

Introduction

Stephen Sykes has aptly observed that “nothing in the history of the interpretation of Barth hitherto should lead one to suppose that any one scholar has the ‘key to Barth’ secreted in his robes.”¹ The problem of interpreting Barth is exacerbated by the hermeneutical challenge of seeking to understand holistically an unusually massive literary corpus. Consequently, Barth scholars often have to concede to the hermeneutical necessity of making generalizations about Barth’s theology as a whole in hopes of making sense of a single part of his massive *Church Dogmatics*. For example, while it is often noted that Barth’s theology is consistently “Christocentric,”² such generalizations can also have the deleterious effect of steering the interpretation of Barth in directions that may not accurately represent his thinking. Add to this the complicating factor that Barth scholars are increasingly wary of interpreting the *Church Dogmatics* in isolation from his earlier works which are now coming to light in Barth’s collected works (*Gesamtausgabe*) and the interpretative challenge might seem to be utterly overwhelming.

Interpretative challenges notwithstanding, this study attempts to contribute to the ongoing scholarly investigation of Barth’s work by examining closely a part of his theology that has either been largely neglected or, when given attention, has often been dealt with only in summary fashion. Though it is well known that Barth was a vocal defender of the doctrine of the filioque—the ancient doctrine that asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son—to date there has been no monograph-length study devoted to this aspect of Barth’s thought. When Barth’s stance on the filioque is examined in shorter works, it has been predominantly assumed that the sum total of what Barth had to say about the doctrine is contained in a section near the end of his first half volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. This study, however, will trace the genesis of Barth’s doctrine of the filioque to his earlier thought with the goal of setting his formal defense of the doctrine in the *Church Dogmatics* into the larger context of his thought. It will also be shown how there was a shift in Barth’s theological rationale for defending the doctrine between the 1920s and the 1930s and how the doctrine continued to function and develop in the remaining volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*.

The study will proceed straightforwardly. After providing a brief historical overview of the filioque controversy itself, including locating Barth within that

¹ S. W. Sykes, “The Study of Barth,” in S. W. Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 1-16 at p. 2.

² For a helpful review of this matter, see Marc Cortez, “What Does It Mean to Call Karl Barth a ‘Christocentric’ Theologian?,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60/2 (2007): 127-43.

historical trajectory, Chapter One surveys the critical scholarship that addresses Barth's doctrine of the filioque.

Recent scholarship has called into question the prevailing understanding of the development of Barth's theology from "dialectical" to "analogical" modes of thinking. Such an understanding has often resulted in isolating Barth's later thinking, as represented in the *Church Dogmatics*, from earlier stages of his work. Consequently, Chapter Two will provide a representational account of the genesis and development of Barth's doctrine of the filioque by examining two of Barth's early major works: *Romans* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*.

Chapter Three will direct an analytical spotlight on the first half-volume of the *Church Dogmatics* because it is there that Barth provides his fullest and most mature defense of the filioque. Careful attention will be given to laying out the literary/dogmatic context in which the formal defense of the filioque is found, and the theological rationale which Barth provided. The chapter will also include, for the purposes of highlighting important nuances in Barth, a comparison of his theology of the filioque with the views of T. F. Torrance, who happened to believe that Barth could have avoided the necessity of defending the filioque altogether.

In Chapter Four the investigation will be extended to analyze those specific instances in the *Church Dogmatics* beyond the first half-volume where Barth makes material applications of the filioque. A close reading of these selected passages will reveal clues as to how Barth continued to develop his thinking about the systematic function of the filioque for his Trinitarian theology, even years after what appeared to be his definitive statement in the first half-volume. The final chapter follows this up by evaluating Barth's doctrine of the filioque, as well as identifying some of the implications of Barth's doctrine of the filioque both for ecumenical and future theological research.

The significance of this study is that it demonstrates that, despite the fact that Barth's understanding and use of the filioque matures over the course of his career, there is also an element of continuity such that Barth can be characterized both in his earlier and later work as displaying a dialectical filioquist pneumatology. That is to say, a latent dialectical Christocentric pneumatology in the second edition of *Romans* (1921) provides the material theological support for the doctrine, which subsequently appears in a formal discussion of the filioque in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* (1924). There Barth speaks of the filioque as a theological analogy of the structure of his developing doctrine of the threefold Word of God. Barth continues to defend and apply the filioque in the *Church Dogmatics*, though the original connection to the threefold form of the Word of God recedes into the background. Instead, in the *Church Dogmatics* Barth views the systematic function of the filioque as a theological guarantee of the unity of the work of the Son and the Spirit and as a dogmatic means of affirming that the Spirit is the eternal "bond and boundary" of fellowship between the Father and Son, and, by theological analogy, between God and humanity (in the person of Jesus Christ), and between God and the Church (as the earthly form of the body of Christ). Barth's most mature view of the filioque, in consistency with his earlier thought,

is therefore construed in dialectical terms whereby the Spirit is understood to be eternally active in uniting and differentiating the Father and the Son.

Beyond showing the broad internal consistency of Barth's earlier and later dialectical filioquist pneumatology, it will also be shown that Barth is atypical in the Western filioquist tradition because he refuses to speak of the filioque in terms of a "double procession"; rather, he views the Spirit as proceeding from the "being-of-the-modes-of-being-of-the-Father-and-the-Son." Consequently, Barth's position on the filioque must be properly understood as actually seeking to account for some of the concerns raised in the Eastern monopatrist tradition, particularly in regard to the Eastern rejection of a "double source" theory of the Holy Spirit.