

Ecclesiology and Ethnography with Humility: Going Through Barth

Abstract

Drawing on the notion that future Ecclesiologies would be wise to go through Karl Barth rather than to attempt to go around him. This article proposes a cautious humility for ethnographic approaches to ecclesiology. The article builds on the move towards ethnographic forms of ecclesiology in a Scandinavian context. From this starting point it argues that Barth's ecclesiology suggests a series of theological checks and balances in ecclesiology and ethnography. These are explored through the notion of humility in method and approach.

Key Words

Epistemology, Empirical, Ecclesiology, Methods, Ethnography, Barth

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The publication of *Ecclesiology in the Trenches* edited by Sune Fahlgren and Jonas Idestrom presages a significant turn in Scandinavian Theology towards ethnographically informed approaches to ecclesiology.¹ This volume whilst it acknowledges that there is much to be done in this area in terms of methodology and the theological understanding of qualitative work, arises from a growing recognition, that with the development of empirical perspectives ecclesiology is undergoing a period of what Sven-Erik Brodd calls construction.² *Ecclesiology in the Trenches* reflects the on going work of a number of a number of Nordic Theologians. Jonas Idestrom has published several of studies that develop a distinctive theological approach to the study of the Church.³ Harald Hegstad's *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* published in 2013 is an extended argument for the necessity of social scientific study of the Church within ecclesiology and Tone Stangeland Kaufman has published on issues of normativity in ecclesial ethnographic methods.⁴ The turn towards the ethnographic ecclesiology among these scholars has taken place while recognising that empirical work is a contested method in the systematic and doctrinal theology. This article acknowledges the theological problems around empirical work in the construction of doctrine. It takes forward the project of construction that others in Scandinavian have suggested is necessary in ecclesiology. It seeks to develop the construction of a new approach to the theology of the Church through an extended treatment of the ecclesiology of Karl Barth. The decision to work with Barth is strategic because his work represents a fundamental turning point in European theology and his influence lies beneath the surface in the hesitation that many theologians in a Scandinavian context and indeed more widely feel about empirical methods being used in systematic and doctrinal theology.

The debate in Scandinavia about doctrine and the contribution of qualitative method in the study of the Church has been at the heart of a wider international conversation. In 2000 Nicholas Healey made an impassioned plea for what he

called a practical-prophetic ecclesiology. The purpose of this kind of ecclesiology he envisioned a turn towards ethnography.⁵ Healey argued that ecclesiology should consider the 'concrete response' of the Church to its Lord by utilising notions of culture. He acknowledged that sociological and anthropological studies of the Church had been undertaken for many years but he argued that these did not ask theologically orientated questions, or at least they did not ask the kind of questions that were of pressing interest to theologians. Healey concluded that 'the church needs to introduce its own, theological form of cultural analysis, which we can call ecclesiological ethnography.'⁶ In the same year in an article published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* entitled 'Ethnography is Dogmatics', Nicholas Adams and Charles Elliott discussed the importance of what they called 'descriptions of the world' for theological work.⁷ Then in 2005 Christian Scharen wrote 'Judicious Narratives: Ethnography as Ecclesiology'. This article that was also published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* picked upon the significance of ethnography in theology and made an explicit connection to ecclesiology.⁸ From these starting points a series of conferences were held under the auspices of The Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network.⁹ These resulted in two volumes that have emerged from the network based on the conferences: *Perspectives in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* and *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. The pressing concern in these volumes focused around the methodological possibilities and limits of an ecclesiology that was both empirical and theological. The term ethnography has a particular history in Anthropology but because it had already gained some traction in the theological world those involved in the network took the phrase as referring in a much more informal way to any form of qualitative enquiry. The first two volumes therefore developed methodological concerns around the relationship between qualitative empirical research and theological discussion on the Church.¹⁰

Within the Ecclesiology and Ethnography conversation the prevailing tendency has been towards the value of qualitative methods and the insights that they can bring to ecclesiology. There have however been two important theological contributions that have been more cautionary. Nicholas Healy, having previously argued for ethnographic ecclesiology, cautioned that the examination of particular ecclesial settings and communities through qualitative research may yield limited insights for more generalised doctrinal construction.¹¹ By contrast John Webster raises a quite different set of issues and these are much more clearly Barthian in nature.¹² Webster makes a distinction between the phenomenon of the Church and the being of the Church. The first of these relates to the historical and the social aspects of the Church while the second relates to the origins of the Church. The origins of the Church are to be understood only through rational theological reflection on the doctrine of God. The being of the Church is therefore inaccessible, argues Webster, to social scientific method. Consequently Ethnographic work is only able to examine the phenomenon. This means that while it is possible to study the Church through empirical means it is not possible to say anything theological as a result of this work. As I will show in this paper Webster's cautionary approach echoes a form of reasoning that is deeply influenced by Karl Barth's ecclesiology. In contrast to Webster in this paper I suggest that it is possible to develop an ethnographic approach to

ecclesiology that can draw important insights from Karl Barth. I will argue that it is possible to treat Barth's scepticism and caution as important doctrinal markers within the ecclesiology and ethnography project and that this can be done without feeling the necessity to so limit the ethnographic work such that it can have no significant theological contribution.

Church Dogmatics as a Fork in the Road

My own work in relation to the ethnographic approaches to ecclesiology, I have come to realise, has developed as tacit conversation with Karl Barth's Theology. Barth I accept is an unlikely dialogue partner for this kind of project in that he is openly sceptical of any kind of theology that deals with the social or the historical. Barth's objections are however extremely important in that they suggest a theological caution that any empirical work in ecclesiology should take seriously. At the same time I am suggesting that read with respect but with a certain transgressive sensibility Barth might be extremely helpful, not just in what he appears to rule out in ecclesiology, but also for his clear focus on Christology.

The Church Dogmatics starts with the assertion that dogmatics is 'the scientific self examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God.'¹³ This understanding of the task of the theologian represents something of a fork in road. It is fork in the road because it appears to offer the possibility for a kind of theology that interacts with the lived expression of the Christian Church. Barth of course does not take this route.¹⁴ In fact his ecclesiology was developed as a rejection of any kind of social or historical analysis as part of the theological task. I want to suggest however that Ecclesiology and Ethnography is correct in choosing to take the opposite pathway and as such it goes down the road that Barth rejected. This move is not necessarily a rejection or even a repudiation of Barth's ecclesiology. In other words ethnographic ecclesiology can explore what it means to do what Barth appears to say the task of dogmatics is to be. So while broadly accepting the Christological framework that Barth sets out in the Church Dogmatics an ethnographic approach to ecclesiology will seek to pay attention close and disciplined attention to the distinctive expression of the Church. This is what I call the other path, the fork in the road and it starts by wondering what if the theologian took the starting point in the Dogmatics at face value? What might happen if the task of dogmatics actually involved paying close and disciplined attention to the continual and on going expression of the Church? How would this change ecclesiology? So while accepting that this is not exactly Barthian in approach Ecclesiology and Ethnography might develop as a dialogue with Barth. But before moving forward with this other turn in the road it is important to spend a while considering why Barth takes the route that he does from his starting point in the Church Dogmatics.

Barth's Christological Ecclesiology

Barth's ecclesiology is a rejection of any kind of theological reflection that is based on social or historical analysis of the Christian community. Behind this move it should be noted there is a specific historical and cultural location to Barth's theology (there is in fact an irony here that is worth enjoying for a moment). As

Bender has shown Barth is concerned throughout his career to define the Church against 'Neo-protestantism' and Roman Catholicism. The first reduces Christ to human experience and the second incorporates Christ in institutional practice. As Barth puts it in the Church Dogmatics.:

"The only possibility of a conception of dogmatic knowledge remaining to us on the basis of Evangelical faith is to be marked off on the one hand by the rejection of an existential ontological possibility of the being of the Church (i.e. Neo-protestantism) and on the other hand by the rejection of the presupposition of a constantly available absorption of the being of the church into a creaturely form, into a "There is" (i.e. Roman Catholicism)."¹⁵

The being of the Church is Jesus Christ and it is freedom of the Spirit that brings about Christ's presence rather than institutional forms or inward piety. Barth is therefore primarily concerned to avoid a distinction between Jesus Christ and the Church.¹⁶ He makes this clear in his assertion that, 'The community is the earthly-historical form of the existence of Jesus Christ Himself.'¹⁷ His Christological ecclesiology is based first and foremost in his understanding of election. The Church is the Church in the election of Jesus Christ. This election 'precedes' human action. This is not a collaborative partnership. God and man do not have 'dealings' with each other. Rather it is God who is active. The activity of humanity has no place in this doctrine of election, rather it is the action of God that elicits a response.¹⁸ Humanity is 'elected' in the humanity of Christ. So for Barth the divine freedom is that Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected human being.¹⁹ As a consequence for Barth the Church exists because Christ exists and it lives because Christ lives. The 'Christian community can be what the human nature of its Lord and Head is.'²⁰ Election is then the basis for action, witness and mission. As Nigel Biggar puts it, 'the Christian community has been elected and separated and it lives its own strange, special existence precisely in order to carry out its mission to bear witness to the reconciliation that God has established between himself and the world in Jesus Christ.'²¹

This Christological orientation limits the possibility of seeing the Church theologically through history or through visible social forms. This problematic is illustrated by Barth with a geometrical analogy. Christology he says is like a vertical line meeting a horizontal line. The horizontal represents human sin.²² Justification, the work of God is the point where the vertical and the horizontal intersect.²³ This is the second key Christological theme in Barth's ecclesiology, the doctrine of reconciliation. So for Barth the true Church is an event, a moment when these lines intersect. The language of event does not preclude talk of the Church as community. Indeed the Church as event can only exist in concert with the 'flesh and blood' of communities. Barth favours dynamic language for the Church over institution and structure. The Church is, he says, 'when it takes place.'²⁴ But says Bender, for Barth the relationship between event and the historical social form of the Church cannot be reversed.²⁵

As Nicholas Healy has stressed Barth has favoured the image of the Body of Christ in his understanding of the Church.²⁶ The body here is understood in a

particular manner. Ecclesiology for Barth is structured Christologically the Church as body is derived from the humanity of Christ. So the image of the body of Christ does not, indicate a social body but rather that the Church is derived from the body of Christ. In other words it is humanity that is crucified on the cross and made alive at the resurrection. The Church is termed the body of Christ symbolically. It does not have an essence of the body Christ rather it is made the body by the free work of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The relationship between the divine and human in ecclesiology is therefore 'ordered' for Barth Christologically. The pattern consists of a unity, a differentiation, and an asymmetry of relations. This pattern is derived by Barth from Chalcedonian Christological definition where the relation of human and divine in the person of Jesus Christ there is a unity between divine and human but this unity leaves distinctions between divine and human in place and that there is a irreducible hierarchy of relations. By analogy this pattern extends to the Church. Here the asymmetry in relations is understood through the patristic ideas of anhypostasia and enhypostasia.²⁸ These are again Christological firstly and only by analogy extended to the Church. Anhypostasia is a negative assertion that the human in Jesus Christ does not have any existence apart from the Word. Enhypostasia expresses the related view that the human has a real and complete existence in the Word.²⁹ The anhypostatic/enhypostatic pattern means that the intersection of divine activity cannot be read off the life of the Church. 'The pattern whereby the church can be understood as the indivisible unity of a divine event and a historical and human institution in irreducible and unconfused distinction is the Christological pattern of Chalcedon and the anhypostatic-enhypostatic logic, whereby the church is a single reality composed of a divine call and a human society in asymmetrical relation, the second entirely dependent upon the first.'³⁰

What follows from this is that the Church, rather than being accessible to sociological observation, can only be understood as an object of faith: *Credo ecclesiam*. As such it is impossible to grasp its reality through historical or indeed empirical means. The Church is essentially a mystery. This does not mean that the lived community can be ignored in fact for Barth the opposite is the case. The Church is a community of believers present in history but it is only the Church because of God. 'The Church is, of course, a human earthly-historical construct, whose history involves from the very first and always will involved human action. But it is this human construct, the Christian Church, because and as God is at work in it by his Spirit.'³¹ There is a human 'action' that builds the Church but what makes this 'truly' the Church is the work of God. The concrete Church exists in history as a continuing witness and it is in this community that Christ is dynamically present 'gathering, upholding and sending.'³²

In commenting on the Apostles Creed Barth rejects notions of the invisibility of the Church. The Church is visible, we believe in its existence. This means that each congregation is a congregation of Christ. 'Take good note, that a parson who does not believe that in this congregation of his, including those men and women, old wives and children, Christ's congregation exists, does not believe at all in the existence of the Church. *Credo ecclesiam* means that I believe that here at this place, in this visible assembly, the work of the Holy Spirit takes place.'³³ It is in this 'concrete' and particular congregation that the Holy Spirit becomes

'event'. Yet there is always a struggle between the empirical Church and the 'true' Church. The 'true' Church emerges as a quickening of the Spirit as human work to build up the community into the true Church.³⁴ The Church exists as it responds to the Holy Spirit. As a result the 'true' Church is made by the free working of the Holy Spirit. This work is predicated on the historical and social but it is not reduced to this. The historical form of the Church makes the invisible visible but only as the Holy Spirit is at work.³⁵ 'The Christian community, the true Church, arises and is only as the Holy Spirit works – the quickening power of the living Lord Jesus Christ.'³⁶ So the Church as an article of faith (*Credo ecclesiam*) does not preclude the 'concrete' nature of the Church. Indeed the opposite is the case because the Holy Spirit calls the community into existence. Yet as Nicholas Healy observes for Barth the Church is only an object of belief in so far as it is event and as a consequence it is only a location for theological reflection in relation to the free work of the Spirit that constitutes the true Church as event.³⁷

The real Church should not be sought apart from the historical manifestation of the community but within its historical forms. The Church is not a 'human possibility.'³⁸ Yet the true Church is only perceived in the historical by means of faith.³⁹ But to see the Church only on the historical plane is to fail to understand the true nature of the Church.⁴⁰ The Church there has a reality and a mystery that coincides with the incarnation. 'The glory of Jesus Christ was hidden when he humbled himself, when he took flesh He was obedient to God, when He destroyed our wrong, when he established our right. So, too, the glory of humanity justified in him is concealed. And this means that the glory of the community gathered together by him within humanity is only a glory which is hidden from the eyes of the world until His final revelation so that it can be only an object of faith.'⁴¹ Barth's theology therefore sets the question of visibility at the heart of ecclesial reflection.

Going Through Barth with Humility

In the final part of this paper I will sketch a number of theological themes that take heed of Barth's caution around the social and historical in ecclesiology. These themes introduce what I want to call humility into ethnographic approaches to ecclesiology⁴². Barth's ecclesiology affirms the necessity of the historical community and of the culturally located expression of the Church. At the same time he brackets off the divine agency as event. This appears to preclude the approach that I have suggested i.e. that ethnographic ecclesiology might fulfil the starting point set out in the Church Dogmatics that the task of the theologian is 'the scientific self examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God.'⁴³ So in effect the life and expression of the Church would be excluded from theological reflection. This kind of move is seen for instance in John Webster's discussion of the phenomenon and the being of the Church and the limits and possibilities of empirical work in ecclesiology.⁴⁴

Webster's approach appears to privilege the theologian and theological reasoning in particular. There are however important caveats to this position. For as Barth makes clear in the Dogmatics and elsewhere, theological reasoning

itself is conditioned and limited.⁴⁵ It is a rational exercise that is subject to grace and as such it is to be 'practised in great humility.'⁴⁶ Humility here relates to the ability of the theologian to adequately witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ the event whereby the Spirit is free to act in the Church. Humility in theology then arises from an acceptance that ecclesial being is fundamentally linked to divine agency. This raises particular issues for ethnographic forms of ecclesiology and the possibility of discerning the work of the Spirit in a community. This issue on the face of it closes down any form of empirical ecclesiology but such scepticism should be balanced by the on-going and everyday sense that God is to be encountered in and through the life of the local community.

There is a positive assertion drawn from Barth that the Spirit is freely present to the community in and through the proclamation of the Church. In other words there is an event in and through the phenomenon of the community and it is an assumption that this presence is to be perceived if it is to be revelation. Ethnographic ecclesiology then might be seen as resting on such perception. Humility however suggests the limits of observation and analysis as much as it does the limits of reason. If the traditional form of theologising has limits the same is true for ethnographic ecclesiology but it seems odd to, on the one hand, assert the presence of Christ in the Church dogmatically and yet to close down the possibility that this presence might be perceived by participation when it is precisely such activity that is the basis, indeed the necessity for a Church that is to be regarded as being 'true'.

Barth's theology is constructed in opposition to two ecclesial polarities neo-protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Ethnographic ecclesiology I would suggest has a similar starting point. It shares a reaction against the first of these neo-protestantism (i.e. theologies of the Church based on experience alone) but rather than Roman Catholicism the other alternative that it seeks to negotiate is the tendency to construct ecclesiology purely as an ideal or as Healy calls it a 'blue print ecclesiology'.⁴⁷ So in advocating the need to pay attention to the lived expression of the Church it is not at all the intention to advocate 'experience' or the 'ultimate concern' of individuals or communities as an adequate basis in themselves for ecclesiology. At the same time it is also important to resist the assumption that the theologian writing a theoretical ecclesiology has some kind of ability to 'see' that has priority over the experience of lived communities. So the dichotomy between empirical or culturally generated theological perspectives and those that are developed by the scholar working with text is a false one.⁴⁸ The key issue is the distinction between the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church and the ability of the theologian working either with text or with empirical work, or I would suggest preferably with both, to be able to speak of the presence of Christ in, with, and through human expression. Humility in theology is therefore an acknowledgement that ecclesiology, be it empirical or doctrinal, must be orientated in such a way that there is a fundamental openness to divine agency. Interestingly Nicholas Healy's use of Barth to critique the ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas suggests that it is not only empirical research that might be tempted to downplay the divine. Hauerwas, says Healy is so focussed on the practices of the Christian community that divine agency recedes

into the background.⁴⁹ This caution drawn from Barth also needs to be at the heart of ethnographic ecclesiology that proceeds with humility.

The perception of divine action as theological reflection is a particular form of knowledge. Hence for Barth the Church is to be understood as the object of faith. *Credo ecclesium* conditions the possibilities and the limits of ethnographic ecclesiology. Faith as the basis for ecclesiology nuances humility in significant ways. From a Barthian perspective the Church is the object of belief because it is the location for divine action. It is in the witness of ordinary and everyday communities that the dynamic revelation of Jesus Christ through the free work of the Holy Spirit is event. It is only as the Church is made as event that there is the possibility for theological reflection. Theological reflection on the Church rests on the dynamic of divine action and the possibility of human perception of this agency. This dynamic then demands humility in theological ethnographic method.

The principle of *Credo ecclesium* in ethnographic ecclesiology suggests that perception of the divine is particular and distinct. Knowledge of God is conditioned by grace. God is known as the Spirit freely makes God known. This gives a particular inflection to notions of participation in ethnographic research, for participation in God rests on the notion that individuals and the community as a whole are incorporated in the election and reconciliation that is revealed in Jesus Christ. This is much more than the introduction of a kind of confessionalism into empirical method. It echoes by analogy the recognition that empathy and involvement is the very basis for all qualitative research.⁵⁰ Believing in the Church as the basis for theological knowledge then introduces a humility that sees participation in Christ as the basis for knowing. Faith in the Church as epistemological orientation is however further problematized by the complex nature of lived communities.

Faith in the Church is an affirmation that Christ may be present in the imperfect expression of the Christian community. It is the fact that expression is always imperfect that necessitates the task of theological ethnography but it also introduces the central role of humility. The point here is that expression in the lived community of the Church is not simply 'imperfect' it is multi-layered, characterised by a plurality of voices. Communities and individuals appear to live comfortably and often without awareness of the mutually contradictory or incompatible theological implications of shared cultural expression. These layers of ambiguity might be taken as a prompt to retreat to the safer ground of doctrinal theology or indeed the true Church as an event. This I want to suggest is a mistake. Doctrinal theology is just as compromised even where doctrines have been agreed by Church Councils. Rather the call is to believe in the Church as the body of Christ that is divided and yet somehow one, in conflict and yet called to unity, sinful and yet also a place of blessing. This, I want to argue is what it means to believe in the Church with humility.

Barth's Christological ecclesiology has two central themes both of which severely limit the possibilities for any kind of ethnographic ecclesiology. The first of these relates to the Chalcedonian ordering of anthropology such that all theological

knowledge of humanity is to be derived from the humanity of Christ. The second theme relates to justification as an event. Here the true Church is limited to moments of divine freedom. These two themes clearly to count against an ethnographic project in ecclesiology but going through Barth requires that these are renegotiated or reframed. Such a project would require a more extensive treatment than is possible in this article but I want to suggest how this kind of renegotiation might take place while leaving key insights from Barth intact. As we have seen Barth's understanding of justification as event is illustrated through a geometrical diagram. In this illustration the social and cultural form of the Church exists as a horizontal line. Divine agency is likened to a vertical line. Where the two lines intersect this is the event of the true Church. It is worth asking how often these lines intersect? If it is seldom then the cross hairs illustration is apposite. If however the work of God in the Church is frequent then in diagrammatical form there will be a series of vertical lines forming more of a grid. If however the divine action is continuous then the grid becomes a block of vertical lines crossing a horizontal line. The point here is that it is possible to hold onto divine agency and I would argue divine freedom without restricting this to episodic and largely unpredictable epiphanies. This in a sense is to affirm the everyday and ordinary experience of believers in the Church i.e. that God is encountered in the expression and fellowship of the community on a regular and reliable basis.

Barth's chalcedonian theological anthropology appears to require that human action and cultural expression is bracketed in such a way that it carries no theological significance. This is problematic for ethnographic ecclesiology because it effectively rules out any meaningful theological knowledge that can be accessed empirically. This conclusion I want to argue need not necessarily follow from a Christological ecclesiology, in the way that Barth and following him Webster imply, if it is reframed through notions of participation. Put briefly such a reframing would see all things in creation as having their origins in Jesus Christ, in the cross all things are taken into Christ and transformed and this transformation is fully accomplished at the end of time when all things are gathered into Christ.⁵¹ It is in Christ then that all things hold together.⁵² This participatory Christology affords the possibility that human culture and expression may have theological significance because they created, taken up and eventually fulfilled in Christ. In terms of ethnographic research the force of all things here is significant. It means that the muddled, compromised, complex, and multi-layered realities of particular Christian communities have theological significance and richness but they have this because of this Christological perspective. Christology here then does not preclude the significance of human agency but affirms and acknowledges that Churches and communities in their imperfection are never-the-less taken up in Jesus Christ and in the process of being transformed. It is this kind of ethnographic ecclesiology that embraces the complexity of particular Christian communities as an aspect of what it means to generate ecclesiology with a measure of humility.

Conclusion

This paper started with the development ethnographic ecclesiology in in Nordic Practical Theology. These developments were set within the developing

Ecclesiology and Ethnography conversation. The article has argued that one of the characteristics of ecclesiology and ethnography has been a concern to develop a significant dialogue with both qualitative methods and doctrinal theology. The paper has then sought to both model and to develop this aspect of ethnographic ecclesiology through a discussion of Karl Barth's ecclesiology. Taking the idea that ecclesiology should attempt to go through Barth it has identified a number of checks and balances that Barth's introduces to the possibility of theological reflection based on the social and historical aspects of the Church. The starting point of the Dogmatics has been read transgressively as a fork in the road. This fork, I have argued can only be taken with humility. Humility rests on the Barthian notion that the Church is the object of faith because its being lies only to be found Christologically. The central role of faith in theological reflection however is not the sole preserve of doctrinally orientated rationality. With Barth then I argue that the basis for ecclesiology is Jesus Christ. Faith is a central category in ecclesiology it acknowledges the crucial aspect of divine action in the life of the Church and the on going recognition that there are limits to what can be seen by empirical methods. Divine action as event however can be reframed through a consideration of the nature and frequency of divine action in the Church. The human and the cultural similarly can be valued theologically by renegotiating the Chalcedonian ordering of relation through the notion of participation.

What I do not do is accept the construction of the theologian as giving unproblematic access to ontology as Webster seems to imply. At the same time the theological task I argue is essential. It is the calling of the Church to express the gospel and as part of that expression there needs to be reflection and critique. The theologian therefore has a crucial role. This role requires both a searching after the presence of Christ in the lived expression of the Church and also the continual reinterpretation of the tradition of the Church in relation to changing culture and contexts. This task is necessary because culture is fluid but it is also necessary because Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is present in the Church. Cultural fluidity shapes ecclesiology because meaning, practice and communication are always in movement. It is the fluidity of culture and the nature of divine presence that determines the orientation of ethnographic ecclesiology. For Barth the Church is apprehended by faith. It is therefore a mystery to be received rather than an object for study. The task of ethnographic ecclesiology rests on the conviction that the Church is the object of faith. Faith because it has its being in Jesus Christ but faith also, I would add, because Christ is present in and through the fluid and often imperfect expression of the community. This perception is the basis for humility in empirical forms of ecclesiology.

¹ Fahlgren and Idestrom *Ecclesiology*

² Brodd 'Ecclesiology Under Construction'1.

³ Idestrom *Loka.l*

Idestrom, 'What's so ' 140-152.

Idestrom 'In Dialogue' 72-91.

Idestrom, *Spåre.n*

Idestrom 'It's that loving gaze. 108-119.

⁴ Stangeland Kaufman, 'Normativity'.

⁵ Healy *Church*.

⁶ Church, World p168-169.

⁷ Adams, N. and Elliott, 'Ethnography' 339.

⁸ Scharen, C. 'Judicious'.

⁹ For more on Ecclesiology and Ethnography see
<https://ecclesiologyandethnography.wordpress.com>.

¹⁰ For material from the Ecclesiology and Ethnography conversation see the journal linked to the network *Ecclesial Practices* Leiden Brill also Scharen, and Vigen, *Ethnography*, Ward, P. *Perspectives*, and Scharen, *Explorations*.

¹¹ Healy 'Ecclesiology'.

¹² Webster J 'In the Society'. Webster's approach has been critiqued in Brittain 'Why Ecclesiology'.

¹³ CD I.1 p3.

¹⁴ See Bender *Karl* where Bender defends Barth from Healy's critique that Barth is not sufficiently 'concrete' in his ecclesiology by pointing out that Barth does discuss ecclesial practices in CD IV.3.2. These practices however do not define the Church. Bender makes the point that for Barth the investigation of practices is the preserve of practical rather than dogmatic theology. (p 275) Sociological descriptions of the Church should not form part of dogmatics but they have a place in Christian ethics and practical theology (p276, CD IV.3.2, 859-860) Barth's rejection of sociological descriptions of the church comes from the prevalence of such work in the 19th century and his desire to maintain the theological character of the church. (p276) Contemporary approaches to the ethnographic study of the Church it is acknowledged are made a significantly different theoretical basis than the sociology of the 19th century and while it may therefore be regarded as more amenable to theological analysis Barth's objections to the inclusion of such approaches in Christian dogmatics still hold sway.

¹⁵ CD I.1, 41, quoted in Bender *Karl Barth's* 96.

¹⁶ Webster 130.

¹⁷ CD IV.1, 66.

¹⁸ CD II.2.176, Bender *Karl Barth's* 116.

¹⁹ Bender *Karl Barth's* 117.

²⁰ CD IV.2.59-60 quoted in Bender *Karl Barth's* 150.

²¹ Biggar *The Hastening*.

²² Bender *Karl Barth's* 168 points out that the analogy of intersecting lines is a significant development from Barth's earlier work in Romans. Here the work of God in the world is likened to a tangent that just touches the edge of a circle. The tangent being the work of God and the circle the sinful world

²³ CD IV. 1, 643.

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- ²⁴ CD.IV. 1,652 see also Carter 'Karl Barth's' 36.
²⁵ Bender *Karl Barth's* 168.
²⁶ Healy 'The Logic'.
²⁷ The Logic p257.
²⁸ Bender *Karl Barth's* 4 see also CD I.2,163.
²⁹ Bender *Karl Barth's* 4 this Chalcedonian pattern of relations has been developed as an approach to Practical Theology by Deborah Hunsinger see Hunsinger, *Theology*.
³⁰ Bender *Karl Barth's* 168.
³¹ CD IV. 2, p 616.
³² Holmes 'The Church' and the presence of Christ 280.
³³ Barth *Dogmatics in* 143.
³⁴ CD IV. 2 617.
³⁵ Bender *Karl Barth's* 171.
³⁶ CD IV.2, 617 quoted in Bender *Karl Barth's* 171.
³⁷ Healy *The Logic*, 254.
³⁸ Healy *The Logic*, 254 see CD IV.1 645.
³⁹ Bender *Karl Barth's* 171.
⁴⁰ Bender *Karl Barth's* 173.
⁴¹ CD IV.1, 656-657, quoted in Bender *Karl Barth's* 174.
⁴² Humility in theology is term that Barth himself used see Bart 'Church' 286-306.
⁴³ CD I.1 p3.
⁴⁴ Webster 'In the Society'.
⁴⁵ CD I.1 3-24, see also Barth 'Church' 286-306.
⁴⁶ Barth 'Church'.
⁴⁷ Healy *Church* see also Ward 'Blueprint'.
⁴⁸ See Ward 'Blueprint' where I link this notion to a theologically oriented Critical Realism.
⁴⁹ Healy, N. 'Karl Barth's'.
⁵⁰ See Scott Jones *Ethnography* 6.
⁵¹ Ephesians 1:3-23, Colossians 1:15-20.
⁵² Colossians 1:17.

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