

Why the prolixity [wordiness] of the *Church Dogmatics*? Why its peculiar character of being at once accessible and yet so difficult to do justice to in exposition and commentary? . . .

Barth was about the business of conceptual description: He took the classical themes of communal Christian language molded by the Bible, tradition and constant usage in worship, practice, instruction and controversy, and restated or redescribed them, rather than evolving arguments on their behalf. It was of the utmost importance to him that this communal language, especially its biblical *fons et origo* [sources], which, as we have noted, he saw as indirectly one with the Word of God, had an integrity of its own: It was irreducible. But in that case its lengthy, even leisurely unfolding was equally indispensable. For he was restating or re-using a language that had once been accustomed talk, both in first-order use in ordinary or real life, and in second-order technical theological reflection, but had now for a long time, perhaps more than 250 years, been receding from natural familiarity, certainly in theological discourse. So Barth had as it were to recreate a universe of discourse, and he had to put the reader in the middle of that world, instructing him in the use of that language by showing him how—extensively, and not only by stating the rules or principles of the discourse.

Hans Frei, “An Afterword: Eberhard Busch’s Biography of Karl Barth,” 110-111, in *Karl Barth in Re-view: Posthumous Works Reviewed and Assessed*, ed. H.-Martin Rumscheidt (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1981).