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Karl Barth

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Karl Barth

For this essay we have chosen a simple title: *Karl Barth*. We could not do otherwise. As yet it is too early to speak conclusively of Barth's *theology* and *influence*. That may be done fifty or perhaps a hundred years from now; all that is written on Barth during his lifetime is only provisional.

For this there are, in the main, two reasons. In the first place, Karl Barth is a theological enigma, "wholly other" (to use a favorite phrase of his), he being neither orthodox nor Modernist, neither Lutheran nor Calvinist, and yet at the same time, a rationalizing enthusiast along Reformed lines, veiling his theological thought in a terminology that is being greatly misunderstood and was at first perhaps designed to be misunderstood. In the second place, there has been a considerable change in both Barthian theology and expression; while some of his former associates have been moving toward Modernism, he is apparently seeking a more conservative, (neo) Calvinistic doctrinal position. Th. L. Haitjema in his fine study *Karl Barths 'Kritische' Theologie* points out that Barth is a "child of his time also in this respect, that he shows spiritual growth from year to year," illustrating this by the sweeping changes in the various editions of Barth's *Roembrief*.¹⁾ Similarly Hermann Sasse in his excellent critique of recent theological trends in Germany, *Here We Stand*, says: "The second edition of Barth's theology is a new work; and the author of the *Dogmatik* represents an entirely different stage of development from the author of the Epistle to the Romans."²⁾ Again, referring to a still later stage of Barthian theology, he writes: "How can this unfortunate development of Barth be explained? He has

1) P. 84 f.

2) Second edition, translated, revised, and enlarged by Theodore Tappert, p. 153.

broken with the living Church."³) Barth himself has voiced the complaint that he has become unpopular, because he has become orthodox.⁴) In an interview with W. Childs Robinson, reported in *The Presbyterian* (Oct. 27, 1938, pp. 3 ff.), Barth made the statement: "I have not held to the contrast between history and super-history for eleven years."⁵) Nor is this accidental; for Barth is principally opposed to a "fertiges System."⁶) Barthian theology, then, is not fixed, but in flux and so as yet cannot be judged with finality. Even the latest edition of Barth's *Dogmatik*⁷) consists only of *Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, or the fundamentals of his theological thought. Indeed, according to Barth, theology can be no more than a *prolegomenon*, since revelation and theology are never contemporaneous, so that really there can be no theology in the traditional orthodox sense.⁸)

If Barth has not been adequately or correctly represented by the many divines who have endeavored to set forth his theology, these writers must not be judged too severely. Barth himself excuses them, for he admits that he has not succeeded in expressing himself in a manner comprehensible to all.⁹) In fact, he admits: "In these years [1928—1938] I have had to rid myself of the last remnants of a philosophical, i. e., anthropological (in America one says 'humanistic' or 'naturalistic') foundation and exposition of the Christian doctrine."¹⁰) Well does A. Keller say of this change: "The streams which sprang forth impetuously from the rock of a soul in revolt are now quieting down."¹¹) H. R. Mackintosh excuses his difficult, often hardly intelligible terminology, which he used especially in his first works, with these charitable words: "In a large degree he felt it incumbent on him at first to choose a new language in which to set forth doctrines which in his judgment were as old as Scripture and the Reformers. Without this,

3) *Ibid.*, p. 109.

4) *The Teaching of Karl Barth*. R. Birch Hoyle. P. 244.

5) Vol. 108, No. 43, p. 6.

6) Cf. CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, Vol. V, No. 11, p. 821.—The whole article *Die Theologie Karl Barths (Dialektische Theologie)* by W. Kemner is worth thoughtful study, the author treating Barthian theology from the orthodox Lutheran point of view and showing a clear understanding of its basic principles.

7) *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*.

8) *The Karl Barth Theology or the New Transcendentalism*. A. S. Zerbe. Pp. 241 ff. Barth does not admit that Holy Scripture is revelation. "Unless conceived as latently containing a transcendental element, Scripture is merely a human book like any other." *Ibid.*, p. 242.

9) *How My Mind Has Changed in This Decade*. Karl Barth. *The Christian Century*. Vol. 56, No. 38, p. 1134.

10) *Ibid.*, p. 1132.

11) *Karl Barth and Christian Unity*. A. Keller. Translated by W. Petersmann and M. Manrodt and revised by A. J. Macdonald, p. XVIII.

it seemed, people could not understand his positions, let alone make up their minds about them. His language has become considerably simplified with time."¹²⁾ H. Sasse in his work *Here We Stand* calls attention to Barth's change of terminology and style, corresponding with his theological change, especially in the *Credo* of 1935, which is about the simplest and most popular of Barth's theological books.¹³⁾ To every biographer of his and every critic of his theology, Barth, then, is a crux, and what is said of him must be received *cum grano salis*; for we are still without the true perspective which is necessary for us to appraise his position and work properly. It is with this understanding that the writer of this essay undertakes his task.

II

Karl Barth, no doubt, is exalted too highly by those who rather blindly follow him throughout as also by those who, selecting from his theology some laudable points, fail to study and consider them against the background of his theology as a whole. Certainly, Barth has some good parts, and these surely shall not be taken away from him; but it would be unfair to forget over the good in his theological setup the evil that deserves criticism. Modernists, on the other hand, judge him too harshly. And very severe, too, has been the judgment of orthodox Lutherans and Calvinists.

Let the reader decide. Holmes Rolston in his work *A Conservative Looks to Barth and Brunner* (pp. 17 ff.), offers the reader quite a number of opinions on Barth. Here are a few: "The appearance of Karl Barth in the Protestant Church at this solemn juncture of her history can only mean that he has been chosen and sent of God to do a work for his generation" (McConnachie). The Barthian movement is "the greatest spiritual movement of the century" (McConnachie). "Suddenly there has burst upon us a true son of the Reformation. He is clothed in fire; his words, the echo of the word which he has heard, are deep and challenging" (J. A. Chapman). "Barthianism is an all-inclusive world view, probably the most original and comprehensive, certainly the most revolutionary of recent times" (A. S. Zerbe).

A still larger collection of opinions is given in A. S. Zerbe's work *The Karl Barth Theology or The New Transcendentalism* (p. 272 f.). We quote a few: "Karl Barth is the greatest theologian since Schleiermacher" (A. Lange). "Barthianism is the final and genuine word for Lutheranism and Barth the savior of Protestantism in Germany" (Count Hermann Keyserling).

Unfavorable opinions are the following. "More a rationalistic than a Scriptural discussion of theology" (Tillich). "Ein auf den

12) *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 263.

13) P. 154.

Kopf gestellter Hegel." (Schmidt-Japing). "Une théologie du désespoir" (A. Keller). "A species of agnosticism akin to that of Herbert Spencer" (W. P. Patterson), etc. *The Anglican Theological Review* ^{13b} regards Barthianism as "Protestantism with a vengeance," as a "School of New Reformation Theology," protesting against the [humanistic] theory that there is a fairly uniform development or evolution in Christianity; against the attempt to make theology the expression of the religious experience of the Church of today; against the attempt to restate Christianity in terms of the religious consciousness or teaching of Jesus.¹⁴ H. Sasse, in *Here We Stand*, writes, "In Karl Barth liberal theology brought forth its own conqueror. He could overcome liberal theology because it is bones of its bones and flesh of its flesh."^{14b} *The American Lutheran* (Vol. 22, No. 10, p. 9) declares that Barthianism is not Lutheran and that its influence (quoting Koeberle's *Quest for Holiness*) threatens to destroy the specifically Lutheran understanding of the nature of the Church, the Sacraments, and the nature of the gift of the Spirit."¹⁵

While orthodox Lutherans do not acknowledge Barthianism as Lutheran, orthodox Calvinists refuse to accept it as truly Calvinistic. One may think of the remark of Wilhelm Pauck in his work *Karl Barth: Prophet of a New Christianity?* who points out that Barth "cites the authority of Luther just as often as he does that of the Genevan reformer."¹⁶ Very definite is the denial of the Calvinistic character of Barthianism made by Cornelius Van Til in *Christianity Today*.^{16b} Asserting that Karl Barth's theology is based upon an antitheistic theory of reality and an antitheistic theory of knowledge, he says: "His theology is a 'sport' and will soon revert to type. Professor McGiffert of Chicago predicted last summer that Barthianism would not last because it was really a recrudescence of Calvinism. If we might venture a prediction, it would be that Barthianism may last a long time because it is really Modernism." Writing in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, F. D. Jenkins of Princeton declares that Barthianism constitutes "a complete antithesis to the Reformed Theology on the subject of the knowability of God as Creator as based upon His creation, including the constitution of man";¹⁷ And after having discussed his theology *qua* theology in detail, he remarks: "Let not the reader think that this is Calvinism. 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the

13 b) Vol. 14, No. 1; p. 13 f.

14) *Karl Barth, Prophet and Theologian*. Pp. 13 ff. 14 b) P. 155.

15) *The State of Visible Christendom. VI—Soeren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth*. By O. P. Kretzmann. Pp. 8 ff.

16) P. 9 f. 16 b) Vol. I, No. 10, p. 13 f.

17) Vol. 83, No. 332, p. 431.

hands of Esau.' Neither is it Augustinianism nor Paulinism, as is so presumptively claimed for it."^{17b} Kai E. Jardt Joergensen, of Copenhagen, Denmark, in *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, writes: "In 1918 Karl Barth published his *Roemerbrief*, which is not a commentary, but rather a world view, or theology. This began the movement known as 'Dialectic Theology.' It has as its aim a fight against what Barth calls 'the misery of Protestantism': Orthodoxy, Pietism, Enlightenment, and Schleiermacher. These, says Barth, are the four cornerstones of the prison in which we are all living."¹⁸ The *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* speaks of Barthianism thus: "It has somewhat modified the parent system (Neo-Calvinism), but has retained its essential feature (Neo-Calvinism)."¹⁹ M. Channing-Pearce, in *The Hibbert Journal*, describes Barthianism as "the sudden combustion of a general and long-gathering reaction against the overweening immanence of nineteenth-century evolutionary thought, and Karl Barth, in the main, a modern Luther pitted against the Papacy of Science."²⁰ F. D. Jenkins, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, closes his keen investigation of Barthianism with the words: "We must end as we began with the statement that that which we have before us is not a theology, but a religious philosophy (as much as Barth decries it), only another attempt in company with Schleiermacher, Troeltsch, Otto, and others, but as variant to them, to find the religious *a priori*. The *a priori* he found, the religion he missed."²¹

But just what value have these variant opinions to the reader? They show that even the most learned students of Barthianism have not been able to agree on the real nature and scope of this movement, no matter whether they were orthodox or liberal, Lutheran or Reformed. They also point out the predicament in which the essayist finds himself who wishes to tell his readers in simple and clear language just what Barthianism is. In his famous work *Karl Barth and Christian Unity* A. Keller says of it: "One is reminded not only of Marcion, but also of the 'Yes-and-No-Theology' of John Scotus Erigena and of the dialectical theologians of scholasticism or of Lagrange, the French-Catholic theologian of the seventeenth century, of Pascal and of Augustine."²² And C. C. McCown in his book *The Search for the Real Jesus* complains: "One of the chief objections to his theology is the kaleidoscopic

17 b) *Ibid.*, p. 461.

18) Vol. 4, p. 175, April, 1931.

19) Vol. 7, No. 5, p. 329.

20) Vol. 35, p. 365. On page 366 the author says: "The pith of his prophecy was the re-affirmation of a transcendentalism which scientific and secular humanism increasingly denied."

21) *Germany's New Paradox Theology*, Vol. 83, p. 462.

22) P. 18.

changes through which it has passed and the paradoxical and contradictory utterances which disfigure its presentation. It is, therefore, extremely difficult to say what he believes . . . hardly a page, certainly not a complete chapter, but is disfigured by the egotistical dogmatism which insists that God is the 'Wholly Other' and that only Barth's *ex cathedra* definitions of the terms within which the subject is to be considered are correct." 23)

One thing, however, is clear. As Barth is casting aside the old terminology and is speaking and writing in simpler terms, it will be easier rightly to appraise him; though what A. Keller says in his *Karl Barth and Christian Unity* is still true: "Barthianism is as yet no theological system, even though the usual volumes on dogmatics are even now being published. It is still in the form of a struggle in which the old and the new are fighting for survival and of a condition of distress in which there is a battle with invisible powers." 24) It is, however, only after Barth will have published his *Dogmatik* completely that the estimates of his theology and influence will be fairly reliable, unless, of course, Barth after that should again make sweeping changes, either toward the orthodox or the liberal wing.

III

The very *names* of the theology of Karl Barth have been found perplexing. It has been called "Dialectic Theology" (a term which Barth himself has not favored), because it uses "the method of statement and counterstatement." 25) But in his well-written, keenly analytic article in the *Journal of Religion* Paul Tillich declares that Barth's theology is *not* dialectic. "A dialectic theology," he contends, "is one in which 'yes' and 'no' belong inseparably together. In the so-called 'dialectic' theology they are irreconcilably separated, and that is why this theology is not dialectic." 26)

Tillich suggests that Barth's theology rather is *paradoxical* and that therein lies its strength." 27) Barthianism is indeed a "Theology of Paradoxes" because of its constant emphasis on the "Yes-and-No" aspects of its internally contradictory theological propositions. God thus is timeless; yet He enters time. God is the unknowable; yet He makes Himself known. Of course, Barth's paradoxical propositions are not quite as simple as all that; we have chosen these simplest of all paradoxes merely to give the

23) P. 296. 24) P. 36.

25) H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 266.

26) *What Is Wrong with the "Dialectic" Theology?* Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 127.

27) *Ibid.*, p. 127.

reader an idea of the essence of a paradox. Barth rather puts the paradox like this: "If you ask about *God*, and if I am really to tell about *Him*, dialectic is all that can be expected of me. Neither my affirmation nor my denial lays claim to being *God's* truth. Neither is more than a *witness* to that Truth which stands in the center between every Yes and No."²⁸⁾

Another name given to Barthian theology is that of "Theology of Crisis." Perhaps the clearest explanation of this term is given by W. M. Horton in his very helpful work *Contemporary Continental Theology*, in which he writes: "The term 'crisis' here refers not only to the crisis of modern civilization and modern theology, but to the perpetual crisis in which man is always involved when he tries to solve his problem by his own powers. Over every man, every institution, every culture, every so-called Christian church that takes this anthropocentric and self-reliant attitude, *God's* judgment (Greek *krisis*) lowers like a thunder cloud, and sooner or later it descends *senkrecht von oben*, straight down like a thunderbolt, to proclaim that all things human are bounded by the 'death-line.'"²⁹⁾ H. R. Mackintosh describes the meaning of *crisis* in Barthianism thus: "Man, the world, religion, the Church — all for this theology are under the judgment and demand of the Word of *God*. . . . To understand Revelation, man must listen with the consciousness of standing at the bar of *God*."³⁰⁾

Because of Barth's continuous stress on the chief content of theology as such, namely, the Word of *God*, Barthianism is now generally known as the "*Theology of the Word of God*." However, Barth's concept of the Word of *God* is not that of Luther or that of the Protestant Reformation in general. Barth does not identify the Word of *God* with Scripture. The Word of *God* is not the written Word of the Holy Bible. Barth is not a Reformed Fundamentalist. So he does not identify the Bible with the Word of *God*. The Word of *God* is rather "*God* himself as He speaks to men; as He meets them in the ever-recurring crises of their lives. It is, above all, *Christ*, *Christ* who bridges the gulf between *God* and man."³¹⁾ Therefore the name "*Theology of the Word of God*" is misleading; upon hearing it, the uninitiated is likely to confound it with the theology of the Reformation, the theology of the *Sola Scriptura*, which Barth, however, disavows.

For this reason, perhaps, the name Barthianism is after all the most significant term for this type of theology, since it identifies that which Barth teaches as theology in quite unmistakable terms.

28) Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 267.

29) Pp. 100 ff.

30) *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 265.

31) *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, *Karl Barth, Prophet and Theologian*, p. 20.

We have said before that Barth has changed not only his expressions, but, in part at least, also his theological emphases. While that is true, the Barthian fundamentals remain. Even in the latest edition of his *Dogmatik* Barth remains Barth. It may be a more mellow Barth, a more mature Barth, a more readable and likable Barth, but it is Barth all the same, as we intend to show later on.

One more thought. Barth has evidently been regarded by some as a thoroughly original theologian. Certain accidents in Barth's theology, or, let us say, certain approaches of his, are indeed novel; but, no doubt, M. Channing-Pearce is correct when he avers that "the utterances of Barth and his school of prophets seem to be neither original nor in any 'major' sense of the word prophetic."³² This will become obvious as we study his theological *Werdegang*.

IV

While Karl Barth's life has been rich in agreeable and disagreeable experiences, it has been in no wise tumultuous. He was born on May 10, 1886, in Basel, Switzerland, where his father, Fritz Barth, later a rather conservative professor of Reformed theology at Bern, was then minister. With his older brother Heinrich and his younger brother Peter (both of whom have since achieved success in their respective fields) Karl thus grew up in the ministerial and theological atmosphere of his parental home.³³ At Bern, Barth attended the local *gymnasium* until 1904. From 1904 to 1908, he studied theology in Bern, Berlin, Tuebingen, and Marburg. In 1908-1909 he served as associate editor of Rade's *Christliche Welt*. After that he was assistant pastor of the German Reformed Church in Geneva; and, beginning in 1912, pastor in Safenwil, Canton Aargau. Here as a pastor he wrote his famous *Roemerbrief*, the first edition of which appeared in 1919. In 1921 he became professor of Reformed theology at Goettingen; then professor of theology at the University of Muenster, in Westphalia, and finally professor of theology at the University of Bonn, where he was dismissed for his outspoken testimony against the rising power and effrontery of the new Nazi government. He returned to his native city of Basel, where he is now teaching theology and where he is working on his six-volume *Dogmatik*, which is to be his real life work.

32) "Karl Barth as a Post-War Prophet." *The Hibbert Journal*, Vol. 35, p. 378.

33) Cf. *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*, by P. H. Monsma, pp. 3 ff.; *The Karl Barth Theology*, by A. S. Zerbe, pp. 38 ff., containing biographical sketches also of E. Thurneysen, F. Gogarten, Emil Brunner, A. Bultmann, Heinrich Barth, Hinrich Knitttenmeyer, W. Kolffhaus, all of them influenced by Barth; *Types of Modern Theology*, by H. R. Mackintosh; pp. 271 ff.; etc.

Behind this simple recital of studies and teaching ventures may be found a most interesting theological *Werdegang*. It has been said that Barth's theology is eclectic.³⁴⁾ Barth's theology could not be otherwise. Dr. P. H. Monsma in his *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation* (among others) points out with much detail how his various teachers have influenced his theological growth and development. From his father he inherited a rather conservative (though not Fundamentalist) form of Christianity, "reasonable and hence acceptable."³⁵⁾ "Such was Karl Barth's father—a man who accepted the Bible as the Word of God and rejected radical criticism of it, who believed in the peculiar sonship of Jesus, who believed in the unlimited power of God to do miracles, who believed Jesus had the power to raise people from the dead and to work other miracles both upon men and upon things, who believed in the atoning death of Jesus, in His resurrection, and in a life hereafter; but who also believed the Bible was imperfect, limited the authority of the writers to things they could witness, rejected the Virgin Birth, sought secondary causes in miracles, and objected to a materialistic conception of the bodily resurrection of Jesus—a man who championed a faith based on the life of Jesus rather than a system of doctrine, who had a strong ethical interest, an evident religious nature, a love of truth and respect for facts as well as a great loyalty to Christ."³⁶⁾ In many respects the theology of the now aging son, as revealed in his *Dogmatik*, comes quite close to that of his liberal-conservative father; at any rate his is the liberalizing (though generally conservative) Reformed theology of Bern and Basel. At Tuebingen, Barth was greatly influenced by the teaching of Adolph Schlatter, from whom, according to Dr. Monsma, he received his low estimate of philosophy and his attempt to divorce theology from it, his aversion to system building, his emphasis on actuality, and the prominence he gives to the idea of God's lordship.³⁷⁾ In Berlin, Barth studied under Harnack, renowned because of his extreme Ritschlian *Einstellung*, and it may be that Harnack's strong criticism of the Bible affected his attitude toward Scripture. But still more decisive was the influence of Wilhelm Herrmann (a Ritschlian like Harnack) on the young student. Of Herrmann, Barth speaks as "my unforgettable teacher."³⁸⁾

34) H. Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p. 167.

35) Cf. Fritz Barth's *Die Hauptprobleme des Lebens Jesu*.

36) *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*, p. 9. 37) *Ibid.*, p. 4.

38) *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 271. "Herrmann, accepting the Kantian idea of science as the only possible one, denies the possibility of any proof of God's existence." *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*, p. 20; cf. the whole chapter, in which Dr. Monsma shows Herrmann's influence on Barth; also Barth's confession: "It was he who showed it [the new theological method] to me" (p. 19).

But also other men influenced Barth's *Werdegang*, such as Kant, Troeltsch, and Schweitzer.³⁹⁾ In Switzerland the Swiss Religio-Social Movement made a deep impression on Barth. Johann and Christoph Blumhardt, Hermann Kutter, and above all, Soeren Kierkegaard, all these and many others, no doubt, directed Barth's theological thought into the channels in which we find them revealed in his *Roemberbrief* and other writings. Barth began his theological career in turbulent times, and obviously the tragic effects of the outcome of the World War on Central Europe had as much to do with Barth's theological modus and message as the influential men who at this time appeared with stirring messages.⁴⁰⁾ Barth, then, left a relatively conservative Reformed theological atmosphere, entered with zest into an extremely Modernistic area, then revolted against it, though still bound largely by the fetters of Liberalism, and is now slowly returning to the liberal-conservative Reformed theology of his homeland.

When teaching his peculiar type of liberal Calvinistic theology, Barth in the beginning employed as a sort of *Glockenlaeuten* (to attract attention — *wissenschaftlich muss die Geschichte eben sein!*) a peculiar theological jargon, which to a great extent he has now given up.⁴¹⁾ These terms were not distinctively Barthian, but borrowed from others (many from Soeren Kierkegaard). Wilhelm Pauck is no doubt right in saying that Rudolph Otto, a mystical theologian, was the first to introduce into modern theological terminology the concept of God as the *Ganz Andere*, the "Totally Other."⁴²⁾ So also Pauck rightly regards Barth's description of faith as *Hohlraum* (a void) as of mystic origin.⁴³⁾ Since this essay is intended for popular study, we spare our reader the long, painful discussion of what Barth's storm-and-stress terminology might mean. In his *Dogmatik* Barth has happily returned to a language

39) *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*, pp. 29 ff.

40) Cf. Rudolph Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917); Friedrich Heiler's *Das Gebet* (1918); Franz Overbeck's *Christentum und Kultur* (1919); etc.; cf. *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*, pp. 65 ff. In *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (1927), Vorwort VI, Barth himself mentions among those to whom he owes much of his theological development: Blumhardt d. Ae. und d. J., Is. Aug. Dorner, Soeren Kierkegaard, Hermann Friedrich Kohlbruegge, Hermann Kutter, Julius Mueller, Franz Overbeck, Aug. F. C. Vilmar.

41) Cf. *Types of Modern Theology*, pp. 263 f.: "Simplification has come, in part, as the result of his discarding, amongst other things, the 'existentialism' which perplexed his earlier readers."

42) "Barth's Religious Criticism of Religion"; *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 8, p. 458.

43) *Ibid.*, p. 468.

which, for the greater part, is generally intelligible, and for this we are grateful to him.⁴⁴⁾

At first Barth found many co-workers. Of these Eduard Thurneysen, Reformed pastor near St. Gall, Switzerland, a student of Franz Overbeck and of Wilhelm Herrmann, was perhaps his most intimate friend. Others were Friedrich Gogarten, Lutheran pastor near Jena; Emil Brunner, professor at the University of Zurich (known in America largely for his teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary); Adolf Bultmann, liberal Lutheran professor of the New Testament at Marburg; Heinrich Barth, professor of philosophy at Basel; Hinrich Knittenmeyer; W. Kolfhaus, Paul Burckhardt, Georg Merz, etc. But of these many have deserted him, especially Brunner, who has become a thorough liberal, Gogarten, Merz, and others.⁴⁵⁾ But as Barth's theological terminology, so also this topic is too extensive to be treated adequately in a brief and popular essay.

V

It would be wrong so to represent the work of Karl Barth as if it had no merit at all in those evil postwar years when utter despair faced the desperately bankrupt Liberal circles of theological Germany. The three outstanding German theologians who had so bitterly attacked and all but destroyed the traditional Christian faith in learned circles were Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsch, and they had hosts of followers, some of whom became almost as destructive as the masters whom they followed. Their theologies, while differing from each other, were all directed toward humanizing God, doing away with the concept of sin, and deifying man as his own savior. By the time when the German armies marched

44) So also not only in his *Credo*, but also in his helpful, learned and timely *Vortraege, e. g., Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie: Gesammelte Vortraege*. Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Muenchen, 1925 (*viertes bis sechstes Tausend*); *Die Theologie und die Kirche: Gesammelte Vortraege (2. Band)*; Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Muenchen, 1928; *The Resurrection of the Dead*. Translated by H. J. Stenning. Fleming H. Revell Co., N. Y. (1933); *God's Search for Man*. Sermons by Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen. Translation by G. Richards, E. Homrighausen and K. Ernst. Round Table Press, Inc., N. Y. (1935); *The Church and the Churches*. Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. (1936); etc. The Concordia Seminary Library has only relatively few Barthian works. Much better is the collection of Barthian books in the Eden Seminary Library, Webster Groves, Mo. — To understand the Barthian terminology, let the reader also remember that Barthians generally are students of Plato, Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Luther, Calvin, Kant, Fichte, Kierkegaard, Dostojewski, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Kutter, Ragaz, Wm. Herrmann. Cf. *The Karl Barth Theology*. A. S. Zerbe, p. 42.

45) H. Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p. 54; Th. Haitjema, *Karl Barths "Kritische" Theologie*, pp. 86 ff.; cf. also the chapter "Karl Barth als Kind seiner Zeit," pp. 61 ff.

into Belgium to subdue France, Germany as a nation had become desperately wicked, desperately ungodly, desperately atheistic. God's "seven thousand," of course, were still there, but they were a sorry "little flock," despised and rejected of men. Germany as a nation had lost its faith in God, had become vainglorious. Its theology was utterly anthropocentric, egocentric; its heart vain, proud, hardened. Then came the great "surrender," when the German armies returned home, a beaten host, with Socialists and Communists subverting law and order and with all of Germany in slavish fear, disappointment, and desperation. To this estranged German people, Barth, with the thunders of Sinai, preached, in the main, a threefold doctrine of Law: the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness of man, and the helplessness of man to return to God. Barth seemingly regarded it as his mission to make every mountain and hill low and the crooked straight. He did not do this orthodoxly; he perhaps did not do this even wisely and well; he himself indeed had to put on sheep's clothing to conceal wolfish traits, which he inherited from Harnack, Herrmann, Kierkegaard, and others, who had been his teachers. But the repercussions of his preaching were so tremendous that he himself was amazed at the unexpected success. Overnight, so to speak (after his *Roembrief* had gone out), he became *the* theologian of Central Europe and of Great Britain and Scotland, hated by the old Ritschlian school, but adored by those who found in his preaching a new note of conviction, which they had missed in the empty teachings of their former leaders.

Barth preached the *sovereignty of God*. He preached it wildly, loudly, in terms of gross exaggeration. The simple but basic Calvinistic concept of his youth he made a new shibboleth; and it was gladly heard. "God" again became "God." "God is God, and man is man!" God is the *Ganz Andere*, the "Wholly Other," the "Impossible Possibility," the "Unknown," the "Remote."⁴⁶ His concept of God was, of course, not Biblical, but Kierkegaardian; his was not the God of the Gospel, but that of the Law, of Mount Sinai. But how different, nevertheless, was Barth's God from the God of Schleiermacher, of Ritschl, of Troeltsch! Over against the Immanentism of his decadent theological age, over against the humanizing of God and the deifying of man, he preached that the difference between God and man is a *qualitative difference*.⁴⁷ No wonder that Ritschlians raved! No wonder that Harnack found

46) "Barth's Religious Criticism of Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, p. 458; Vol. 15, pp. 128 ff.

47) Cf. in this connection the excellent article "With Kierkegaard on the Way to the Altar," *Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, Vol. 3, No. 9, pp. 13 ff.

in Barth's teaching Gnosticism, Marcionitic tendencies. No wonder that Modernists in our own country vented their spleen when they analyzed Barthianism.⁴⁸⁾ When Barth preached God, he did not mean man; not an idol made in the image of God, but God, the Creator, the Master, the Sovereign.

And Barth preached man's helplessness over against God — *man's sin*. Barth again dared speak of original and actual sin. Of course, his definition of sin was not that of traditional Christianity. "Sin, for Barth, is man's taking himself for God. It is the deification of man."⁴⁹⁾ As Barth re-affirmed divine transcendentalism, which scientific and secular Humanism had denied, so he re-affirmed man's sinfulness, man's utter helplessness over against God.⁵⁰⁾ Man cannot come to God! "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth!" Man can never become *creator Creatoris*. "Between God and man there is a hollow space which man is unable of himself to penetrate. The contention that the creature possesses this power is idol worship."⁵¹⁾ *Finitum non est capax infiniti*. Hence if man is to be saved, God must save him. Man is helpless over against God, is lost. *A bas* with man's effort to be his own savior!

And God does desire to save man! That was Barth's great corollary which he proclaimed to a world that had been indifferent to salvation. To establish this truth, Barth went back to Luther and Calvin, less to Luther, though, than to Calvin. Of course, here again Barth did not preach the full clear Scripture truth, not the blessed Gospel in its winning sweetness. He did indeed speak much of the *Wort Gottes*. But his Word of God is not the Word of Scripture. "Als inspirierte Schrift sagt die Bibel Gottes Wort. Und doch sagt sie ja nichts, denn sie ist ja heilige Schrift. Das unterscheidet sie von den Propheten. Aber die Bibel ist nun auf der andern Seite auch *nicht* Gottes Wort. Denn Gottes Wort ist nur der *Logos*. Wenn die Bibel aber nicht Gottes Wort sagt und auch nicht Gottes Wort ist, dann folgt, dass die Bibel erst darin Gottes Wort sagt, dass sie *gesagt wird*."⁵²⁾ Nevertheless, despite his rationalistic monstrosities about the Word of God, Barth once more taught the need of divine revelation, not in experience,

48) "A 'wholly other' God is no God for me." H. E. Luccock, "With No Apologies to Barth." *The Christian Century*, Vol. 56, No. 32, pp. 971 ff.

49) "Barth's Religious Criticism of Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 8, pp. 459 ff.

50) "Karl Barth as a Post-War Prophet," *The Hibbert Journal*, pp. 36 ff.

51) "What Is Wrong with 'Dialectic' Theology?" *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 35, pp. 36 ff.

52) *Was ist Theologie?* Erik Peterson. Friedrich Cohen Verlag in Bonn (1926).

not in nature, not in Schleiermacher's way, not in Ritschl's way, not in Troeltsch's way, but in a way that led anxious believing searchers after the truth back to Scripture and Christian theology. Germany's theological world would not listen to orthodox theology; but it did listen to Barth!

F. Kattenbusch summarizes Barth's message in the following words: "Was Sprengler als Historiker kommen sieht, wieder einmal der Zusammenbruch einer Kultur, taucht vor Barths Auge als ueberhaupt die Weltkrise auf! Er predigt neu den Glauben an einen 'kommenden,' den verheissenen, gedrohten 'Tag,' der das 'Gericht' Gottes ueber die Welt als solche, in diesem Sinn den Anbruch eines anderen Aeons darstellen wird. Nicht als ob Barth phantastisch auf 'geschichtliche,' gar 'baldige' Katastrophe rechnete, er vergegenwaertigt sich nur 'alles' unter dem absoluten, begrifflichen Kontrast von Gott und Welt, Ewigkeit und Zeit, Jenseits und Diesseits, Geist und Fleisch, Gerechtigkeit und Suende, Leben und Tod, und meint, es sei wahrlich an der Zeit, 'alles,' endlich mal 'das Zeitliche' in dem Lichte dieser unerbittlichen Gegensatze, die doch nur das *Eine* zum Bewusstsein bringen wollten, dass 'Gott' nicht mit sich handeln laesst und *allein* gelten, herrschen, segnen, fuchen will, zu schauen und zu bedenken."⁵³ In *The Colgate-Rochester Divinity School Bulletin*, Liberal J. B. Anderson sums up Barth's merits as follows: "For sinful man does need God and needs Him desperately! And Barth's exaltation of God and putting God and righteousness absolutely first, and his tremendous stress upon the reality of God working a divine work of revealing and cleansing and empowering within the soul of the penitent and trusting man — Barth's fervent and uncompromising proclamation of man's awful need and God's marvelous grace sufficient to meet that need — these are the strong points and the much-needed emphases in Barth's thought." Nevertheless back-leaning Modernist that he is, he adds venomously in the concluding paragraph: "But, on the other hand, the pity of it is that all this is linked up with a tragic retreat, a turning back from the priceless fruits of recent centuries of culture in science and philosophy and social enlightenment and development in order to hark back to hyper-Calvinism, to an extreme supernaturalism, total depravity, special revelation, election, predestination, and a revolting emphasis upon the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God."⁵⁴ This fierce attack upon Barth shows definitely that Barth's theology is certainly not after the heart of American humanistic Modernists. But neither is it Christian, in particular, Lutheran, orthodoxy.

53) *Die deutsche evangelische Theologie seit Schleiermacher*, p. 96 f.

54) *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 303.

VI

There remains, then, the task of pointing out in a general overview some essential points in which Barth differs from orthodox Christian, and especially Lutheran, theology.

The first difference between orthodox Lutheranism and Barthianism is found in their differing attitudes toward Scripture. To the orthodox Lutheran, Scripture is God's Word in all its parts, so that whatever Scripture says must be received as the inerrant, divinely inspired Word of God. This doctrine Barth rejects. He does not acknowledge the *Schriftprinzip*. Indeed, he advocates historical (*i. e.*, destructive) criticism of the Bible. Paul Tillich writes: "Historical criticism is of so little concern to Barth that he can quite avowedly express his indifference toward the question of the existence or non-existence of the 'historical Jesus.' He does not reject the historical research of the Liberals, but he treats it as a trifling matter, of which his Christology is independent."⁵⁵ Th. Haitjema writes of Barth's rejection of Scripture as the *norma normans* of the Christian faith: "Wohl ercheine Karl Barth in seinem Glauben an die Heilige Schrift naiver, aber das sei im Grund doch eben nur Schein, da Barth ja im Vorwort zur zweiten Ausgabe des *Roemberbriefes* seinen voreingenommenen biblizistischen Standpunkt dahin erlaeutere, dass er 'das Vorurteil habe, die Bibel sei ein gutes Buch und es lohne sich, wenn man ihre Gedanken ebenso ernst nehme als die eigenen' — wobei Messer der feine Spott, der den Satz wuerzt, entgangen ist."⁵⁶ How greatly Barth despises Scripture as the true *principium cognoscendi*, he shows, for example, in his article "Das Wort in der Theologie von Schleiermacher bis Ritschl," in which he writes: "Es erweckt ebenfalls Aufmerksamkeit, dass die Kategorie, unter der die Biblizisten [How he hates the adherents to Scripture as the inspired Word of God!] die Bibel betrachtet haben, die Geschichte ist. Wer Geschichte sagt, der sagt jedenfalls damit noch nicht Offenbarung, noch nicht Wort Gottes, wie die Reformatoren die Bibel genannt haben, noch nicht Subjekt, dem man sich zu fuegen hat, ohne darueber verfuegen zu koennen. Auch dann nicht, wenn er, wie die Biblizisten taten, *Heilsgeschichte* sagt."⁵⁷ At times Barth becomes downright blasphemous when he argues against Bible theologians who defend Scripture as the inspired Word of God and the only source and norm of faith.⁵⁸ Barth, then, rejects in unmistakable terms the *Sola Scriptura* of the Lutheran Reformation.

55) *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 15, p. 133.

56) *Karl Barths "Kritische" Theologie*, p. 117.

57) *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 6. Jahrgang (1928), p. 103.

58) Cf. A. S. Zerbe, *The Karl Barth Theology*, "How Barthians Undermine the Credibility of Scripture," pp. 107 ff. Cf. also *Kirchliche*

But what, then, is to Barth *das Wort Gottes* which so definitely he has placed in the center of his theology? As in other places, so also at this point Barth refuses to speak in clear terms, so that it is hard to say with certainty just what he regards as the Word of God. In the 13th edition of Luthardt's *Kompendium der Dogmatik* R. Jelke says: "In der neuesten Theologie wird mit dem Begriff 'Wort Gottes' vielfach recht willkuerlich umgegangen. Die radikalsten modernen Theologen bestimmen Wort Gottes — ohne jede inhaltliche Kennzeichnung — einfach als Anrede, als Anspruch, der den Menschen zum Befremden seiner Ichsucht in der Totalitaet seiner Existenz trifft und fuer sich behaftet. Damit ist natuerlich jeder Zusammenhang mit der Theologie der Reformation aufgegeben. Wo es sich nicht eindeutig um das Zeugnis von Jesu Christo und dem in ihm verwirklichten gnaedigen und heiligen Willen Gottes handelt, hat man nicht 'Wort Gottes' im Sinn der Reformatoren."⁵⁹ This criticism strikes at the very core of Barthian theology. To Barth the *Wort Gottes* is simply the *Deus dicens*, God's voice heard, directly, in His revelation to Apostles and Prophets; indirectly, in the written records of that revelation (the Bible), and still more indirectly, through Christian preaching.⁶⁰ In his *Dogmatik* (1/2) Barth declares: "Das Wort Gottes ist nicht mehr und nicht weniger als der Schoepfer des Menschen und also die Instanz, durch deren Spruch und Urteil er ist oder eben nicht ist." The Word of God, according to Barth, then, is the overwhelming, overpowering God, revealing Himself to man as such, either *via* the Word of Scripture or *via* Christian preaching. Barth's doctrine of the Word therefore belongs into the field of mysticism or enthusiasm. It subverts Scripture as the foundation of faith and puts in the place of objective Christian truth (Holy Scripture) man's subjective impressions of God's specific address. Of course, Barth, in his general exposition of Christian truth, moves within the Confession of the Church, as he, for example, does in his *Credo* and, in general also, in his *Dogmatik*; but by rejecting Scripture as the norm of faith and basing his theology on the *Credo* of the Church, he makes the confession of the Church a *norma normans* and thus, after the fashion of Romanism, exalts the Church over Scripture. After all, however, Barth's doctrinal background is the basic idea of Calvinism, which teaches

Dogmatik (1/2) (1938), p. 575: "Von Verbalinspiriertheit duerfte auch im Raum der Kirche nicht geredet werden, wenn sie sich des Wortes Gottes nicht irrtuemlicher Weise in der Weise versichern will, wie es die Juden und Heiden allerdings tun, um doch gerade dadurch zu verraten, dass ihnen das wirkliche Wort Gottes fremd ist."

59) P. 336.

60) A. B. Hoyle, *The Teaching of Karl Barth*, pp. 250 ff.; H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, pp. 287 ff.

the immediacy of God's operation and rejects the means of grace. We have spoken of the greater clarity that is to be found in Barth's *Dogmatik*; but just at this essential point, at the definition of the Word of God, Barth veils his doctrine in obscure and unintelligible expressions. Does Barthianism here not revert to type? Has enthusiasm not always veiled itself in darkness to mystify and confuse? Certainly, by its most misleading doctrine of the Word of God, Barthianism reveals itself as something else than orthodox Christian theology.

An almost tragic error of Barthianism is its thorough *mingling of Law and Gospel*. Barth presents, on the one hand, the angry, sovereign God and, on the other, the sinful, helpless man, leaving, however, no bridge to span the gulf between the sovereign God and helpless man. Perhaps in his *Credo* Barth comes nearest to outlining an *ordo salutis*. But nowhere does the reader find that clear and comforting doctrine of the Gospel, the very contradictory of the Law, which Luther proclaims with so much clearness and emphasis. In *God's Search of Man* (sermons by Barth and Thurneysen), for example, we read: "We can come before God only in that we admit what was covered in the temple with offerings and prayers: I am poor, naked, before Thee; I am utterly at Thy mercy and in Thy hand; I am guilty! Before God man must at least become perfectly humble. To seek God, certainly that is what is involved in all religions. But we seek God in that we realize this: I cannot find Him; I cannot honor Him, I cannot praise Him as I should. He must seek and find me; then I shall have what I need. He must raise me up and take pity on me. The shadow of great humility must fall over us, so that we only stand afar off and dare not lift up our eyes, but smite our breast and say, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!' Wherever that takes place in the temple, there the temple has again become a house of prayer. Then the praise of God has again broken forth from the little ones, the babes."⁶¹ Barth here makes the great mistake against which Dr. C. F. W. Walther so earnestly warns in his *Law and Gospel* and other writings, namely, that of trying to bring sinners to salvation by the Law. Lutheranism insists that not merely the Law, but also the Gospel, in its full, rich sweetness, must be proclaimed to the sinner, in order that he might believingly pray: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." But Barthianism is not Lutheranism.

Barth's consistent mingling of Law and Gospel leads to another serious error, namely, that of wrongly defining *repentance*. To the Lutheran believer repentance means both *contritio cordis*, worked by the Law, and *fiducia cordis*, wrought by the Gospel. Now, Barth certainly preaches *contritio*, as he is indeed a fierce Law

61) P. 130.

preacher. But he is no true preacher of the Gospel, no winning preacher of faith. Faith to Barth does not mean trust in the universal Gospel promises set forth in Scripture. Barth, in fact, knows of no *gratia universalis* in the Lutheran sense. As said before, Barth's *Dogmatik* is not yet complete; but even his *Prolegomena* leave no room for a penitent sinner's trust in God's grace secured for all sinners by Christ's *obedientia activa et passiva*. Barth does define faith, but his definition is almost terrifying; there is no Gospel background to his "faith." For Barth, faith is "respect for the divine incognito," "the horrified 'stop' before God." To have faith means "to be silent," "to adore in ignorance," "to know that death alone can be a simile of the Kingdom of God."⁶² Barth has now given up the definition of faith as *Hohlraum* (void, hollow space), an expression which was used no doubt to point out man's utter passivity and receptivity in the act of conversion. But faith is not merely a passive act, but an active act, a taking, receiving, appropriating by the believing penitent of what God gives, namely, the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, offered in the Gospel. But of that Barth says nothing. Barthianism does not give to the anxious sinners the full, sweet Gospel comfort which Luther so gloriously unfolds in his Gospel sermons. In his *Dogmatik* (1/1) Barth writes: "Im Glauben wird das Gericht Gottes anerkannt und seine Gnade gepriesen. Im Glauben wird Selbstpruefung im Blick auf die Verantwortung vor Gott notwendig. Der Glaube ergreift die Verheissung eines 'Gefuehrt-werdens in alle Wahrheit' (Joh. 16:13). Der Glaube erkennt Gott. Der Glaube ist die Bestimmtheit menschlichen Handelns durch das Sein der Kirche, also durch Jesus Christus, durch die gnaedige Zuwendung Gottes zum Menschen."⁶³ The ancient Greeks used to say: "Simple is the word of truth";⁶⁴ Barth, however, does not tell the anxious sinner in simple terms the whole precious Gospel truth regarding faith and its glorious effect. But, after all, is Barthianism so very far removed from Calvinism? Calvinism has defined the Gospel as God's declaration of conditions under which He is willing to receive the sinner. Has not Barth adopted this formula, expressing it, however, in modern philosophical terms?

Since Barth does not define faith rightly, he is unable also to define *justification* correctly. For God to justify a sinner means, in Lutheran theology, for Him to declare a believing sinner righteous for Christ's sake. In his *Dogmatik* Barth often speaks of justification, very often even in terms of Christian theology, justification meaning forgiveness of sins. He writes, for example:

62) "Barth's Religious Criticism of Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 8, p. 464.

63) P. 16.

64) 'Απλοῦς ὁ μῦθος τῆς ἀληθείας.

"Nicht um seiner Notwendigkeit und Totalitaet, sondern um seines Gegenstandes, um Jesu Christi willen, rechtfertigt er [der Glaube] den Menschen.⁶⁵⁾ But nowhere does Barth clearly define justification or declare the Scripture doctrine of justification. W. Kemner in his article "Die Theologie Karl Barths" presents a rather favorable view of Barth's doctrine of justification, which he professes to have received from Luther, but it is obvious that Barth does not teach Luther's comforting doctrine of justification.⁶⁶⁾ It is interesting to consider the closing paragraph of Kemner's very helpful article. He writes: "Gerade auch die dialektische Theologie liefert, wie der ganze kirchliche Wirrwarr in Deutschland, wieder den deutlichsten Beweis dafuer, dass alle Theologie und alles kirchliche Wirken in der Luft schwebt, wenn man kein festes Wort hat. Weil Barth, ebensowenig wie die andern Theologen, die Absicht hat, zu Schrift und Bekenntnis zurueckzukehren, wird er mit all seiner Dialektik den Zerfall der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands nicht aufhalten koennen. Das deutsche Kirchenvolk wird seinen Weg nach Rom auf der einen Seite und seinen Weg ins alte Heidentum auf der andern Seite fortsetzen. Dabei ist es ziemlich gleichgueltig, welchen Weg die Mehrzahl einschlaegt; denn sowohl Rom als auch das Heidentum hat sich wider Gott fuer den Menschen entschieden."⁶⁷⁾ Also Barth's doctrine of justification "hangs in the air."

It would lead us too far to consider other doctrines of Barthianism in detail. But a few points may yet receive emphasis. Barth teaches no *certitudo salutis*; nor can he teach any assurance of salvation, since he denies the means of grace in the Lutheran sense. Well does Wilhelm Pauck write: "Both Calvin [?] and Luther stressed the certitude of salvation. Justification meant to them the assurance of God's grace in spite of sinfulness, by the mere apprehension of God's love in faith. Barth cannot give such an assurance. The hope of standing under God's 'Yes' is only a perspective, the direction of the narrow path in this world. It means walking on the edge; it means that it is possible to take the smallest step only in a *desperatio fiducialis*, in faithful despair, in expectation of a *futurum aeternum*, which man as man shall never attain, which he can only divine in the experience of the complete annihilation of his being as such."⁶⁸⁾

As Barth denies the means of grace in the Lutheran sense, so, in particular, also the objective gift of Baptism, regeneration, and the objective gift of the Lord's Supper, the true body and blood

65) *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1/2), p. 402.

66) *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, Vol. 5, N. 11, p. 824.

67) *Ibid.*, p. 828.

68) "Barth's Religious Criticism of Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 8, pp. 463 ff.

received under the bread and wine for the remission of sins.⁶⁹⁾ Also at this point Barth has returned to the Calvinistic conception concerning the Sacraments. So also with regard to the doctrine of the Church. Barth's definition of the Church is essentially Calvinistic. He defines the Church as "a people consisting of those who have found in Jesus Christ their own comfort and hope and the comfort and hope of the whole world, and who therefore have discovered their service in bearing witness before the world, which without Him is lost, to Jesus Christ in His offices of Prophet, Priest, and King." Of the witnessing to Christ he writes: "True witnessing to Jesus Christ occurs necessarily in the unity of two things, a definite repetition of the confession of Him as the One who has come to us as Son of God and Savior and will come again, and of the actualizing of this confession in definite decisions in relation to those contemporary questions which agitate the Church and the world [italics our own]." ⁷⁰⁾

Is Barth Trinitarian? While he professes to be Trinitarian, he has substituted for the term "person" the term "Seinsweise" (*modus subsistendi*), though he wishes this term to be understood in the sense of the traditional word "person." But his definitions of the three "persons" in the Godhead certainly are misleading. He defines God the Father thus: "Der eine Gott offenbart sich nach der Schrift als der Schoepfer, d. h., als der Herr unsers Daseins. Er ist als solcher Gott unser Vater, weil er es als der Vater Gottes des Sohnes zuvor in sich selbst ist." ⁷¹⁾ He describes God the Son as follows: "Der eine Gott offenbart sich nach der Schrift als der Versoehner, d. h., als der Herr mitten in unserer Feindschaft gegen ihn. Er ist als solcher der zu uns gekommene Sohn oder das uns gesagte Wort Gottes, weil er es als der Sohn oder das Wort Gottes des Vaters zuvor in sich selber ist." ⁷²⁾ Of the Holy Ghost he writes: "Der eine Gott offenbart sich nach der Schrift als der Erloeser, d. h., als der Herr, der uns frei macht. Er ist als solcher der Heilige Geist, durch dessen Empfang wir Kinder Gottes werden, weil er es als der Geist der Liebe Gottes des Vaters und Gottes des Sohnes zuvor in sich selber ist." ⁷³⁾ How is the reader to understand these definitions?

Whoever reads Barth becomes confused. Just what does he mean? Barth does not bind himself to Scripture as the sole source and rule of faith nor to the Confessions as declarations of the Scripture truth. His only *principium cognoscendi* is the *Wort Gottes*, the "speaking God," whose address comes to man as he

69) Cf. H. Sasse, *Here We Stand*, pp. 162 ff., p. 175.

70) *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, pp. 5 and 12.

71) *Dogmatik* (1/2), p. 404.

72) *Ibid.*, p. 419.

73) *Ibid.*, p. 470.

contemplates Scripture. So, then, what? Ultimately, every doctrine that Barth teaches, *schwebt in der Luft*. The complaint has been made that one cannot take Barth seriously; indeed, that he does not take himself seriously.⁷⁴⁾ Barth thus writes: "Damit, dass Gott in seiner Freiheit, Barmherzigkeit und Allmacht Mensch wird und als solcher am Menschen handelt, besteht das Geheimnis der Offenbarung und Versoehnung. Durch dieses Tun Gottes wird die Sünde ausgeschlossen und zunichte gemacht."⁷⁵⁾ Does this not make the *satisfactio vicaria unnecessary*? Does Barth still believe in Christ's atoning death? Barth speaks in riddles, and as long as he does that, no one can take him seriously.

It is an interesting and perhaps true word picture of Barth which W. M. Horton paints of him in his widely read *Contemporary Continental Theology*. He writes: "Karl Barth is not (like Bishop Manning) a constitutional conservative. With quizzical eyes, peering out from behind thick lenses, and a satirical, lopsided grin, he looks more like a Bolshevik than like an ecclesiastic, and his appearance is not deceptive."⁷⁶⁾ As the reader painfully plods through Barth's repetitious *Dogmatik*, he feels as if Barth's "quizzical eyes, peering out from behind thick lenses," were upon him, and he senses, almost with a shudder, the "satirical, lopsided grin of this Bolshevik theologian," as he is wrestling with this or that unintelligible expression or this or that Barthian dogmatical enigma. Is Barth deceiving himself and others?

There have been many criticisms of Barth, and many of them are quite just. But there is none that the writer values more highly than that given by Dr. Theodore Engelder in the closing paragraph of his excellent series of articles on "The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology" in *THE CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*. With much charity and also much truth the writer says: "The truth of the matter is that the dialectical theology has cast overboard much of the old Calvinistic theology which is good and never had what is best in the Lutheran theology."⁷⁷⁾ We cordially recommend this series of articles (which we did not reread while writing this article for fear of repeating needlessly what Dr. Engelder has already said) to our readers. The study of that series is timely and needful; for Barthian half-truths are infiltrating America's Lutheran theological circles, and persons who have not carefully studied Barthianism are inclined to view it as a real salvation theology for today. Whatever good Barthianism

74) "Das ist die Nemesis, die den Dialektiker erreicht, dass er vor lauter Ernstnehmen nicht zum Ernst kommt." E. Peterson, *Was ist Theologie?* P. 7.

75) *Dogmatik* (1/2), p. 209.

76) P. 97. 77) Vol. 7, No. 6; p. 409.

offers has been presented much better by Luther; and Luther, by the grace of God, has kept us from the confusing dogmatic jargon which Barthianism had gleaned from all manner of theological gutters therewith to torment those who endeavor to understand and interpret his works.

The hope has been expressed that when the influence of Kierkegaard and Barth will reach Lutheranism in our country, the full impact of their thinking will so change things that Lutheranism will no longer face even the remnants of Modernism. "History will turn back four hundred years, and the historic controversy between conservative Calvinism and confessional Lutheranism will return to the center of theological conflict."⁷⁸⁾ A beautiful hope, but too good to be true! Barthianism cannot prevail against Modernism, for intrinsically it itself is Liberalism, because *a priori* it rejects the *sola Scriptura*. Already many of the companions and followers of Barth have espoused extreme Modernism, and as long as Barth himself refuses to acknowledge the *sola Scriptura*, his feet are planted in sinking sand.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

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