This is lecture 13 for the course “Contemporary Theology 1.” In our last lecture, I was discussing with you Karl Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God. We were describing it to you and I got most of the way through it, but I have just a little bit of it left that I want to return to in this lecture. I’m going to do that and then I’m going to interact critically with his views before we go on to his concept of God. But before we do any of that, why don’t we bow for a word of prayer?

Father, we thank you again for the privilege of study. We pray that as we consider again this concept of revelation that appears not only in Karl Barth’s work but in the thinking of many neo-orthodox theologians that you would give us insight into what they are saying. Help us to distinguish between that which is right and that which is wrong. May we in all cases make Your Word the ultimate touchstone for truth. We pray all these things, then, asking for Your blessing upon our study, for it’s in Christ’s name we ask it. Amen.

At the very end of the last lecture, I was sketching for you the implications of Karl Barth’s doctrine of revelation for his understanding of the nature of Scripture, and I noted for you that he believed that the Bible is not itself revelation, but instead is a witness to revelation. He also considered that the Bible is a fallible human book that’s filled with errors and contradictions. And I noted for you, right at the end, that he also believed that the Bible had the capacity for error not only in regard to matters of history or science but even in areas that deal with religious matters and theological issues, it could possibly be in error. Well, that’s where I left it at the end of last lecture. Let me pick it up at that point right now.

Having heard what Barth has to say about the fallibility of the Bible, you might begin to think that Scripture is worthless. And yet, Barth never said that. Barth felt that in spite of all of the errors that one might find in Scripture, Scripture still becomes
the Word of God when God freely decides to do a miracle through it, specifically when God decides to use the human words of the authors to speak to someone in the nonverbal encounter. As a result of this, Barth believed that the Word of God is not tied to the Bible, and what he meant by that is simply that God can use other forms of revelation, other means of revealing Himself to people. But on the other hand, he said the Bible is tied to the Word of God and whenever God decides to speak through it, that is when it becomes revelation. Now on page 530 of volume 1, part 2 of The Church Dogmatics, Barth speaks about the relationship of the Bible to the Word of God. Let me just read you a section from that so you get the flavor of his thinking. “If, therefore, we are serious about the fact that this miracle is an event, we cannot regard the presence of God’s Word in the Bible as an attribute in hearing, once for all, in this book as such and what we see before us of books and chapters and verses. Of the Book as we have it, we can only say we recollect that we have heard in this Book the Word of God. We recollect, in and with the church, that the Word of God has been heard in all this Book and in all parts of it. Therefore, we expect that we shall hear the Word of God in this Book again and hear it even in those places where we ourselves have not heard it before. Yet the presence of the Word of God itself, the real and present speaking and hearing of it, is not identical with the existence of the Book as such. But in this presence something takes place in and with the Book. For which the Book as such does indeed give the possibility, but the reality of which cannot be anticipated or replaced by the existence of the Book. A free divine decision is made. It then comes about that the Bible, the Bible in concreto,” that is in concrete, “this or that biblical context,” that is the Bible as it comes to us in this or that specific measure, “is taken and used as an instrument in the hand of God.” That is, it speaks to and is heard by us as the authentic witness to divine revelation and is therefore present as the Word of God.

Well, there you have it very clearly that Barth does not want to identify the Bible as such with its books and chapters and verses. He doesn’t want to identify the Bible as such with the Word of God. The Word of God uses the Bible but it is not identical with it.

Well, Barth also has some thoughts about what inspiration is, and let me just share with you how he defines that. Barth understands inspiration as the using of fallible human words, namely the Bible, by the Word of God to speak to man. Inspiration then is equated to revelation, as Barth understands it. And yet, as you reflect upon this and as we’re going to see what Barth actually understands as
Barth’s Doctrine of the Concept of God

revelation and inspiration is what orthodox theologians typically refer to as illumination. Now on page 533 in volume 1, part 2 of *The Church Dogmatics*, Barth has a very cryptic statement here about verbal inspiration, but I think it’s important. Let me just read it to you. Barth says, “Verbal inspiration does not mean the infallibility of the biblical Word in its linguistic, historical, and theological character as a human word. It means that the fallible and faulty human word is as such used by God and has to be received and heard in spite of its human fallibility.”

Well, one final thought in terms of Barth’s understanding of Scripture and that is to look at what he has to say about the authority of Scripture. And here I think I can probably best sketch his views by quoting him. What you see from Barth is that the true authority is not the Bible but it is the Word of God who reveals Himself. Barth then says about the Bible the following on page 126 of volume 1, part 1 of *The Church Dogmatic*. He says, “The biblical witness possess authority in that it claims no authority whatsoever for itself and in that its witness amounts to letting the Something else,” the word *something* is capitalized and clearly he’s referring there by the phrase, *Something else* to revelation, that is, the Word of God which, in his thinking, is Jesus Christ in personal encounter. So he says, “And in that its witness amounts to letting the Something else be the authority itself and by its own agency. Thus we do to the Bible a poor honor and one unwelcome to itself when we directly identify it with this Something else, with revelation itself.” You can see then the Bible’s authority is entirely derivative. It’s derivative from its function as a vehicle through which God can speak.

Well, so far I have just been describing Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God. I think before I move on to another topic in Barth’s theology it would be helpful for me to give you some critical evaluation of what Barth says. This view is not only important in Barth’s thinking but it is very, very prevalent in contemporary thought, and I think it behooves us to make some comments about whether it is a right view or a wrong view, what respects we see in it, what aspects we see in it are correct, and what aspects in it are incorrect. Let me then turn to an evaluation of this view, and I want to note, first of all, some contributions that we can see in what Barth has said. Then I want to raise some problems with it.

An initial contribution is Karl Barth’s emphasis on Christ as revelation. I think this is very, very helpful in certain respects. Oftentimes orthodox thinkers have a tendency to think of
Scripture as the only form of special or supernatural revelation. But as a matter of fact, there are other forms of special revelation. In fact, Scripture is very clear that Christ reveals God and, in fact, that He is the highest form of revelation. You remember that in the gospels, Jesus says that he hath seen Me, hath seen the Father. That means very clearly that in knowing Christ, in seeing Christ, they had had a revelation of God. The apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:9 that, and I quote, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” The writer of Hebrews also has an interesting commentary on this matter. In Hebrews 1:1-3 we find specifically what he says. He says that even though God revealed Himself in Old Testament times through the prophets, in these last days of revelation He is revealing Himself through His Son, His Son Jesus Christ. And then in Hebrews 1:3, the writer says that Christ is, and I quote, “The radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.” Indeed, Jesus Christ is revelation. He is the highest form of revelation of God that God has given of Himself, and Barth is helpful in reminding us of this fact.

A second contribution that we find in Karl Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God is his emphasis on God revealing Himself in acts. Now, it is not true that all revelation is act, at least not in the way that Karl Barth means act, but it is important to recognize that some of God’s revelation does come in acts. Miracles, for example, are a form of revelation, but they are also acts of God. Now the reason that I say that this emphasis of Barth is important is that, again, orthodox thinkers, evangelical theologians have a tendency to equate special revelation totally with Scripture and not think in terms of any other form of God’s revelation. But the fact of the matter is that while Scripture is one form, a very important form of special revelation, it is not the only one. Orthodox thinkers agree that God’s acts, God’s miracles in particular, are forms of revelation, or they are revelatory acts of God. Obviously, with the miracle, is also an explanation that comes along to help us understand the meaning of the miracle. But nonetheless, the miraculous event is itself revelation. So Barth is helpful then in reminding us that God does reveal Himself in acts. The acts may be miraculous. They may deal with His activities in the exodus, His activities in leading His people through the wilderness. God reveals Himself to His people in this way.

Then a third contribution from Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God is also to be noted. I think Barth’s emphasis on the need to respond to revelation is an important reminder for all of us. There is oftentimes the tendency to point to the Bible as revelation.
without ever opening it up, without ever reading it, and without responding to it. Barth is helpful in reminding us that when and wherever God speaks to us, He has to be taken seriously. We need to respond to what God has revealed. We can’t simply say that something is revelation and leave it there and never read it, never respond to it. We do need to take it seriously. So, in all of these respects, I think what Barth has to say is helpful. But that is not to say that there aren’t problems with His doctrine of the Word of God. In fact, I think there are a number of problems with it. There are obvious problems, of course, with denying the inerrancy of scripture, but in my interaction I want to focus on a series of problems that relate specifically to Barth’s notion of revelation.

Well, what are some of the problems? An initial problem is his claim that revelation comes always in the form of a person and that it never comes in the form of proposition. Now this is typical not only of Barth’s thinking but of neo-orthodoxy in general. As a matter of fact, neo-orthodox thinkers not only make this claim but someone like John Baillie in his book *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*—and *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* is the neo-orthodox one—in this book Baillie tells us that this is what Scripture actually teaches. It teaches, according to Baillie, that the content of revelation is God Himself. It is not propositions. But on the contrary, this is not what Scripture teaches. If you do a word study in the Old Testament of the word *galah* and in the New Testament of the word *apokalypto* and those are the biblical words in the Hebrew and the Greek for reveal or uncover or unveil. If you do a biblical study, a word study of those terms, what you find is that quite frequently what is spoken of as reveal is information, it’s facts, in other words it’s propositions for language. That is not to say that Scripture never tells us that God reveals Himself as a person or that the content of revelation is never a person, it’s just the scripture says that the content of revelation is oftentimes information or facts or proposition. So this idea that revelation is never in proposition is surely not something that is taught by Scripture. In addition, a passage like 2 Timothy 3:16 demands that Scripture itself, that particular set of propositions, is revelation. This verse says that all Scripture is, and the Greek term that is used there, all Scripture is *theopneustos*. Now that particular Greek word is an adjective which is composed of a noun, the noun is *theos*, T-H-E-O-S transliterating it, and it’s also composed of a verb. The verb is *pneuo*, P-N-E-U long O is the way it’s transliterated, and that noun and that verb are put together with a passive adjectival ending. Now, when this term is used in the passive, the adjective means the product of God’s breath. Hence in this passage, Paul is
not saying that the Bible is something that exists and God speaks through it, nor is he saying that the Bible breathes out God. Now either of those two senses would require an active ending on the adjective, and in fact if we had an active ending on the adjective that would fit with the Barthian notion of revelation, that God speaks through the Bible, that the Bible breathes out God as we encounter Him when we read it. But the fact of the matter is that Paul doesn’t use an active form of the adjective. He uses instead the passive form. What that means is that Paul is saying that at one time there was no Bible at all, but then God spoke, He breathed out, and the result was the Bible. That means that the Bible is what God said, that is, it is a set of propositions that are what God has said. But now if God has spoken, then clearly He has revealed Himself, and if what He has spoken is Scripture, then clearly Scripture is revelation. Now I grant you that it is true that many passages in Scripture record occasions when God revealed Himself to one person or another. But on the basis of 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, “all Scripture is God’s word,” we can still say that even the passages that speak about times when God revealed Himself to others are themselves also revelation to us. They are not just signposts to revelation. They are, in fact, revelation. Now further implication of 2 Timothy 3:16 is that the Bible does not become the Word of God when I encounter God through it and then cease to be God’s word when I don’t. Instead it, that is the Bible as an object, is always the Word of God. It is what He has spoken.

Well, a fourth concern that I have deals with Barth’s view that any attempt to verbalize what God revealed in this non-verbal encounter distorts that revelation. I think that this is a very, very problematic idea. Now, I would say initially that it’s dubious whether we can be sure that God really reveals anything in a non-verbal encounter, but let me reserve my comments on that item for just a moment. At this point, I just want to interact with the idea that any attempt to verbalize the content of what God reveals distorts it. Now I grant you that sometimes God will reveal truth through visions or through dreams, and we don’t always know whether the vision or the dream actually contained any words. But the biblical writers put into language what they saw in the vision or the dream. Now what we want to ask our self is whether such verbalizing of the vision or the dream distorted the content of the revelation. According to Karl Barth, it must, because any attempt to verbalize what’s revealed in the encounter with God is going to distort it. Well, does it in fact distort the revelation? Now you might think that we have no way of knowing the answer to
this since, after all, you and I weren’t the ones who received the vision or the dream or any other revelation from God. But despite our skepticism about this, I actually think you and I may be in a better position to answer this issue, to address this question than we might think. The reason I think that is that there is an instance recorded in Scripture which I believe is instructive on this whole matter, and it at least gives us some idea of whether verbalizing revelation must, of necessity in all cases, distort that revelation. Now you are probably wondering what passage I’m thinking about. I’m thinking specifically of Daniel 2 which records Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. You remember that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He had a vision of this huge statue that was made up of various metals and then as he was looking, he saw a stone that came and rolled and it struck the image on its feet and it toppled the whole image and then the stone became a mountain and it filled the whole earth. Well, Nebuchadnezzar didn’t know what that meant, and He was looking for somebody to interpret it. But you remember that for quite a while he didn’t find anybody who knew how to interpret it. Well as time went by, it wound up that there was another problem. There was a problem in that Nebuchadnezzar not only needed to know what the dream meant, but over a period of time he actually forgot the details of the dream. So, Nebuchadnezzar needed somebody who could first recount or recapture the dream for him and then give its interpretation. Eventually, as you remember, he came to Daniel, and Daniel asked the Lord if the Lord would show him this dream and then explain to him this interpretation. And as we find it recorded there in Daniel 2, it’s clear that God did just this. In Daniel 2, we have recorded Daniel’s account of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as well as the interpretation of that dream.

Now, this seems to me to be the perfect test case for Barth’s view that verbalizing revelation of necessity distorts it. Both Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar have the same dream. So, they should know what it contained. If verbalizing revelation must distort it, then we would expect that when Daniel recounted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar would have to say no, no, that’s not the dream or at least he’d have to say that’s not quite right. But read Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t say anything like that. On the contrary, Nebuchadnezzar agreed that Daniel’s account of the dream was correct, and he was most appreciative to Daniel for recovering and interpreting the dream. So as I look at that passage and I see what happened, I have to come to the conclusion that, evidently, verbalizing revelation does not of necessity distort it. It surely didn’t in this case, and if it doesn’t
have to, if it didn’t in this case, there’s no reason to think that it has to in any other case.

Well, let me move on to another concern that I have with Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God. The idea that there is no revelation unless there is a response is also, I think, problematic. This not only contradicts 2 Timothy 3:16 which tells us that Scripture is what God has spoken as an objective thing, this idea also contradicts common sense. Let me explain what I mean. Suppose I write you a letter about myself and then send it to you. Suppose, as it turns out, you never open that letter, so obviously you can’t respond or react to anything that I’ve put in the letter. Now, the fact that you never opened the letter and you never react or respond to it, does that mean that I didn’t really write or that I didn’t really reveal things about myself in the letter? Well, of course not. You see, there can be revelation. There can be communication. There can be word from a person even if no one responds to what is said and even if no one ever reads it or hears it. So I think this idea that in order for there to be revelation, there must be a response is also problematic.

Well, let me make a couple more comments on Bath’s views on revelation. I would suggest to you that Barth’s view of revelation by demanding that the hearer respond in order for there to be revelation actually confuses the orthodox doctrines of revelation and illumination. Now, the matter of understanding, of appropriating, and of applying God’s Word is what we mean when we refer to illumination. By mixing these activities with revelation, Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox thinkers confuse revelation with illumination. Well, one final objection to the Barthian view. This will be a little bit more extended than some of the other ones, but I think it’s a very important issue.

Barth claims that the content of revelation is Jesus Christ given in non-verbal, personal encounter with the individual. Well now, you and I might quite well ask, look, since no language is spoken in this encounter and since one cannot verbalize what Christ said how do you know that you’ve actually encountered Christ? Now I imagine that Barthians would probably reply, look, if it happens you’re gonna know it. There won’t be any mistaking it. But it seems to me that this kind of response is problematic. And I think here that the thinking of the contemporary philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is very, very helpful. Wittgenstein lived in the 20th Century and in his later philosophy, he wrote what is known as the private language argument. That particular argument appears in his work
Philosophical Investigation and the investigations is his major work in his later philosophy. Now in that work, Wittgenstein discusses the possibility of constructing a private language by which someone could name and even identify their private sensation, their private feelings, their private and personal experiences. By private, I mean internal to themself. Now by saying that the language is private, Wittgenstein meant that there is no element of the language that is public or that could be made public. Now Wittgenstein’s claim was that the only language that is genuine language is a public language and is language that can be made public, hence he argued that there is no such thing as a genuine private language. If you try to construct one, you’re really not constructing a genuine language.

Now I believe that Wittgenstein’s argument for this view is applicable to the Barthian claim that we can just know that we’re encountering God despite the fact that there is nothing public, despite the fact that this encounter and what God says to us in it cannot be made public in any way. Now let me share with you part of Wittgenstein’s argument to this effect. Wittgenstein asks us to imagine someone who tries to give a name to his private sensations like pain. Suppose, he says, that someone decided that each time he had a certain sensation, a certain pain, he would write the symbol S in a diary. That will allow him to identify when he’s experiencing the same pain. So, let’s say for example, on one day he experiences this pain and he goes to his diary and he writes down the symbol S. The next day he thinks he’s experiencing the same pain and so he goes to the diary again and he writes down the symbol S. And the same thing happens a few hours later, a few days later, and so on and so forth. Now Wittgenstein argues though, that this writing of the symbol S each time he thinks he has this pain is nothing more than a meaningless ceremony. The person with the pain, according to Wittgenstein, does not know that each time he writes down the symbol S that he’s actually experiencing the same pain. He doesn’t know it because, and here is the key, he doesn’t know it because there’s no criterion for sameness, that is since there is no public way for us to tell that when our friend uses the symbol S he’s really experiencing the same pain as before, we have no idea of whether he’s really experiencing S. Maybe he’s experiencing something else. But even more, Wittgenstein says, it’s not just that you and I don’t know whether he’s really experiencing S again, the person himself with the pain doesn’t even know. He doesn’t know because he has no criterion for calling it the same pain. After all, it’s internal. It’s private to him, but he has no way that he can get inside of himself.
and reassure himself that it’s the same pain he experienced the day before.

Now, note with me how all of this applies to the Barthian non-verbal, revelatory encounter. The Barthian tells us that he has this private experience with God, and he wants us to believe that it really is God and that God really has said something to him. However, the Barthian can’t tell us what God said without distorting it. In fact, there’s no public way for the Barthian to prove to us that it was God whom he experienced or that what he says God said God really did say. Maybe it was God, but maybe it was Satan. As a matter of fact, maybe it was indigestion. There’s no way for us to know because there’s no criterion for determining whether it was God or whether it wasn’t. You see, with nothing public about this encounter, we simply have no way of knowing whether this was God or not, but even worse even the Barthian can’t really know whether it was God or not. Since his experience is totally private, he too has no criterion for determining from one experience to another whether it was God or not whom he encountered. Now please don’t misunderstand. I am not denying that the Barthian is experiencing something. I am only saying that since there is no public criterion for telling what it was, neither we nor the person having the experiencing can be certain that God was encountering him. Well now if this is true, then it seems to me that the Barthian notion of revelation is hopelessly bankrupt. We are told that God is the content of revelation. We are told that He reveals Himself to us in non-verbal encounter, and we’re told that when this happens we’ll somehow know it and we’ll be able to respond. The logic of Wittgenstein’s private language argument as applied to these concepts suggests otherwise, and it uncovers what seems to me to be a fatal flaw in the neo-orthodox notion of revelation. Without something public, something public like a book, a set of propositions. Without something public like a book which can be observed and tested, we have no certainty that our private experiences are of God as opposed to experiences of something else. And thus what the neo-orthodox person says about revelation really offers us very little help, if any. If this is supposed to be what revelation is and if this is supposed to be how God gives it, we’re in real trouble if we think we really know what God has spoken. Well, I could go on to offer some further complaints about Barth’s notion of revelation, but I think you get the basic idea of what the problems are.

Let me turn now for the remainder of this lecture to look at Barth’s concept of God. Having seen what Barth has to say about
the doctrine of the Word of God, it should be fairly easy for us to understand what he has to say about God. According to Karl Barth, God is to be understood as clearly holy or totally other. But we haven’t gotten to the point just yet in contemporary philosophy and theology where God is so distant that we can just ignore talking about Him altogether and focus totally on Christ. It is clear that, for Karl Barth, a transcendent God is really there. It’s just that for Barth nothing can be known about God in His transcendence. We can only know anything about God at all through the Word of God, Jesus Christ. But of course the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is not God in His transcendence. These items can be seen as Barth’s view in view of the following points that he himself makes about God. Barth says that revelation is the self-unveiling of a God, who according to His nature cannot be unveiled to man. Inscrutability and hiddenness, then, belong to the nature of Him who is called God in the Bible. Barth says that God as Creator is distinct from the world, that is, as the person that He is, He does not belong to the realm of what man as a creature can know directly by observation.

When you think about what Barth is saying, it’s reminiscent of Kantian metaphysics with his distinction between the noumenal realm and the phenomenal realm. I’m not saying that Karl Barth got this idea of God from Immanuel Kant, I’m just noting that there is a similarity that there are certain things which are open to our knowledge, open to our observation. Other things are beyond it. Now Barth says that God cannot be unveiled even indirectly in the created world because God is the Holy One whom we, in our sin, cannot see. Barth also says that the God who has revealed Himself is the Deus absconditus, the hidden God. The God to whom there is no way and no bridge, of whom we could not say or have to say one single word if He hadn’t, on His own initiative, met us as Deus revelatus, God revealed. Now this does not mean that the God who is revealed is actually the Deus absconditus, that is, the transcendent God. It means instead that the transcendent God has taken on a form in order to reveal Himself to us. This form is not the transcendent God Himself. Barth says this is God distinguishing Himself from Himself, a being of God in a mode of existence, not subordinate as compared with His first hidden mode of being as God, but just different. Now the fact that God takes on this mode does not mean that the mode fully reveals God. Barth says on page 369 of volume 1, part 1 of the dogmatics, “It is not the form that reveals, speaks, comforts, works, helps, but God in the form. Further, this mode is not the subject of revelation because that would mean that God could be unveiled to man after all, and that would mean that there was no longer
any need of God,” that is the transcendent God, “to reveal Himself after all.” Now, note the mediating position that Barth is taking at this point. He’s taking a view that says on the one hand that the transcendent God is still in the picture, still very important even though we can’t know Him and is transcendent. Orthodox thinkers have said that we can know God in His transcendent character. Those who are more radical than Barth will say that the Deus revelatus, in particular Jesus Christ, is the subject of revelation and He does unveil the transcendent, and therefore, the transcendent God isn’t needed any longer. Now Barth’s position is right between these two views. God as transcendent can’t be known in His transcendence but that doesn’t mean that we can get rid of Him totally and talk only about Jesus Christ. The transcendent God, though He’s not knowable in Himself, is still important. Here I see an affinity to Kant’s distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal realms, his distinction between a thing in itself and a thing as it appears for us. We can’t know the thing in itself. We can only know the thing as it appears for us.

Now the transcendent God, according to Barth, has taken on various forms at various times, but the form in which He is most revealed as well as most veiled is Christ. Christ is God’s word to man. In Him, Barth says, God is unveiled in veiledness and veiled in unveiledness. Barth says God’s revelation is God’s Son Jesus Christ. That is the Word of God that came to us originally and keeps coming in encounter after encounter. The Word of God, that is Christ, comes to us in a form that is unsuitable for self-presentation of God. It doesn’t correspond to the matter, that is, it doesn’t correspond to the transcendent God but rather contradicts Him. In so doing, it veils what it unveiled. Obviously then, Christ is God and is God’s revelation, but He’s not identical in form with the transcendent God. We can’t know the transcendent God except as we see Him in Christ, but that is not to see Him as He really is in Himself. Now this means finally that things that are human, in particular Jesus Christ, can never correspond to the nature of God. That is, they can’t correspond to God in His transcendence. Propositions about God don’t reveal His nature, but they are signposts that point toward Him and they are signposts which, when God chooses to use them to speak to us, become the Word of God. Thus, speech about God in a way that really corresponds to His nature is impossible.

Again, here I see Barth taking a mediating position. Orthodox thinkers would say that we can speak meaningfully about God in His transcendence. Typically Orthodox thinkers have said that we
do so analogically, or by analogy. What is true of us is true of God by analogy. Those who are far more radical than Barth say that language is absolutely meaningless in relation to the transcendent God. When we use it we’re actually talking nonsense. Therefore, we might as well remove this transcendent God from the scene because there’s nothing meaningful that we can say about Him. Language in no way points to Him. Barth, I think you can see, takes a mediating position. He won’t say that language reflects God's nature even analogically, but on the other hand he won’t say that language is so meaningless in relation to the transcendent God that we can’t say anything about Him and must remove Him from the discussion altogether.

Now the upshot of all of this is that our primary concern has to be with Christ. He is the Word of God. He’s God’s Word to us. But that doesn’t mean that we totally throw out the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God, and never talk about Him. God isn’t dead just yet in contemporary theology, if I can put it that way. We really believe He’s there. He really encounters us in revelation. We have to talk about Him as He acts in creation, revelation, redemption and the like, but we cannot know Him in Himself or talk about Him in a way that corresponds to how he is in His transcendent self. He’s there, but we can’t say anything accurately about Him as He is there in His transcendence. Now the final upshot of all of this is that one’s approach to theology or dogmatics, if you will, as well as one’s approach to Scripture must be primarily, if not exclusively, christological.

Well, that completes what I want to say about Barth’s concept of God and it also completes my material that I have for you on Karl Barth in general. In our next lecture I want to turn to the thinking of Rudolf Bultmann. We’ll pick that up next time.