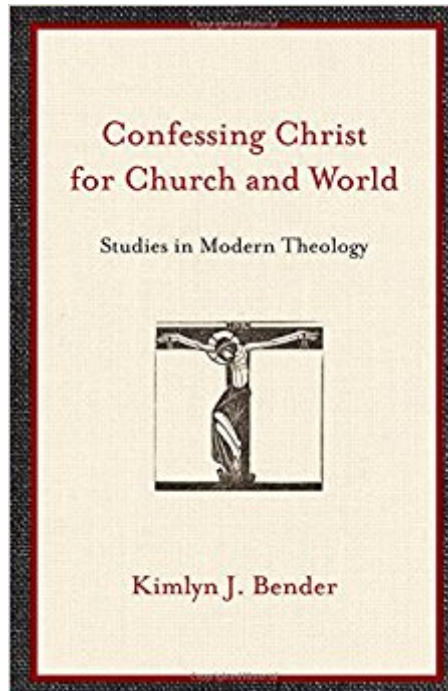


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# Confessing Christ For Church And World: Studies In Modern Theology



## Synopsis

With one foot in the world of Scripture and another in the contemporary world, Karl Barth was both a modern and a confessional theologian. The intersection of these two worlds makes him a fruitful dialogue partner for thinking creatively about what it means to be faithful to Jesus Christ today. In this collection of essays both old and new, Kimlyn Bender explores Barth's understanding of Christ, church and world in conversation with American evangelicalism, Roman Catholicism, Reinhard HÃfÃtter, Adolf von Harnack, Bart Ehrman and Baptists, among others. Along the way he also engages the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Bender's penetrating analysis of modern theology sheds light on both the task of theology and the witness of the church.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Clear, scholarly and accessible, these essays draw extensively upon the work of Schleiermacher and Barth as vital resources for Christian reflection today. As a collected volume, this will provide an indispensable point of reference for the further understanding of their theological contributions in new and changing contexts." (David Fergusson, University of Edinburgh)"A distinguished expert on Barth's doctrine of the church, Kimlyn Bender now extends his agenda to include an impressive range of new topics. His lively and incisive essays cast fresh light on modern theology from a sophisticated evangelical perspective. He will help American evangelicals to see that Karl Barth, whom they once regarded as a fearsome enemy, is actually their best friend." (George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary)"This collection of studies by Kimlyn Bender showcases both very fine dogmatic talent and impressive theological maturity and responsibility. Engaged across a wide

ecumenical front even as it delves deeply into the particular riches of Barth's theological legacy, Bender's work brings much needed light to some of the most acute debates of the present moment in English speaking Protestant theology. It invites readers to secure important gifts for the life, preaching and mission of the church precisely in and through the joyful labor of substantive theological reflection and careful dogmatic argument. The lucidity with which these essays are written is surely a mark of Bender's great gifts as a theological teacher." (Philip G. Ziegler, University of Aberdeen)"Kimlyn Bender's beautiful collection of essays brings us again and again before the living Jesus Christ. He reminds us of the scandal of the gospel and uses it as the starting point from which to explore several key questions and issues that have shaped modern theology. The richness of his scholarly work is reflected in the topics covered, which range from matters of ecclesiology to epistemology, from creation to Christology, from Scripture to ecumenism. With a careful and fair hand, he brings his two great interlocutors, Barth and Schleiermacher, into conversation with thinkers and ideas from a wide variety of traditions and points of view. The result is a vibrant and enriching conversation that will be of interest to anyone studying dogmatic theology. This book represents the best of contemporary Protestant theology, and it challenges us to see Christ once again with new and more discerning eyes." (Keith L. Johnson, Wheaton College)"Confessing Christ for Church and World brilliantly declares 'Jesus is Lord' in the contemporary North American context in dialectical fashion. In this fine collection of essays, Kimlyn J. Bender masterfully explores the significance of Karl Barth's theology in conversation with Friedrich Schleiermacher and other notable interlocutors on a wide range of important subjects. The reader will come away challenged and enlightened by the depth and breadth of this ecumenical endeavor that grounds contextual theology in the scandal of gospel particularity." (Paul Louis Metzger, Multnomah Biblical Seminary, author of *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth*)"This collection of essays will be helpful for any evangelical theologian or historian interested in understanding the influence and impact of Karl Barth on theology in this century. One need not be an expert in Barth to gain valuable insights from Bender's work. This Barthian scholar has made Barth's work accessible to a larger audience and has thereby given a valuable gift to the nonspecialist." (Glenn R. Kreider, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July–September 2016)"Bender's collection of essays provides space for dialogue across the American Christian spectrum, while not sacrificing his own Protestant outlook. What makes such an exchange possible is not the diversity inherent in American expressions of Christian religion, but rather Bender's own conviction that there is common ground to be found at the center of all Protestant principles: the preeminence of Christ over church, over canon, over creation." (Max

Heidelberger, Princeton Theological Review, Vol. 19, No. 1)"In these well-crafted, incisive and penetrating essays, Kimlyn Bender provides ample demonstration of the ongoing significance of both Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher for theology and confession in the present time. An outstanding contribution to the literature of contemporary theology in service to the witness of the church." (John R. Franke, Yellowstone Theological Institute, general coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America)"In this absorbing work, Kimlyn Bender offers a series of doctrinal studies that exemplify the art of thinking with esteemed figures from the theological tradition— in order then to think after them for the purpose of the church today. The collection attends primarily to themes in ecclesiology, Scripture, and Christology in dialogue with Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher; but in truth its dogmatic remit is far broader, and its discourse embraces a wide array of challenging conversation partners. Bender writes with his characteristic precision and verve throughout, and his measured contributions are as insightful as they are thoughtful. This volume comes highly recommended." (Paul T. Nimmo, University of Aberdeen)"In this remarkable collection of essays, Kimlyn Bender unflinchingly keeps our attention fixed on the scandalous particularity of Jesus Christ— his living and active presence and authority. Upon the completion of one essay, readers will be eager to see what they will find next. Each essay is important in its own right, and taken together the book presents a compelling and coherent theological and ecclesial vision. This collection includes astute analysis of seminal theological texts and clarifying and evenhanded assessment of significant theological disagreements that have shaped the contours of modern theology and have abiding significance for theology and church today. These essays are exemplary instances of historical theology carried out with an eye towards faithful dogmatics and the church's witness in the contemporary world." (David Lauber, Wheaton College)"More than just a description of Karl Barth's theology, Kimlyn Bender's erudite collection of essays explores a variety of topics and interlocutors engaging Barth as a persuasive conversation partner. These essays are theologically sophisticated and written in a lively and intellectually engaging style, discussing topics in ecclesiology (Reinhard HÃfÃ tter), Christology (Schleiermacher), Scripture and theology (von Harnack and Bart Erhman), natural theology (William James and Alasdair McIntyre), and atheism (Feuerbach and the 'new atheism'). Ecumenical in tone, Bender's arguments are shaped by a strong Reformation sensitivity and written in an 'ad hoc' apologetic style (or what Barth calls 'good apologetics'), demonstrating the truth of confessing Christ in the church and the world. This book is highly recommended for scholars in Barth's thought yet accessible to non-experts, especially Catholic and evangelical observers, who seek to think more critically about their own commitments and traditions." (David Haddorff, St. John's University)

Kimlyn J. Bender (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is associate professor of theology at Truett Seminary, Baylor University. He is the author of *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology* and is coeditor with Bruce McCormack of *Theology of Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology*. Bender's work has been published in numerous journals and collections, including *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *Soundings*, *Sophia*, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* and *Journal of Religion and Society*. He serves as a contributing editor for *Cultural Encounters*, has served as the theology editor of *Perspectives in Religious Studies* and is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the Karl Barth Society of North America and the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion. Bender is the recipient of numerous awards, including the David Allan Hubbard Award from Fuller Theological Seminary, the Outstanding Faculty Award from the University of Sioux Falls, and the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics. An ordained Baptist minister, Bender has preached in many churches and has served in ministries in the Dakotas, California, New Jersey and most recently as the Senior Pastor of Oak Hills Baptist Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He and his wife Trudy have three children.

Karl Barth is the giant of 20th Century theology. He is credited with stemming the tide of theological liberalism and recovering a Christological and theological hermeneutic. Others regard Barth with suspicion seeing in his theology a dangerous trend toward universalism and an undermining of the authority of scripture. Still others are troubled by his 'theology from above,' and his dismissal of natural theology (theology from below). For my part, my forays into Barth's theology have been fruitful, though not without difficulty. Barth is a prolific and complicated theologian and it is helpful to have a guide who illuminates the significance of his theology for my context. Kimlyn J. Bender (Ph.D, Princeton Theological Seminary) is associate professor of theology at Truett Seminary (at Baylor) and has previously published a book on Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology (subject and title). In *Confessing Christ for Church and World: Studies in Modern Theology* he explores a range of topics: ecclesiology and ecumenical relations, Canon and confessionalism, Creation and Natural Theology. Karl Barth remains his chief interlocutor but he also looks at the work of Fredrick Schleiermacher, as a counterpoint to Barth, and several contemporary voices. *Confessing Christ for Church in World* divides into three parts. Chapters one through four make up Part One and explore Karl Barth's ecclesiology in conversation with American theology, evangelicalism and the Catholic church. Part Two (chapters 5-9) explores Barth's understanding of Canon and the chastened role of confessions in Barth's theology. Part Three (chapters 10-11) explores Barth's doctrine of Creation

and rejection of Natural theology as exemplified in his 1938-39 Gifford lectures. Bender concludes in chapter twelve with a 'postscript' on Schleiermacher's Christology. Part one begins with a brief summary of Barth's ecclesiology. Barth sees the church as the body of Christ in his 'earthly-historical form of existence' (22). As with any other point of contact between God and humanity, Barth speaks, by analogy, using the Chalcedonian formula to speak of what the church is (29). That is, the church is to be understood as a divine institution and a human one (fully human, fully divine). Christ is not fully identified with or dependent upon the church, but the church shares in his life and bears witness to his coming (32). As Bender states: Barth's own position is to speak of the church as both divinely constituted and historically situated, a reality comprised of both an inner mystery of the Spirit and a society of human persons in fellowship and joint activity. The Church is for Barth both invisible and visible, so that the inner mystery is not sacrificed to the external form, or vice versa, thus maintaining the integrity of each. Barth seeks neither to confuse nor separate the divine event and the historical and sociological form, presented in a highly dialectical construal of the relation between divine action and historic duration. (36-7). Bender then surveys recent critiques of Barth (that he subsumes pneumatology into Christology, how his soteriology makes the church appear non-concrete or unnecessary (43-51). However Barth, agrees that the church is a concrete reality, but is concerned that our definition of church doesn't collapse into its visible expression solely (55). Furthermore, Barth sees redemptive history coming to close with the cross but that doesn't mean that he dismisses all human agency (58). Barth's high Christology means the church is always subservient to him. As Bender notes, "While the church is necessary for us because God has freely chosen it and freely joined himself to it, it is not necessary for God, nor is God's salvific activity limited to the church by some type of necessity (62). In Chapter two, Bender brings Barth's ecclesiology in conversation with evangelicalism showing where Barth would critique it and its practice, where he may contribute something of value for evangelicals, and where Barth's project is sympathetic to its aims. Bender argues that Barth would critique evangelicals for substituting a movement for a church, the ways we may be anthropologically grounded rather than theologically grounded, our triumphalism and secular methodology, our 'cults of personality,' and our reliance more on testimony than the gospel (77-78). Bender sees Barth as contributing to evangelical ecclesiology by providing a rich theology of church (rather than a concession to sociological categories or Catholic substance), a critique of evangelical individualism, and a theology which sees church both as divine event and human institution (79-87). Bender sees common ground between evangelicals and Barth in their shared embrace the scandal of the gospel (87), and believe in commitment to a particular congregation (ibid.). and the commitment to mission (89). In chapter

three Barth delves into Reinhard Hütter's critique of Barth, from a Catholic perspective, and illustrates how Barth provides a radical alternative to Roman Catholic ecclesiology. While Roman Catholicism (in Hütter's understanding) sees the church as an 'embodied pneumatology,' which undergirds the 'great Tradition' in the Neumanesque sense (109-110), Bender observes this is opposed to not only Barth but Protestantism (116). Like many other Catholic theologians Hutter sees a 'Catholic substance' in the church's ecclesial life where the church is the continuation of Christ's work making the church a 'steward of grace.' In contrast, Bender observes: Herein lies the difference between Catholic substance and the Protestant principle. For there is an irrevocable insistence by the latter that the gift never be seen as a transferable entity entrusted to a steward who possesses it, that the church can be a servant and not a steward of grace, and a permanent distinction be made between Giver and recipient, between Christ and his bride, between Spirit and temple. In effect, this insistence is made because a Protestant vision is predicated on a refusal to grant that the church is, itself, an extension of the incarnation. This refusal is in turn joined to a basic recognition that Jesus Christ is present, and not absent, and is so through the power of the Spirit. The church does not "make" Christ present, but Christ makes himself present through the power of his self-attestation (118). Bender brings this Protestant-Catholic distinction to bear on ecumenical discussions between Evangelicals and Catholics in chapter four. While conversation between the two is increasingly friendly and mutually edifying, too often Evangelical Protestants have conceded their lack of ecclesiology and looked to Rome. Bender sees in Barth a mature and thoughtful alternative to Catholic Substance (133). Part two examines Barth's Canon, his understanding of scripture and ecclesial confessions. Barth's theological education schooled him in liberal theological assumptions and the historical-critical method. Bender traces Barth's move away from his training in his early theological works (chapter five) and as a mature theologian (demonstrated by his published dialogue with Harnack discussed in chapter six) to an understanding of scripture rooted in its particular witness to the coming of Christ. In chapter eight, Bender turns to the work of Barth Ehrman (our modern day Harnack?) and illustrates the problem of reading scripture (and the canon) non-theologically. Chapter eight shows how Barth's understanding of creeds and confessions brings him into fruitful conversation with Baptists and other non-creedal, free churches. Barth banged out his understanding of Creeds against Lutheranism (not Catholicism). In Lutheran Orthodoxy, the Augsburg confession took on scriptural authority whereas Barth found, in the Reformed tradition, the various confessions were offered provisionally. Bender argues that free church can learn from Barth an appreciation for confessions without a capitulation to a forced subscription (264). While Baptists will find points of tension with Barth, Bender illustrates several points amendable to them in his

theology (265). I particularly enjoyed Bender's chapter on Barth and atheism (chapter nine). Barth did not see secularism and the growing antipathy toward God as a new problem. For Barth, this was a new spin on an old issue. Religion and Atheism were but two sides of the same coin; both were an idolatrous rejection of Christian particularity: the gospel of Jesus Christ (275). Barth's response to Atheism was to emphasize the peculiar person of Christ, to subject atheists to critical negation, not allowing them to set the terms of the debate, and to continue to hold out grace toward them through Jesus (271-280). Barth could even see a value in the growing secularism and Atheism in helping the church clarify its identity over and against the wider culture. Part three discusses Barth's (and Schleiermacher's) Christological understanding of creation and his rejection of some-sort of universal natural theology. As Barth's Gifford lectures demonstrate, Barth was much more interested in the particularity of special revelation. This Christocentric particularity (and contra-Schleiermacher, an objective Christology) is instructive for us and the church's proclamation of the God in Christ. What should be evident from the above summary, Bender is a sympathetic reader of Barth (though I would hasten, not uncritical). I found this book helpful in helping me hear how Barth would critique our age. I recommend this book for students and theologians. As a pastor, I found Bender's discussion helpful for clarifying the purpose and witness of the church. Whatever differences I may have with Barth (and I am a neophyte in his theology), I appreciate his challenge to secular and sociological modes of church. I also think that Bender argues convincingly that there is such a thing as a Protestant ecclesiology with substance. The Church is the invisible-that-becomes-visible, bearing witness to our redemption through Christ. I give this book five stars. Notice of material connection: I received this book from IVP Academic in exchange for my honest review.

Kimlyn Bender, at Baylor University, has written a stellar collection of essays in *Confessing Christ for Church and World: Studies in Modern Theology*. The bulk of the essays center on or build off of the theology of Karl Barth, though there is also a really interesting look at Schleiermacher. It's broken up into three parts, the first dealing with the church, the second with canon, and the third with the relation between Christ and creation. Bender previously published a volume on Barth's ecclesiology, and much of that comes to bear in the essays included in this work. Particularly he defends Barth's ecclesiology against a host of influential detractors (Hutter, Hauerwas, and Mangina). He holds that Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, though often labeled deficient, is not in fact too weak, but merely different. The key to Barth's ecclesiology is the inseparable but asymmetrical nature of the church's union with Christ. The church is united to Christ while always being distinct from him. Barth is wary

to prevent Christ from being collapsed into the church, and thus losing his freedom to disrupt and redirect his people. Christ is always Lord over his church. Moreover, the action of the Spirit can never be directly identified with the action of the church. For that would "naturalize" and "historicize" the Spirit's work. Rather, the church exists in its correspondence to the work of the Spirit - as a response to God's prior work. Thus, when critics denounce Barth for ignoring human agency, Bender rebounds that they have ignored the high place he gives to this idea of correspondence, or of analogy between human act and divine act wrought through faith. This then leads Bender to assess what a conversation between Barth and American evangelicals might look like over the nature of the church. Next he addresses the question of Roman Catholicism and argues that in fact the reformation is not over. He writes, Protestantism is not simply an ad hoc reaction to Renaissance papal abuses. If it was, the Reformation would certainly have long since been over. But the Reformation is not so much a historical epoch as an intentional confession of faith based on a principle of discovery, no matter how imperfectly embodied or carried out. It is an attempt to recover and confess the right relationship between Christ and the church, and all other elements, that is, justification by grace alone through faith alone, Scripture as the living voice of Christ over against and not only within the church and its tradition, and so forth - all are intricately tied to this.

(140) Thus, Bender would have us beware of an overhasty ecumenical rapprochement that doesn't deal with the crux of the matter. Though Protestant-Catholic relations have hit a unique congeniality in the last few decades, this does not mean that matters have actually been resolved. This then moves to Part Two, which deals with the question of the canon of Scripture, which is crucial to Barth's ecclesiology. All the essays here are very helpful in dealing with a question that is often given short-shrift. Bender holds that Barth gives the canon a real though relative authority. It is possible, though not at all likely in Barth's view, that the canon of Scripture could be altered. For Barth, this change would have to be more than the whim of a few individual detractors. "Canonization is a matter not so much of decision and authority but of faith and obedience" (168). Thus, canonization is not a completed task as much as it is a command issued to the church. Every generation must receive the canon anew. This should not be read as destabilizing in any extreme way, for Barth has confidence that this reception will be in continuity with the church preceding it. Nonetheless, he holds to a formal openness to the canon's revision. There is some profitable discussion here of Barth's interaction with von Harnack over historical-criticism, and then Bender's own interactions with Bart Ehrman, seeking to bring Barth's thought to bear against one very influential opponent of Christianity and the canon of Scripture. The heart of Barth's understanding of the canon is that "in spite of all of the trials of interpretation and understanding in the midst of this real and irreducible

variety, through a cacophony of voices we come to hear one voice, a voice that kills and makes alive, a voice the church believes and obeys in the midst of its own struggles, doubts and fears" (176). This then is primarily a theological judgment, not a historical one. So Ehrman's problems are naturally theological, more so than historical. Other opponents of Christianity are addressed, namely those who identify as atheists. Here Bender offers a very interesting account of how Barth might respond to the New Atheism as we see it today. Essentially concluding that Barth would first seek to deconstruct it from the inside, drawing out its internal contradictions, and then applying an external critique, namely the Gospel of Christ. Lastly, in Part 3, Bender addresses some questions related to Christ's relationship to creation. He looks at Barth's Gifford Lectures and highlights the role that particularity plays in his account of the theological task. By far, my favorite essay though was his discussion of Friedrich Schleiermacher, in "A Concluding Postscript to Schleiermacher's Christology." He shows that while Schleiermacher sought to place Christology at the center of his thought, this was not so much a matter of Christology being the hermeneutical center of Christian thought, but of Christology being "the pinnacle, so to speak, of the theological edifice" (354). This late entry of Christology into the game, even if it is given such a high role, ends up being problematic, because Schleiermacher lets a prior metaphysical account of the world as a closed system prevent him from taking full stock of the actual Christ event. Because he deemed all miracles impossible, he was unable to grasp the miracle that is God's coming to us in Christ Jesus. Bender maintains this weakness in Schleiermacher over and against Kevin Hector who has tried to revive Schleiermacher's Christology, claiming that it gives us a high account of Christ in a fashionable actualist bent. In a rather brilliant manner, Bender upends this proposal, showing that Schleiermacher's anthropological theology needs finally to be put to rest. All in all, this a very provocative and sophisticated collection of essays. It is at times repetitive, as many of the same themes are run through several times, but it leaves readers deeply impressed by the ongoing significance of Barth's theology and of the Protestant confession of Christ as Lord over the church in a way that is of enduring significance. Amidst the seemingly endless flow of books on Barth, and theology more broadly, this is one that is well worth its time and deserves attention. NOTE: This book was provided free of charge in exchange for an honest review.

Superb book. Excellent service

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