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# Karl Barth and Anglicanism

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ALTHOUGH THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND has shared with the Church of Scotland in putting Barth's *Church Dogmatics* into English, a close and influential relation between Barth and Anglicanism could hardly be claimed. The aloofness is mutual. Barth shows little knowledge of Anglican theology, unless Anselm be counted. Detailed scrutiny of the historical surveys reveals few references of any kind to Anglicanism. On the other hand, Anglican theology has manifested not only a well-bred lack of concern for Barth's theology but also a marked ignorance of what it is all about. In this regard Anglo-Catholics differ plainly from European Roman Catholics, while Liberals suspect scholasticism and Evangelicals for the most part make do with generalisations based on hasty and superficial study.

## 1. *The Isolation of Anglican Theology*

THE relation between Barth and Anglicanism is not untypical. It serves to pinpoint a distressing tendency of Anglicanism toward isolation from the rest of the theological world. Anglicans like to think that they are a bridge church. In fact, they are more akin theologically to an island church, linked to the mainland shores only by relatively sparse and sporadic traffic. This isolation is not good for Anglicanism. It produces theological parochialism, prevents healthy interchange, and shuts off all but a few from the riches of thoughts, learning and achievement that are to be found in other lands and churches. The result can be debilitating inbreeding. If harm can certainly come from outside, the possibility of good far outweighs it.

Isolation is also bad for the external churches. Anglicanism has no mean heritage. Its contributions are too valuable not to be shared lavishly with others. In spite of isolationist pressures many Anglicans have made their mark and their work has been appreciated. Barth

lost something by not having fuller contacts with Anglican theology, just as the latter has been the poorer for not having closer relations with Barth. The time has surely come for Anglicanism in general to play, theologically as well as ecclesiastically, a more authentically ecumenical role.

## 2. *The Nature of Theology*

IF it is asked what specifically the Anglican world might learn from Barth, the place to begin is with the thought-provoking material that Barth offers on the nature of theology itself. Most dogmatic systems open, of course, with definitions of terms like doctrine and dogma. Far too often, however, these tend to fall into a familiar and not too exciting pattern, with variations only in detail. Barth is the exception.

In *Church Dogmatics* I, 1, which is about to reappear in a clearer and smoother edition, Barth tackles the question of theology in a radical and instructive way. A first concern is to present theology as a reality and discipline in its own right and not as one which tries to justify itself in terms of something else, e.g., history, sociology, or religion. Behind this stands an ultimate concern for the authentically scientific character of theology. This does not mean that theology submits to the definitions or accepts the criteria of other sciences. The primary point is that theology is object-related. The methodological and epistemological differences entailed by the difference in object—the Creator and not the creature—are to be accepted. They confirm rather than undermine the rank of theology as a true science. In contrast, the attempt to support the scientific nature of theology by compromising its inner integrity as a discipline leads to the collapse which commonly confronts us in the modern academic world. The final cause of the compromise, of course, is a failure to take the reality of the object of theology with genuine seriousness.

Barth's understanding of theology comes into confrontation with various Anglican tendencies both old and new. The interconnecting of theology and philosophy has a long post-reformation history in England and is not peculiar to any one school. Philosophical preambles are just as likely in Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic circles as in Liberal programmes. Theology is often viewed as the child of Hebraic religion and Greek philosophy. The value of Barth's analysis is that from the material standpoint it puts a question-mark behind this common notion. The roles and relations of philosophy and theology come under fresh scrutiny. A full-scale alternative is suggested which will free theology to be itself. The marriage of the Hebraic and the Hellenic (or Hellenistic) faces a nullity suit and its offspring must offer proof of legitimacy.

A newer trend in Anglicanism, as in other circles, is the subsuming of

theology under religion, which in turn is set among the humane sciences with history, psychology, anthropology and sociology. This course is defended on the ground that only thus can theology become a sphere of objective study. What is forgotten, of course, is first that grouping theology within social science involves a basic shift in its object, namely, from God (and man) to man (and God), and secondly that the shift in object will still leave a necessary distinction from what seems to many people to be the normative discipline of natural science. Thus the sheltering of theology under a religious umbrella destroys its authenticity while in no way enhancing its status. Barth himself offers a pertinent working example of theological science in distinction from both natural and social science in his attempt at a theological anthropology in *Church Dogmatics* III, 2. Here a distinction is made between the legitimate contributions of other disciplines and their pseudo-theological speculations. The valid findings are used but without being made into the substance of a theological statement. In this way Barth hopes to avoid an isolation of theology from other sciences while preserving its essential distinctiveness, developing it in terms of its special object, and preventing its dissipation.

### 3. *Apologetics and Natural Theology*

IMPLICIT in what has been said is a questioning of conventional apologetics in the sense of an attempt to meet objections to the faith on secular premises. The main point here is that theology undergoes intrinsic perversion when it is recast in this mould. Its true form is that of an exposition or account of the divine self-revelation in its inner coherence and rationality. To offer it the support of philosophical, scientific, psychological, or historiographical arguments is to change it into something other than it is and hence to add the more bitter wounds of the friend to those of the enemy.

One might ask, of course, whether Barth is not offering a new style of apologetics rather than banishing apologetics as such. A modern humanist like W. W. Bartley in his *Flight to Engagement* seems in fact to view Barth's theology as the most formidable modern statement of Christianity—far more formidable than either rationalistic apologetics or the compromises of existentialising or demythologising—simply because it stands on its own premises and is presented in its own impressive rationality. This is certainly not a matter of strategy on Barth's part. It develops out of his basic conviction that theology is an honest science as the science of God in his self-revelation. It can thus be relied on to establish its own validity so long as it is worked out in conformity with its object.

Natural theology is the foe of Barth rather than apologetics. By natural theology he does not mean natural or general revelation. What

he has in view is an attempt at theology in man's own strength. This is a contradiction in terms. Since, however, man is the one who does theology, it will obviously be a constant possibility or temptation even in a theology of revelation. It can also take the most varied and subtle forms ranging from a blatant manifestation such as Hitler's German Christianity to the formal orthodoxies of philosophical theology and ethics. In his final statement on the matter in *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1 Barth suggests that even to dispute directly with natural theology is to engage in it. The only possible answer is a presentation of its opposite as in the lectures *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*. The authentic article unmask and judges the counterfeit.

The issue of natural theology brings into sharp focus the broader issue of the nature of true theology. It does so in a way which raises very sharply the question whether much that passes for theology today, either in the Anglican world or elsewhere, is not in fact a type of natural theology even if, perhaps, it believes itself to be a theology of revelation. The whole matter of the nature of theology, of the relation of theology to philosophy and other studies, of true and false apologetics, and finally of natural theology, is one which is so crucial that, in spite of much recent discussion, it still demands urgent and intensive investigation.

#### 4. *The Task, Structure and Function of Theology*

BY basic definition theology is for Barth what the Christian or the church says about God. God-talk, however, must be based on the divine self-revelation. There thus arises the twofold theological task of investigating this talk about God with a view to both its correction and its purity. The science of theology is an attempt to ensure that what is said about God is consonant with God as he has made himself known to us.

The structure of theology is presented by this task. In this area Barth accepts the conventional pattern of biblical studies, dogmatics, practical theology, and church history. He has some important observations, however, on the purpose and integration of the individual disciplines.

Biblical studies form the natural starting-point or basis because it is through scripture that the Word of God, which as the divine self-revelation is the theological norm, is now known to us. The Bible is not examined out of purely historical or religious interest. All branches of biblical enquiry are certainly needed but all contribute to exegesis and exposition with a view to the accurate hearing and understanding of the divine self-revelation in the Word.

Dogmatics and practical theology share the common factor that

both deal with application. Dogmatics examines the transmission of the gospel message in the contemporary world while practical theology deals with conduct and practice from the same standpoint. The aim is a presentation of God's Word, or outliving of the Christian life and mission, which will be both authentic on the one side and yet also pertinent to the contemporary scene on the other.

Church history plays a subsidiary but essential role in this context. It offers models from the past by which modern proposals may be tested and amended. The continuity of history, however, gives added force to these models, for present situations grow out of those that precede. Thus present-day reality cannot be understood, nor its possibilities or dangers, without some acquaintance with the past. A direct leap cannot be made from biblical study to the modern 'translation' of God's Word under the tutelage of dogmatics and practical theology.

The analysis of the structure of theology makes its function apparent. Contrary to appearances, theology is not an intellectualised abstraction. It does not operate autonomously. It is not an end in itself. It plays a servant role in the church's mission. As a test of God-talk and the resultant practice, it stands in working relationship to the proclamation and life of the church. It serves proclamation by making sure both that the true message is not compromised when put in contemporary idioms, and that the best and most suitable idioms are found for this message. It serves the church's life in analogous fashion, setting for it the proper course between secularisation and sacralisation.

A notable protest is thus issued against the isolation of theology from the church and its mission. A notable plea is made for an understanding of the work of theology in direct relation to the evangelistic and pastoral ministry. The common situation, of course, is that theology is pursued as a highly theoretical discipline, that its practical pertinence is not discerned, and that ministry is impoverished for lack of theological sustenance. In these circumstances the plea and the protest of Barth merit more serious consideration than they have for the most part received.

### *5. Historical Theology*

THE relating of theology to life and mission in no way diminishes the stringency of its demands. This is particularly evident in Barth at the level of historical theology. When Barth was driven by the needs of the pastorate to a new theological quest, he realised that his exploration would have to be both broader and more intensive. Primarily it would be an exploration of scripture, but secondarily it would be an exploration of theological history. Later, when he became a teacher of dogmatics, Barth became even more acutely conscious of the gaps in his theological training and he filled these so assiduously that both in

his *Protestant Theology* and also, in the small-print sections of the *Church Dogmatics* he emerges as one of the foremost historical theologians of the century.

Barth's activity in this field teaches us the need to take historical theology with full seriousness. At various times and for various reasons Anglicanism has done this. Its patristic record is particularly good. Polemical concerns have stimulated reformation and post-reformation research. The influence of Barth finds some reflection in a resurgence of historical interest. Nevertheless the general record is less encouraging. The dedication and achievement of the few is matched by the neglect and indifference of the many. Liberal theology in particular displays a lamentable weakness here except when it wishes to establish its progressiveness. One is often embarrassed by the familiarity of its important new insights.

A second thing that we are taught is the need to broaden the scope of historical investigation. If Barth himself displays obvious limitations, his areas of strength emphasise the greater weaknesses of others. The whole development of German theology from the eighteenth century to the modern era offers an illustration. In a sense Barth himself, if we read him, offers the remedy for our ignorance here. He does so, however, only if there is a readiness to wrestle with the material which he presents, to compare it with similar presentations, to work back through these to the originals, and finally to try to bring the whole into relation to parallel movements in other lands, schools, and churches. Anglicanism has had many things to say about Barth but it has shown little enthusiasm for this more arduous task, which, apart from being necessary to a mature evaluation of Barth, has substantial rewards of its own to offer.

Finally, Barth's work in this area teaches us the need for constant reconsideration even of matters that may already be an area of study. Philosophers have set an example here with their extensive work on Anselm in the wake of Barth's challenging reinterpretation. Roman Catholics offer another illustration with their reappraisal of Aquinas in the light of Barth's radical criticism. Anglican theology, has however, has not been conspicuous for its initiative in new historical exploration of this kind. Things might have been different if Barth had trodden on some painful Anglican corns as he did with Dutch theology in his attack on the absolute decree. Yet the issues raised are surely of catholic importance. Hence there is plenty of scope for Anglican response or reflection in the general effort to arrive at correct and fruitful historical interpretation.

## 6. *Reformation Theology*

WHAT is true of historical theology in general is particularly true of the theology of the Reformation. If Barth worked hard in patristics

and displayed an astonishing grasp of modern European development, the primary focus of his attention, after scripture, was the work of the Reformers. In his disenchantment with Liberal Protestantism he had the sound instinct that for Christians in the Reformation tradition *ad fontes* means also 'back to the Reformers'. He followed this slogan to good effect in the years of dogmatic activity that followed. The stimulus of Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* led him to include the more systematic presentations of the seventeenth century in his studies as well as the works of the sixteenth century leaders.

The personal achievements of Barth in Reformation scholarship are astonishing. A glance at the indexes of the succeeding volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* offers a clue. Closer study shows that the references embrace more than a casual mention of names or odd quotations. Volume I, 1 rests on an intensive study of Luther in particular, with extensive quotations from his works. Volume II, 2, in the chapter on election, gives evidence of arduous wrestling with Calvin, the confessions, and seventeenth century developments. Included is an illuminating survey and application of the supralapsarian-infralapsarian controversy. Volume III, 3, discussing providence, follows the main outlines of the Reformed doctrine of *concursum*. Volumes IV, 1 and IV, 2 contain a particularly valuable account of justification and sanctification in their mutual relation according to Luther and Calvin. These are samples of the vast collection of Reformation wares on display in Barth's leading dogmatic work.

Barth has also played a large part in bringing new emphasis and excitement to Reformation studies. New editions of the Reformers might have seemed unthinkable fifty years ago; they enjoy a steady market today. What Luther teaches about the hidden God, what Zwingli says about the sacraments, what Calvin believes about the knowledge of God and the testimony of the Spirit, what the Lutherans and Reformed teach about law and gospel—these are again the subject of vigorous and healthy debate.

Anglican theology has naturally profited from and participated in this new interest in the Reformers. After all, the Church of England shared in the rethinking of vital issues in the sixteenth century, contributed to the common achievement, and embodied the results in its confession, liturgy, catechism, and ministry. The question remains, however, whether, considering the extent of Anglican involvement in the Reformation itself, modern Anglicanism has gained as much as it should from the new situation. Blissful unawareness or deliberate aloofness seems to mark too much of the Anglican world in face of this resurgence of Reformation vitality.

A first suggestion then is that Anglicans who have a concern for the Reformation should enter more fully and on a broader front into the present-day movement. Already the possibility exists that the opportunity is passing. New theological developments have lessened the



general interest in historical theology and hence also the special interest in the Reformers. Nevertheless, time has not yet run out. The original impetus remains. New thinking in Roman Catholicism helps to keep many of the issues alive. New factors such as the renaissance of Anabaptist studies and the theological problem of revolution bring the Reformation period into new focus. Following the lead given by Barth in this area is a first and urgent priority from an ecumenical and not just an insular standpoint.

A second suggestion is that Anglicans should seek here the kind of fruitful interchange dealt with under section I. What the non-Anglican world needs is a presentation of the specifically Anglican contribution to Reformation theology. If this is not original it has some instructive features. A general understanding of the period suffers from the common omission of this aspect, as may be seen in Barth's own studies or in many ecumenical discussions. Anglicans in turn could profit by a much more serious application to the works of the great continental Reformers. If England has produced some fine scholars in this field, the general level of knowledge and understanding is deplorably low. Anglo-Catholics tend to be dominated by a concern to mark off Anglicanism from Protestantism, while among Evangelicals pietist influences have hampered a full commitment to Reformation scholarship. Here if anywhere cross-fertilisation can and should begin.

Thirdly, it is suggested that interest in the Reformers should not be purely antiquarian. Barth initially went to Luther and Calvin because he needed help in the modern situation. He quickly discovered that much that he found there applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the problems of our own time. One might refer, for example, to the doctrine of the inner testimony of the Spirit. Learning what Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, or Whitaker taught about this is interesting but this is not enough. The final point is whether assurance of the divine authorship and authority of scripture is still to be found here. Insight and not just information is at issue.

A further suggestion is that, while the Reformers should certainly be consulted, what they say must also be subject to the formal principle which they themselves espoused, namely, the supremacy of scripture as the norm of faith and practice. Barth personally feels a great sense of indebtedness to the Reformers. Hence he likes to be in agreement with their teaching, as the prefaces to II, 2 and II, 3 show. Nevertheless, it can hardly be expected that any theologians, however sound, will be totally scriptural in every thesis, statement, or nuance. Hence the student of the Reformers has to weigh what he finds in the Reformers by the primary testimony of scripture and make corrections or offer new presentations where these seem appropriate. This is one reason why a distinction must be made between a historical account of a Reformation doctrine and a dogmatic account of the same doctrine. The dogmatician fails in his duty if he passes off the one as the other.

Naturally the historical presentation has its place. Yet its character as such must be recognised. Dogmatics cannot exempt any teaching of the past, however venerable, from submission to the scrutiny of scripture. This is why Barth in *Church Dogmatics* II, 2, under pressure from his reading of the biblical material, feels constrained to reconstruct the Reformed doctrine of election. This is why he is so scornful of Boettner's bland assumption that dogmatics need only repeat the sixteenth or seventeenth century teaching with a few modern arguments in its support. Equation of biblical and Reformation teaching forms an obstacle to true dogmatics. It prevents the proper functioning of the biblical norm and promotes unhealthy doctrinal rigidity. It also hampers the shedding of new light on reformation teaching in a positive sense as scripture itself is illumined by fresh study.

The final suggestion arises out of this. It is that an updating of Reformation theology is required in dogmatics even when no basic criticism or correction seems to be needed. Three points of importance must be considered here. (a) A work of translation has to be done into the terms and concepts of the modern age so that intelligibility may be preserved and preachers may receive guidance in the ongoing presentation of the gospel. Barth constantly attempts this in the *Church Dogmatics*; his restating of the Reformed doctrine of *concursum* in III, 3 may be cited in illustration. (b) Application needs to be made to new issues of thought and practice. Thus the pietistically orientated understanding of faith calls for a fresh emphasis on the object of faith (*Church Dogmatics* IV, 1), while Bultmannian existentialism brings the finished work of Christ into new focus (IV, 1). (c) New aspects and implications of older doctrines or doctrinal discussions have to be brought out. The most striking example of this in Barth is the reconstruction of supralapsarianism in *Church Dogmatics* II, 2, where new life is breathed into very dead and desiccated bones. The paucity of anything comparable to these ventures in contemporary Anglicanism is pitifully evident. One naturally looks to the Evangelicals in this area. Evangelicals undoubtedly understand and cherish their Reformation heritage. They show little ability, however, to restate, reapply, and redeploy it. For this reason their Reformation loyalty isolates them from the contemporary world instead of bringing them, as it might, into the more powerful and constructive interaction with it.

### 7. Trinitarianism

BARTH'S name is more often associated with christology than with the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, however, the christomonism with which he is charged may well be more applicable to mistaken impressions than established data. For in reality Barth's theology in the

*Church Dogmatics* is essentially trinitarian. He has many stimulating things to say both about the Trinity as such and also about its theological implications.

Barth, adjusting his theology even formally to its object, expresses the doctrine of the Trinity in its external structure. He devotes the Prolegomena predominantly to this theme, for the doctrine of the Trinity forms its core and centre. The second volume follows with an exposition of the one God: the knowledge and perfections of God in II, 1 and the election and command of God in II, 2. The three final volumes are then given up in turn to the three persons: God the Creator (and Father) constitutes the subject-matter of III: creation in III, 1, man in III, 2, providence in III, 3 and the ethics of creation in III, 4. God the Reconciler is presented in IV: the Son of God and justification in IV, 1, the Son of Man and sanctification in IV, 2, the God-Man and vocation in IV, 3 and the ethics of reconciliation in the unfinished IV, 4. God the Redeemer (the Holy Spirit) would then have been the focus of the unwritten V as Barth projected it. This theology has, then, a planned trinitarian structure which reflects God himself as he is self-revealed in his trinity, his unity, and his godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Naturally the example offered by Barth does not have to be followed in detail. Theologies can be constructed in different ways. Barth himself constantly issues the reminder that method is arbitrary. Nevertheless, Barth's procedure contains an element of rebuke to theologies in which the doctrine of the Trinity plays no formative or controlling part even though it has a place as a detailed locus. Furthermore, what Barth attempts makes concrete his own principle that the object of science necessarily shapes the science itself if it is rigorously conducted. If the object of theology is God, and God reveals himself as the Holy Trinity, then at some point and in some way the doctrine of the Trinity should have a comprehensive influence on the whole theological presentation. Perhaps this statement should be modified. Theology has in the main modelled itself on the Creed, so that a trinitarian structure does in fact persist. What is needed, then, is a more conscious recognition of its inherent significance.

The doctrine of the Trinity has material as well as structural meaning in Barth. Since what God is and does outwardly corresponds to what he is and does inwardly, and since man as the creature of God is made in the image of God, the implications of trinitarian teaching are everywhere apparent. In particular the revelation of God itself reflects and expresses the Trinity (I, 1 § 8) and hence provides us with trinitarian analogies that are far apter and stricter than the so-called vestiges of the Trinity in man and nature. Volume I works this out in relation to the Word of God in its threefold form and also in relation to theology itself as exegetical, dogmatic, and practical theology. Later, in the second coming of Christ (IV, 3), a perichoresis is again discerned in the

three forms of the coming as resurrection, outpouring of the Spirit, and the final return. As regards man, the *imago Dei* is construed in III, 1 and III, 2 as man's being as male and female in reflection of the being of the one God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Whether or not this is a good interpretation of the *imago*, it shows how seriously Barth takes the Trinity—the image of God must be the image of *this* God who is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It also has the merit of contributing a great deal of theological sense to Barth's exposition of 1 Corinthians 11 and his general discussion of the vexed question of the relation, equality, and order of the sexes. The main point, however, is that the Trinity does not constitute here an isolated theological puzzle. It is brought into living relation with all the theological loci.

A final instructive feature in Barth's trinitarianism is his zealous, if not always successful, wrestling with the task of presenting trinitarian orthodoxy in intelligible modern terms. The newer versions of the Nicene Creed face the same problem, as may be seen in the substitution of 'one in being' for 'of one substance'. Naturally it is easier to criticise here than to emulate, although Barth's famous 'mode of being' deserves better than a charge of modalism. The easiest course of all is probably to write dogmatics in the form of a historical presentation with an elaborate set of footnotes. But the day of truth comes round with each Trinity Sunday and the duty of saying something about the Trinity which is correct, which also makes sense to a modern congregation, and which has, too, an obvious bearing on contemporary Christian thought and life. Perhaps this is why many people would like to transform Trinity Sunday into the First Sunday after Pentecost. Even so, we still have here an area in which difficult theological work is demanded if the pulpit is to achieve a combination of sense and orthodoxy and to do it in a way which will be fruitful and practical rather than barren and abstract.

## 8. *Christology*

MORE criticism has probably been directed against Barth's christological emphasis than against anything else in his theology. He is not accused of christological unorthodoxy, for his attempt at restatement in IV, 2 follows closely the Chalcedonian understanding. His alleged fault is that of carrying the concentration on Christ to the point of a distorting Christomonism.

Now it could be argued from Barth's own presentation and statements that this criticism has no very solid material foundation. Indeed, quite apart from the general trinitarianism of the *Church Dogmatics*, an opposite thesis might be plausibly advanced at some points. Thus in IV, 3 the post-ascension ministry of Christ seems to be more or less totally absorbed in the work of the Holy Spirit. Again, if the doctrine

of God the Reconciler claims somewhat greater attention than that of God the Creator, the two are more equal in proportion than in the equivalent statements in the Creed, and the story of the Bible is in any case the story of the word and work of reconciliation. The axiom that all persons of the Trinity participate in God's external works offers a further safeguard in Barth against excessive concentration on the Son. If the Son plays an important role in creation, the Father plays a no less important role in reconciliation.

Even if it be conceded, however, that Barth carries his christological reference too far, this does not mean that the reference as such has nothing to say to us. In point of fact something of great importance is being said at various levels. A relative reduction of christological concentration will not alter this. Only a total denial of the centrality of Christ could do so, but this is hardly conceivable, since it would be a renunciation of Christianity itself.

Epistemologically, for example, Barth's thesis is as follows. God can be known only through God. But we cannot know God as he is known to himself, i.e., in his primary objectivity. He makes himself known to us in his secondary objectivity in a way adapted to our mode of perception, i.e., through salvation history. This secondary objectivity reaches its climax in the incarnation of the Word in which God himself is present in secondary objectivity. The thesis is an epistemological commentary on the saying in John that no man has seen the Father but that the Son has declared him. If, of course, it meant that to know the Son is to know only the Son, then objection might be taken to it. The meaning of Barth, however, is the same as that of John, namely, the access to the knowledge of God, Father, Son and Spirit, is through the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The question which is sharply posed by Barth's thesis is whether this truth is taken seriously enough in dogmatics. Are not other ways to the knowledge of God being constantly suggested or developed which contest the exclusiveness of the Son, overthrow the true foundation of theological epistemology, and finish up by positing that God is known through man?

Hermeneutically the thesis is that Jesus Christ is the key to an understanding of scripture. This would seem to be taught in the New Testament itself. It forms the principle of patristic exposition. The Reformers, too, construe the Bible in terms of Christ. In our own time, however, historical exegesis has broken the material unity of scripture and replaced it at best by a historical, religion, or cultural unity which has little force or validity. In the resultant hermeneutical confusion Barth's reaffirmation of the christological rule raises the critical question whether a return should not be made to the biblical self-witness, new historical insights being used as a tool rather than installed as a master. Natural application of this rule can bring with it new problems, especially when typology is not restrained by sober exegesis. Nevertheless abuse is no argument against proper use. If

Christ is in fact the ultimate theme of the divine self-revelation, and hence of scripture, then biblical studies can achieve results of only relative importance so long as they do not observe and serve this principle. Christ in all the scriptures is a fine slogan. The demand of Barth is that it be treated as a strict reality.

Anthropologically the thesis of Barth might seem to be exaggerated when he claims that true man may be found in Jesus Christ alone. Yet here, too, he offers stimulus for exciting and not unprofitable investigation. The connection between man as the image of God, Christ as the express image of God, and the Christian as the image of Christ undoubtedly calls for theological exploration. Moreover, if man is known through man, as one might surely agree, the problem of the fallen nature of man constitutes an obvious problem. How can true man, i.e., man as God created him, be known through actual man, i.e., man under the distortion of sin? This is the question that Barth is answering when he seeks true man in God made man, i.e., Jesus Christ. Anthropological renewal poses a similar problem when we ask about justified man, for, unless we attempt abstract idealising, the only possible definition is presented by the biblical 'man in Christ'. Whether anthropology be approached from the standpoint of creation or from that of reconciliation, whether the orientation be theological or ethical, an authentically biblical and dogmatic account of man surely seems to demand a much stricter christological reference than is customary in traditional discussions.

Homiletically the thesis of Barth is that the preaching of the gospel will have to be a preaching of Christ. Two simple points may be made here. First, Barth's dogmatic grounding of this sound evangelical rule prevents a divorce between the proclamation of Christ in practice and a less christologically orientated dogmatics, and in so doing it gives theological strength, clarity, and force to the preacher's work. Secondly, by establishing the dogmatic foundation Barth provides a safeguard against the divergence from the preaching of Christ which always threatens when pulpit instinct does not have the support of doctrinal insight. Without a sober christological focus in theology, preaching Christ can be materially thin even when it is biblically loyal and emotionally fervent. It can also dissolve under the pressure of supposedly broader and more attractive insights.

### 9. *Holy Scripture*

IF overemphasis on Christology has been the most widespread criticism of Barth, underemphasis on scripture raises the severest objections among Evangelicals. Three points especially call for notice here: first, minimising of the original act of inspiration; second, admission of the possibility of errors in scripture; and third, virtual equation of

inspiration with illumination. Additional matters are the reduction of scripture to the status of witness to revelation and ambivalence in the relation between scripture as word of man and as Word of God.

In the present context, where discussion of these issues is not demanded, the main problem is that the contributions made in Barth's doctrine of scripture are only too easily missed in the flurry of condemnation. Anglican theology, which shares the confusion of the age in this whole area, might well profit by some of Barth's emphases and insights even if it cannot go along with his teaching in detail.

Thus the stress on the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, whether it be called inspiration or illumination, should surely commend itself. It forms an integral and important part of theological tradition from the earliest days and is especially underlined by the reformers, including the Anglican Whitaker. New issues in biblical criticism have in many instances intellectualised the study and use of scripture to the point where the Holy Spirit is pushed out, taken for granted, or regarded as inadequate in face of modern problems. If, however, scripture is God's book, God must be its sponsor and expositor. If it is inspired by the Spirit, the Spirit must unfold and apply it. This note sounded by Barth has an authentic biblical and Reformation ring. It has to have a place of prominence in any theology of revelation and any solid doctrine of scripture.

Again, Barth's criticism of Liberalism should not be shrugged off even by Liberals. As Barth sees it, the Liberal handling of the Bible is guilty of a comical self-contradiction. Pretending to be historical, it imposes its own questions and criteria instead of taking the Bible as it is and letting it speak for itself. The result is a pseudo-science. This in turn, as in much Anglican theology, may provoke a pseudo-scientific reaction which tries to meet mistaken conclusions without tackling the underlying presuppositions. Right answers are thus given to wrong questions. What Barth is asking is that Liberals should re-examine their own objectivity in relation to the object itself and that Evangelicals should give an example of true objectivity, not simply refuting Liberal theses at their own level, but applying the resources of linguistic, archaeological, and religio-historical study to an exposition of the Bible as it actually is and purports to be.

Possibly the best section in Barth's biblical teaching is his discussion of the authority of scripture in *Church Dogmatics* I, 2. Barth relates the authority of the Bible to the work of the Holy Spirit. Isolated from the Spirit, the word could have no more than a quantitatively different authority from that of fathers, confessions, or councils. Combined with the Spirit in the inseparable unity of which the Reformers speak, it achieves a qualitatively different authority. In Barth's words, the relative, formal and indirect authority which we meet in other spheres yields here to an absolute, material and direct authority, for it is God himself who speaks in and through the word. The issue is

not a dead one. In different ways both Liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics display an open or more devious resistance to the supreme normativeness of scripture. Yet changes have taken place, as Barth shows in his masterly survey of Roman Catholic development up to Vatican I, and as subsequent development up to Vatican II vividly reminds us. The result is that a mere repetition of ancient presentations can no longer suffice. Barth's importance in this area is (a) that he keeps before us the cruciality of the issue, (b) that he attempts a new and contemporary exposition, and (c) that he makes it apparent that scripture can claim ultimate authority only in so far as this can be shown to be the authority of God himself exerted in a unique and distinctive way.

Finally, Barth's use of scripture should be noted. He honestly tries to practise what he preaches. Making the authority of scripture his primary emphasis he also makes it his concern to work this out in matters of both faith and practice. Thus he engages in extensive exegetical work, much of it included in the *Church Dogmatics*, in order to have a solid foundation for his dogmatic formulations. He also attempts to work out the implications of biblical teaching for all the debatable issues which confront the church in ethics, relationships, structure, and mission. The criticism to which his exegesis is naturally subject in no way affects the validity of the effort.

All Anglicans can learn here. Anglo-Catholics are given a working example of apostolicity. Liberals are shown that whether Genesis be written by Moses or J and E, the requirement of an obedience of thought and action to scripture still stands. Evangelicals are taught that authentic submission to scripture is in the last resort more important than proving its inerrancy. All Anglicans are confronted by a sharp questioning of the pragmatism which so often constitutes the actual rule. What counts is not just a correct doctrine of scripture but a true and faithful use, namely, a hearing and doing of the Word of Christ as he rules his church in and through the written word.

## 10. *Doxology*

RECOGNISING the distinctive nature of theology as the science of God, Barth recaptures an element which is mostly absent from doctrinal works which take human studies as their model. For Barth, theology, like all the works of the Christian, must begin, continue, and end in God. The theologian begins with prayer to the Father for the Holy Spirit, continues in contemplation of God's word and work in Christ, and ends in adoration of the one God, Father, Son and Spirit. Thus alone does he achieve a proper conformity with the object of enquiry.

The doxological culmination calls for particular notice. It carries with it a self-correction. Barth at first used paradox as an indication



of the transcendence of God and the overwhelming bigness of truth. In the *Church Dogmatics*, however, paradox has come to be regarded as a proper category for the sphere of evil. Its divine counterpart is *doxa* in the sense of glory. God and his truth are still beyond our full grasp. We know only in part. We speak, but what we speak cannot finally be spoken in academic categories. By a natural movement we are forced with the apostles into a climax of worship.

In this regard the *Church Dogmatics* is a rebuke and a reminder. It is a rebuke, for too much of our modern theology is so sophisticated, so intellectualised, or so abstractly orthodox that it cuts God down to human size, effects a divorce from piety, and evokes no doxology. It is also a reminder, for the apostles offer a better model and many of the greatest theologians and theologies have shown that the apostolic example can be followed with no sacrifices of rationality or learning.

The doxological quality is a necessity rather than a luxury. Only as theology has it can it do justice to its proper theme, for God is indeed greater than we think, so that if we really think of him we are finally 'lost in wonder, love and praise'. Again, only as theology has this quality can it do justice to itself, for apart from doxology it lacks congruity with its ultimate nature and function. Finally, only as it has this quality can it do justice to what should be its exemplary role, for theology ought to offer a model of the study which so concentrates on its object that humility replaces arrogance and curiosity bows to wonder—the wonder which in the last resort is wonder at God and his ways and works.

Perhaps the supreme achievement of Barth, after all, is to have restored to some degree what was rapidly becoming an old-fashioned style of dogmatics. If this be the right style, however, he needs followers to bring it back into fashion. There are some, of course, who are ready enough to flee to doxology as a refuge from rationality, singing a creed that they cannot say, as the late Bishop Pike did. This is not what is meant. The followers needed are the ones who will move on naturally and irresistibly from prayer to rationality and from rationality to worship. Perhaps Anglicans might take the lead here. They are steeped in a theologically informed liturgy. Whether they look back to Reformers or Carolines, Tractarians or Evangelicals, this style of theology is their tradition. They have held to it as well as any, and perhaps better than most, in the modern shift of fashion. They have the potential, then, for theological renewal along the general lines indicated by Barth. All that is needed is the courage, the resolve and the vision to realise this potential.