crucified, must be given to death, if the Word of all words, the Word of God, shall speak to us. . . . For, the word does not last, it passes away, and must be stripped from its uncanny psychic intrinsic force, must be buried, lest it get in the way of the Word of God. . . . Therefore, first precept: no eloquence!"[33] This also applies to the prosody and elocutionary style of the sermon: "Where God is promulgated, the poor endeavors of human rhetoric die away, the word is *not* at hand there, since, when speaking, one is harkening, sighing, searching and looking for that wholly other Word, which is never and nowhere at men's disposal, because it is the Word of God alone. Where this secret sighing and searching for the Word of God does

30. *KBGA* 4:18.

31. Denecke, *Gotteswort*, 136.

32. August Friedrich Christian Vilmar, *Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik: Bekenntnis und Abwehr* (Marburg: Elwert'sche Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1856).

33. Eduard Thurneysen, "Die Aufgabe der Predigt," in *Das Wort Gottes und die Kirche: Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1920–21; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971), 100–101.

not go through a sermon, becoming perceptible precisely in such *restraint* [*Verhaltenheit*] of speech . . . there the sermon has been of no value."[34]

That this is geared toward liberal theology and its homiletics of understanding becomes clear with a second warning: "Along with the warning against eloquence comes the other one, against empathy with the so-called listener's requirements. The sermon does not struggle to understand man, but to understand God."[35] And in the foreword to their 1935 collection of sermons, Barth and Thurneysen reaffirmed this antirhetorical stance: "Adolf Schlatter . . . has said it is his burning desire for the Church to cleanse its proclamation of all kinds of rhetoric. This is why he always had to refrain from 'pulpit oratory.' We must take up this concern."[36]

THE RETURN OF RHETORIC IN BARTH'S LATE JAILHOUSE SERMONS

During his later work as a professor of theology (after Göttingen, he held professorships in Münster, Bonn, and Basel), Barth preached less often, and the impact of his later preaching practices on his theological work perhaps did not equal that of his work in Safenwil. Yet Barth's academic teaching, scholarly writing, and preaching continued to inspire each other. This applies to another—his last—theological turnaround as well. Having moved, in a second turn, around 1930, toward a more Christological orientation, which also marked his magnum opus, *Church Dogmatics*, the third, and last turn took place after 1940 and was most clearly formulated in his 1956 lecture "The Humanity of God."[37] Whereas in his early, fundamental turn after World War I, Barth had accused liberal theologians of having made man "great at the cost of God," as he would retrospectively put it, he now took issue with his own lopsided attempt to make God great at the cost of man: "the *humanity* of God did not quite come into its rights in the manner in which we . . . lifted up His deity."[38] But Barth's turn to the humanity of God is less a return to the liberal theologians' position than an evolution in his dialectical theology—for, he insisted, the humanity of God could come only from God.

Did this turn to humanness also imply a return to the humanities? Despite Barth's admission that "in the religionism, the anthropocentrism, the ill-fated humanism of

34. Ibid., 101–2.

35. Ibid., 102.

36. Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, in *KBGA* 31:654. Schlatter (1852–1938) was a Swiss theologian.

37. Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God," trans. John Newton Thomas, in *The Humanity of God* (1956; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 37–65.

38. Ibid., 39 and 44.

the earlier [i.e., liberal] theology, there might have been something at work that could not be given up,"[39] there is little evidence that he knowingly turned to the humanities. If they pervade Barth's work, this was mainly the result of practical and media-related issues, related to the rhetorical composition and acoustical performance of sermons, as I will now show.

The turn to the humanity of God is manifested in the sermons Barth delivered between 1954 and 1964 to a very particular congregation: the prisoners in the Basel jail. Barth held twenty-eight sermons there after the only lengthy pause in his preaching practice; he had not taken the pulpit since 1947. His decision to preach to this audience—not without recalling that "we people outside . . . in our own way are one and all prisoners as well"[40]—is of some interest with regard to the sounds of language, or, more precisely, to the different media by which language becomes voice. As in Safenwil, this was a congregation mainly composed of less privileged, socially marginalized groups, men who were likely to hear Barth's words not as explanations of a theological system nor, even worse, as the voice of the theological "star" he had become, but hopefully as a message addressed to them by God. It was an exclusive circle in that it ruled out an audience interested only in hearing Barth.

There is a second special aspect of these sermons, though, which makes it possible for others "outside" to hear Barth: two of them were recorded on audio, and one of the recordings was broadcast by Swiss and German radio stations.[41] Whereas most of Barth's sermons have survived only as textual manuscripts or transcriptions,[42] the recordings offer us a source for tracing Barth's struggle not only to find a language for the Word of God, but also quite literally to give it voice and tone.

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39. Ibid., 44.

40. Karl Barth, "What Remains," in *Call for God*, trans. A. T. Mackay (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 65 (*KBGA* 12:209).

41. The August 6, 1961 sermon on John 4:18 was recorded and pressed on vinyl shortly thereafter; Karl Barth, *Gottesdienst in der Strafanstalt* (Zurich: EVZ, 1961). The Christmas Eve sermon of 1963 was broadcast by Radio Beromünster and Süddeutscher Rundfunk; recordings of this broadcast were sold as audio cassette tapes only much later; Karl Barth, *Aber seid getrost! Weihnachtspredigt in der Strafanstalt* (Zurich: TVZ, 1979).

42. Barth's textual basis for preaching changed significantly over his lifetime. In his early years, he would write out the entire text, which he then learned by heart. See *KBGA* 53:x, xiv. For his later sermons, he prepared only outlines with keywords, giving his sermons a much more improvised quality. The published texts of these sermons are based on transcribed stenographs made by his assistant and close collaborator Charlotte von Kirschbaum (who had also become Barth's lover and moved into his house to live with him and his wife), revised by Barth before printing. See *KBGA* 12:x–xi. For the broadcast sermons, Barth exceptionally used a manuscript he had entirely written out, which differs significantly from the spoken version (see the two versions in *KBGA* 12:242–51 and 296–305).

In his late sermons, Barth developed a new homiletic style that broke with the customary exegesis of a longer Bible passage he had usually applied before. Now, he tended to base his sermon on one, mostly short, sentence from the Scriptures, which he then explained, often word by word. This aphoristic style is used in all his prison sermons from the early 1960s. And, despite his former embrace of Schlatter's "burning desire to have the Church's proclamation cleansed from any kind of rhetoric," it serves rhetorical principles defined by the five *officia oratoris* of *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *actio* or *pronuntiatio*.[43]

In a sermon on New Year's Eve 1962, Barth explicitly states that the short verse from 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is enough," has the advantage of being easily memorized by the audience: "My dear friends, that is a very short text—only four words—I think it is the shortest on which I have ever preached. The advantage of this is that you can remember it all the better. It is, by the way, my most important concern, each time I am permitted to be here, that the word from the Bible should stick in your minds and stay with you afterwards rather than my sermon."[44] Here, the shortness of the Bible verse serves the *memoria*—not of the speaker, but of the public; in addition, by privileging "the word of the Bible" over his own sermon, Barth underlines his rhetorical *ethos* as a humble servant of God, addressing feelings (*pathos*) of sympathy and trustworthiness in his audience.

Another rhetorical principle he applies in his sermons is the rhetorical figure of *repetition*. If Quintilian, in his *Institutio oratoria*, critically reviews the techniques of rhetorical *loci et imagines*, and instead favors the mnemotechnical mechanisms of segmentation and constant repetition,[45] Barth also praises repetition to help the listener keep the Word in mind, or almost learn it by heart. The Bible passage for his 1963 Christmas Eve sermon comes from John 16:33—"In the world you face anxiety; but take heart, I have conquered the world"—and each of the three parts of the verse is repeated in a particular manner.[46] In the first eight paragraphs, Barth repeats "I have conquered the world," which introduces paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5 and closes paragraph 6, twelve times (in paragraph 4, it is even repeated five times); he then moves on to "In the world you face anxiety," which is repeated eight times, exactly as often as he repeats the phrase "but take heart" in the concluding paragraphs. Here, the rhetorical

43. These *officia oratoris* go back to the Roman teachers of rhetoric, notably Cicero's *De oratore* and *De inventione*, as well as to Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.

44. Karl Barth, "What Is Enough," in *Call for God*, trans. A. T. Mackay (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 78 (*KBGA* 12:220).

45. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* (Leipzig: Halm, 1868), bk. 11, chap. 2, 27–35.

46. Karl Barth, "But Take Heart," in *Call for God*, trans. A. T. Mackay (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 105–15 (*KBGA* 12:242–51).

principle of *repetitio* is—like the aphoristic style—meant to foster the *memoria* of the word not only by the orator, but also and primarily by the listener.[47]

The same technique of repetition is used in the 1960 New Year's Eve prison sermon on Psalm 31:15 ("My time is secure in your hands"). There, the quoted phrase is repeated twelve times. Barth highlights repetition as a homiletic tool when he picks up the view of time evoked in the Bible verse and applies it to a scheme of repetition that he then turns into a suggestion:

> How would it be, if we—each man and woman among us—tonight, before we went to sleep, were to say once more to God, aloud or softly, what we have heard just now: "My time is secure in your hands"? If that were our last act in the old year, then its ending would be marked by our telling the truth. For this is the truth! "My time is secure in your hands!," and God is waiting for us to tell the truth at last—even in this last hour. . . . And how would it be, if, tomorrow morning, when we awaken, we were to say, again aloud or softly, exactly the same thing: "My time is secure in your hands"?[48]

Barth's repetition technique closely corresponds to something his close friend Eduard Thurneysen gave the theological name of *Nach-Sprechen*, or "vocal imitation" (literally, speaking-after). Through such vocal imitation, the speaker was to break with the belief in the human power of speech and be "commandeered" by the Word of God. The human word of the sermon "must let itself be usurped; it must let itself be governed by this alien Spirit and Word. It must be a repetition [*Nach-Sprechen*]; it must repeat only this alien Word which is never engendered by our own spirit and its natural articulation."[49]

The homiletical principle of vocal imitation resonated with more than the rhetorical tradition of *repetitio*. Since the 1880s, psychological research on auditory memory and memory of word sounds had become interested in repetition and seriality.[50] Although there is no evidence that Barth acknowledged that development, his favoring of repeated hearing does draw on the new possibilities offered by the sound media of

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47. The history of theologically inspired scholarly reflections on the role of memory and time in the process of hearing goes back to Augustine, *De musica*, bk. 6.

48. Karl Barth, "My Time Is Secure in Your Hands," in *Call for God*, trans. A. T. Mackay (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 46 (*KBGA* 12:185).

49. Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, trans. Jack A. Worthington and Thomas Wieser (1946; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1962), 107.

50. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metter with Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 206–64; Viktoria Tkaczyk, "Hochsprache im Ohr," in *Wissensgeschichte des Hörens in der Moderne*, ed. Netzwerk Hör-Wissen im Wandel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 139–48.

his day. We know that Barth was a passionate user of modern sound recording devices. A great lover of music, particularly by his favorite composer Mozart, he used these devices every day to acoustically attune himself to the voice of God: "I confess that thanks to the invention of the phonograph, which can never be praised enough, I have for years and years begun each day with Mozart, and only then (aside from the daily newspaper) turned to my *Dogmatics*."[51] In a letter to his son, Christoph Barth, he describes a newly purchased gramophone as the "central piece of furniture" in his home.[52]

I will say more about the impact of media practices on Barth's theology later on. First, however, the artful linking of theological content and the rhetorical principles of *actio* or *pronuntiatio* (in antiquity, both terms had long been used synonymously, before the latter was reserved for articulation), as they become manifest in Barth's vocal performance, merits consideration. What did this voice sound like, what was its tone? A "close listening" to the recording of the 1963 Christmas Eve sermon will help us answer these questions.[53] My approach is related to Anette Hoffmann's method of "close listening," as an "attempt to grasp as many as possible of the audible features of a recording," including "the features of the voice of the speaker . . . accent, pauses, background noises—in short, everything one can hear on a recording,"[54] but I focus less on the contrast between written script and spoken recording (with the archival politics that implies) than on the neglected *vocal* dimension of preaching and its elocutionary style.

The structure of the sermon—or, to put it in rhetorical terms, the *dispositio*—gives a first hint. Barth decomposes the three-part Bible verse ("In the world you face anxiety; but take heart, I have conquered the world"), placing the last part first and ending on the second part. By beginning with the evangelical message, he emphasizes the divine origin of the Word he is about to pass on, and by ending with "take heart," he gives the sermon a consolatory and conciliatory tone. The main part of the sermon (on the middle term, "In the world you face anxiety") deals with the dialectics of fear

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51. Karl Barth, "A Testimonial to Mozart" (1955), in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdman, 1986), 16. The German original refers to a *Grammophon*, not a phonograph.

52. [Karl] Barth to [Christoph] Barth, June 23, 1949, cited in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf: Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (Munich: Kaiser, 1986), 376.

53. A digital version of the recording of the entire service can be listened to at the online archive "Sound & Science: Digital Histories" at https://soundandscience.de/node/2461. In the analysis that follows, I will provide time indications in minutes (′) and seconds (″) in order to facilitate finding the respective passage in the recording (the overall duration of which is 57′36″). Please see also *KBGA* 12:242–51 (for the manuscript of the sermon) and 12:296–305 (for the verbatim transcript of the sermon, as spoken by Barth).

54. Anette Hoffmann, "Introduction: Listening to Sound Archives," *Social Dynamics* 41, no. 1 (2015): 75.

or tribulation and solace or good cheer, according particular attention to the notion of quietness or rest (*Ruhe*).

We find this same consolatory and gentle tone of rest in the prosody of Barth's voice—its rhythm, tempo, and timbre.[55] On the recording, Barth speaks in a low voice, generally slowly and calmly. This gives his speech a continuous note of seriousness and sincerity, with a sparing use of humor and irony that avoids over-solemnity. Barth repeatedly addresses his prison audience directly, for example, by evoking the fear of being alone on Christmas Eve or by using the familiar second-person pronouns *du* and *euch*. This gives his sermon a dialogical tone, which is undergirded by his neither extraordinarily strong nor suppressed regional accent.[56] Remarkably, he sometimes introduces small breathing pauses between words or between sentences. Though this may be partly an effect of his age, he skillfully uses it for phrasing purposes.[57] We might conjecture that some listeners may have interpreted it as articulating a kind of wonderment, or even as an attempt to hear something from the realm of transcendence. Though this is something we can only speculate about, it is suggested by a certain hesitancy, at times giving way to serene assertion.

Barth's prosodic style and oral articulation avoid the famous "pulpit tone"—the ostentatiously passionate, declamatory vocalization of earlier centuries. Yet here and there, in a measured way, he shifts to a more emphatic and dramatic style,[58] the one we find more often in his academic lectures.[59] Tellingly, the 1963 radio sermon uses an emphatic tone when discussing the human realm of the Church as being called by Christ, in particular when emphasizing the call's acoustic qualities: "he did not whisper it privately into your ear, or yours, or yours, or mine, But take heart. No, it is a trumpet blast: But take heart!"[60] Here, his voice rises in volume, and the word "trumpet blast"

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55. I am grateful to Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus for listening to Barth's sermon and discussing it with me, and for helpful hints regarding its prosody. On the changing historical forms of elocution and speech art, see Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, *Stimme und Sprechkünste im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2001).

56. The dialogical tone can be heard at https://soundandscience.de/node/2461, 43′11″–44′56″; 34′32″–34′55″.

57. These pauses are particularly pronounced in the introductory address to his prison and radio audiences, 08′05″–10′20″, and in the beginning of his sermon, 10′20″–12′49″.

58. For example, at 19′33″–20′48″, or at 45′50″–46′53″.

59. For example, the recordings of his opening talk at the constitutive plenary session of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948; Karl Barth-Archiv Basel (hereafter KBA) no. 9193.2.

60. The emphatic tone can be listened to at https://soundandscience.de/node/2461, 41′24″–41′43.″ The passage is included in the transcript at *KBGA* 12:303, though not in the published version of the sermon and therefore also not in the English translation.

(*Trompetenstoß*) is emphasized by a strong, loud accent on the second and last syllable, with a similar accent on the word immediately following.

This and other momentary dramatizations combine with Barth's generally nonemphatic prosody to create a balanced elocutionary style—supporting Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus's refutation of the allegedly sharp break from passionate to dispassionate styles of speaking in German politics, theater, and poetry recitals after 1945. A more accurate analysis, Meyer-Kalkus argues, would reveal a more diversified use of pathos and a complex interplay of continuities and discontinuities: the "simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous, of various styles, schools, and traditions."[61]

Unfortunately, there are no recordings of Barth's earlier sermons, and we can therefore only conjecture that he embraced a similarly differentiated prosodic and elocutionary style much earlier than the 1960s and adopted a consolatory and conciliatory vocal tone as early as the 1930s. But there are some hints that should make us refrain from explaining his voice on the later recordings as simply and directly caused by his turn toward humanness, as a purely "outer" expression resulting from his "inner" theological stance. These hints lead us to Barth's sermons of the 1930s, and to the impact of the new radio medium on vocal transmission of the Word of God.

HIS WORD ON THE AIR

It was in the mid-1930s that Barth's preaching voice was first heard on the air. He seems to have hesitated for a long time, although not because he was skeptical of the modern technology of the radio. Just as he cherished the gramophone, Barth was a willing and regular, though certainly also critical, user of the medium throughout his life, as evidenced in a letter to his son Markus dated August 16, 1937: "The weather has changed here, too, but I'll still take the horse out again tomorrow. It has the peculiar vice that it refuses on any account to gallop. This reminds me of two horrible radio sermons we heard on Sunday."[62]

Rather than from a rejection of the medium, Barth's reluctance to broadcast his sermons arose from his opposition to the censorship affecting Swiss radio.[63] This censorship was part of a politically conservative and antimodernist program of "intellectual

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61. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, "Between Pathos and Its Atrophy: The Art of Elocution in Germany after 1945," *Passions in Context* 1 (2010), https://www.passionsincontext.de/index.php/?id=779.

62. Karl Barth to Markus Barth, August 16, 1937, KBA no. 9237.144. In a program on the Catholic and Reformed radio sermon, however, he finds that neither Protestant nor Catholic sermons can generally be complained about. Undated audio recording, KBA no. 9160.2.

63. See Constanze Jecker, *SendungsBewusstsein: Kirchliche Kriegskommunikation und die Anfänge der Radio-Predigten in der Schweiz 1925–1945* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2009), 109.

and spiritual defense of the nation" (*Geistige Landesverteidigung*) that aimed to counter both fascist and communist political extremism and to bridge social rifts by reinforcing Swiss symbols, heroes, and values, including Christianity. Few intellectuals openly opposed the political program of spiritual defense, and the most celebrated of those who did was Karl Barth, some of whose texts had already been declared politically dangerous. In September 1937, Alphons Koechlin, president of the domestic missionary association Schweizerischer Verband für Innere Mission und evangelische Liebestätigkeit (responsible for choosing speakers for the Swiss Protestant Church and guaranteeing their neutrality on radio), did his best to make Barth change his mind.[64] In the end, he succeeded and Barth agreed to broadcast his first sermon.[65]

Unfortunately, there is no recording of the 1937 radio sermon, nor of a second sermon that was aired by the nationwide Swiss broadcaster SRG in 1939.[66] For an impression of how his voice might have sounded at the time, we have to resort to two types of indirect sources. First, the Barth Archives in Basel hold three letters he received from his "radio congregation" in response to the 1937 radio sermon. On December 13, L. Zingt-Klingenberg wrote: "Yesterday's radio sermon impelled me to write these lines. I looked forward to the program like a child before Christmas & today can only thank you sincerely for giving us the opportunity to hear your words so vividly."[67] A Mr. Bärklin tells Barth in a letter dated December 14: "My wife sends best wishes too. She was very uplifted by your radio sermon on Sunday."[68] While in this case, it is not clear whether Mrs. Bärklin's affective reaction comes from the content of the sermon or its vocal performance—or from both—another letter of June 10, 1939, in which a couple also refers to the 1937 radio sermon, plainly describes their emotional response to Barth's rhetorical *ethos*: "We already had the pleasure of hearing a sermon of yours on the radio, and even then I was struck by the great awe with which you spoke to God in your prayer. The same today, & since then I have prayed to him with greater awe as well."[69] "Vividly," "uplifted," "awe"—these characterizations do not enable a clear reconstruction of

64. Alphons Koechlin to Karl Barth, Basel, September 17, 1937, KBA no. 9337.569, 1.

65. Karl Barth to Alphons Koechlin, Bergli, Oberrieden, September 22, 1937, KBA no. 9237.174.

66. There is an important difference between those two early radio sermons: only the 1937 sermon is a radio sermon in its own right; it was produced exclusively for radio and read in the Basel studios of the SRG. The 1939 sermon was the transmission of one delivered by Barth on June 11, 1939, at the Martinskirche, Basel. See *KBGA* 26:162.

67. L. Zingt-Klingenberg to Karl Barth, Gattwil, December 13, 1937, KBA no. 9337.684.

68. Bärklin to Karl Barth, Bern, December 14, 1937, KBA no. 9337.691.

69. G. and H. [?] to Karl Barth, Bern, June 10, 1939, KBA no. 9339.375.

Barth's voice, but they hardly refer to an overly declamatory, dramatizing, or vehement tone.[70]

A second source supports that assumption. In his guidelines for speakers on Swiss radio, Kurt Schenker advises manuscripts to be composed for "easy pronunciation."[71] A radio talk should be "composed such that it is easily grasped . . . [and] have a clear and simple arrangement. . . . The easier, more transparent, and less complicated the language, the less effort the listener will have to make in order to follow the unfamiliar line of thought."[72] Schenker also notes the "clear articulation," "moderate tempo," and "greater use of pauses" that the microphone requires: "At the microphone, the pace should neither race nor dawdle. . . . Even more than before a live audience, insert breathing pauses, which both stop the speaker from talking monotonously and spasmodically and give the listener a moment to relax."[73]

The characteristics of Barth's voice and elocutionary style—his low, unhurried, dialogical tone, structured by breathing pauses—clearly match Schenker's guidelines, which Barth was, in all probability, asked to respect when he stepped in front of the microphone at the SRG's Basel studio in 1937. The letters also suggest that he did not merely mechanically adhere to the guidelines but engaged with and adopted them while creating his own radio rhetoric, in line with the requirements of the *aptum* (which, according to Cicero and Quintilian, requires a special skill or taste on the part of the speaker).[74] In this sense, Barth's tone of voice in the 1960s articulates more than an expression or consequence of his theological turn to the humanity of God: it also testifies to a skilled incorporation of the pragmatic affordances of radio speech that he had become acquainted with much earlier.

What is more, these affordances also resonate with Barth's and Thurneysen's rhetorical homiletics of *Nach-Sprechen* or *repetitio*, since the redundancy compensated for a particular deficiency of the new medium: whereas sound recording devices such as the gramophone offered the opportunity to stop and repeat what had been heard, radio did not. As Schenker reminds his radio speakers: "It is impossible for the listener to hear the passage he did not understand again. . . . Nor can the listener think over a

70. On the pulpit as a refuge for the "centuries-old tradition of rhetoric" and the polemic against "declamation," as opposed to individual, "natural style," see Meyer-Kalkus, *Stimme und Sprechkünste*, 224–28 and 234–45.

71. Kurt Schenker, *Richtlinien und Bedingungen für Vortragende im Schweizerischen Rundspruch* (Bern: Schweizerische Rundspruchgesellschaft, 1933), 1.

72. Ibid., 2–3.

73. Ibid., 5.

74. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De oratore: Über den Redner*, trans. and ed. Theodor Nüßlein (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2007), bk. 3, chap. 14, 52–chap. 15, 56; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, bk. 11, chap. 1.

statement again during the talk, since otherwise he will lose the thread of what follows. This means that a radio talk must be so easy to grasp that the listener is left with a clear, unambiguous picture, or a definite impression."[75] This echoes with the terms of Barth's rhetorical homiletics of the 1960s, in which the mnemotechniques of repetition and the aphoristic style was meant to help the biblical Word "stick in your minds and stay with you afterwards."[76]

The analysis of Barth's recorded voice from the 1960s brings out theology's ongoing dependency on rhetoric. The legacy of rhetoric resurfaced in Barth's practice of structuring the sermons (*dispositio*), in his homiletics of vocal imitation (*memoria* or *repetitio*), and in his elocution (the *pronuntiatio*). My close listening also shows that elocution styles in German after 1945 did not necessarily abandon passionate declamation, but applied it in more nuanced ways than before. Nor does the "tableau of a dominance of false pathos [from] the last third of the nineteenth century until 1945" that prevails in German scholarship on declamation match Barth's sermons from the 1930s,[77] as is suggested by the letters Barth received from listeners and the advice he presumably acquired from Schenker's guidelines.

CONCLUSION

This examination of Barth's theological endeavors has shown, first, that his dialectical theology, though firmly rejecting the humanities and its hermeneutical and rhetorical legacy, was haunted by this same legacy, in the form of rhetorical principles and practices that he wanted theology to abolish. The subliminal entanglement of rhetorical and theological issues in Barth's preaching practices is evidence of the ongoing interconnection of the *studia humanitatis* and the *studia divinitatis* and demonstrates the need for further research in the history of humanities on the mutual exchange between theology and the humanities.

Second, in Barth's work, concepts and practices related to sound and hearing played a crucial part in negotiating the relationship between theology and the humanities. As a theoretical concept, hearing supported Barth's break with liberal theology and its dependence on the humanities, while the acoustic dimension of his sermon practices deployed the shared rhetorical legacy he wanted theology to abolish. Bringing together the history of sound and of the humanities in this way might add complexity to Jonathan Sterne's important warning against "transhistorical constructs of sound." Sterne attributes the powerful "audio-visual litany"—the conventionalized list of

75. Schenker, *Richtlinien*, 2.

76. Barth, "What Is Enough," 78 (*KBGA* 12:220).

77. Meyer-Kalkus, "Between Pathos and Its Atrophy," n.p.

oppositions between vision as rational, distant, objective and hearing as emotional, immersed, subjective—to "a two-thousand-year-old Christian theology of listening."[78] Yet as this study of Barth has shown, the history of theological acoustics is too intricate to be subsumed under one such genealogy, and Christian notions of sound and hearing turn out to be less stable than Sterne suggests. We should rather conceive of them as shifting, disputed interventions in the theological field, which does not make them any less powerful, but rather explains why the humanities continue to invoke their power—a power that needs to be further sounded out.

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78. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 14; see also Sterne, "The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36 (2011): 207–25.

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