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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE: A TRIBUTE TO KARL BARTH

his program and of an existentialist program. There, where this warning had not been heard, one took up afresh the experiment with a subjectivity, which as such accounts itself to be truth. It was an experiment with resting in oneself and with a self-moved faith, and therefore, and precisely in this form, also a faith which had neither a ground nor an object. Hence, there has arisen in the middle of our century and under the existence-dialectical signature of Kierkegaardianism a regular theological reaction. That this development from Kierkegaard was possible must cause us to have third thoughts which had not yet arisen in the beginning, forty years ago.

And now we must sum all this up. Kierkegaard was still definitely more tied to the 19th century than we realized at that time. One could perhaps also, by underscoring the historic, place the question whether Kierkegaard's view (seine Lehre) was not the highest, most consistent and most thoroughly reflected perfection of that pietism which in the 18th century together with rationalism laid the foundation for the Christianity and ecclesiology of the pious-oriented man which Kierkegaard so passionately fought, and which we forty years ago under the invocation of Kierkegaard's name again undertook to fight? But we could not attack the foundation itself, the whole anthropocentric Christian thought process as such from Kierkegaard, because he himself had not attacked it—yes, even more, because he, on the contrary, in a forceful and refined way and to a high degree had strengthened it.

From the perspective of this later understanding I am and I remain grateful to Kierkegaard for the immunity I received at that time through him, and I am and remain also full of deep respect for his life's noble tragedy and for the unusual intellectual clarity which is in his works. I consider Kierkegaard to be a teacher, through whose school every theology in every case must at one time go. Woe to everyone who neglects that school! But one must not remain sitting there—and still less, turn back there. Kierkegaard's "teaching" is, as he himself has said, "a little spice to the food," but not itself the food, which is the task of every proper theology to give the church and mankind.

The gospel is (1) the glad message of God's *Yes* to men. It is (2) the message which the community must bring further to the whole world. It is (3) the message from above. It is these three points which I learned in other schools, in addition to what I had learned from Kierkegaard's school, after meeting with Kierkegaard.

Barth As A Person and As A Theologian

by Bernard Ramm

Barth As A Person

When I started to teach theology at the beginning of my academic career, I turned to those old American standbys: Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge (whose *Outlines of Theology* I in turn outlined in my days at the University of Washington), Augustus Strong, and G. T. Shedd (whom I really liked the best). I had heard of Brunner and Barth and the term "neo-orthodoxy," but that was the limit of my knowledge.

In my seminary education we kept hearing these names and others. A few of us were disappointed with the lack of knowledge of Barth and his theology among our own professors. Accordingly, we made an appointment with an evangelical theologian (whom I shall not name) and trusted that he would give us some idea of Barth's theology and its meaning for evangelicals. After the theologian had rambled around for twenty or thirty minutes, he stopped his talking and asked us a question: "Are you thoroughly confused?" We all admitted that we were. Then he said, "I have really explained Barth."

My reaction to that remark was extremely negative. It seemed to me both unethical and theologically irresponsible. A theologian with such an international reputation—already being classed with Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher—could not have been fairly treated in this manner.

The second time I was exposed to Barth is associated with the public library of the city of Los Angeles, famous for its holdings in religion, even though a state institution. Here I found the first volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* translated into English with a great exertion of energy by G. T. Thomson.

I was stultified when I tried to read it. Two things in particular puzzled me. I had a general idea of what a church father was and could recognize names like Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine. Apart from that, my knowledge of the fathers and their theology was virtually nil. Here was a text in theology filled with references to the fathers and cited in their original Greek or Latin texts. This seemed to me to border on omniscience.

The other matter that puzzled me was his use of familiar terms like Word, Word of God, revelation, etc., but with meanings that were very different from my understanding of them. The result was that much which I read was meaningless. That ended my encounter with Barth for some time.

Meanwhile the great monographs of Brunner were being translated (much to the credit of Olive Wyon of Oxford). Long before I had any substantial knowledge of Barth I was fairly well versed in the theology of Brunner.

After World War II, when the process began of systematically translating Barth into English as his successive volumes were released in German, I started my own program of systematically reading the translations. Due to my highly Americanized version of evangelical theology I found much that I could not grasp; but undiscouraged, I kept reading the volumes.

When I received a grant for a year's study abroad there was no question in my mind but that I should go to Basel where Barth was still lecturing. So my wife and I and our two children sailed the Atlantic on the U.S.S. America and finally ended up in a cozy apartment in Basel not far from the university.

Students ask me much more frequently about Barth as a person than they do about his theology. My knowledge of Barth as a person is based on hearing his lectures, sitting in on his seminars, attending his special English-speaking seminars, and visiting his home on visitation hours, which were from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday afternoons.

The first point I make to my students is that Barth was then

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seventy-three years old. The days of thunder and lightning were over. This was a different Barth from the theologian who had personally challenged Adolf Hitler, who authored the famous Barmen Declaration (1934), and who wrote his angry **NO** (*Nein*) to Emil Brunner. He had become more the theological patriarch than the theological knight.

What came through foremost from Barth as a person was a spirit of kindliness, patience and humor. In the question period in his English-speaking seminar some of the questions asked by theologically ignorant American students could only be called asinine. But Barth would answer any question seriously and sometimes at great length. His saintliness in this regard was far greater than mine.

The second question most frequently asked by the students is whether he were a Christian or not. Students would travel from many places in Europe (thanks to the train system) to attend his English-speaking seminar. The group was, then, very mixed theologically. The students ranged from sturdy Dutch Calvinists to American graduates of liberal seminaries. No count was made, but it was my firm conviction, shared by others, that there was universal agreement among the students that by my standards Barth was an authentic Christian gentleman. This was the opinion of even those who disagreed strongly with his general theological stance.

Of course, being a fine personality is not the same as being a Christian. Barth himself remarked that the heretics were usually very attractive fellows. But with that *caveat* in mind, I consider Barth a great person and an authentic Christian.

The last time I saw Barth was in July 1958. I had made an appointment to visit him, and he had forgotten it. But he graciously invited me to his backyard patio where some of his friends had gathered. I felt it was out of place to carry on a theological discussion in such a setting. So I requested from him one piece of paper with his own writing on it. He spoke in Basel Deutsch to one of the young lads there, Peter Barth, the son of Markus Barth, who disappeared into the house. He reappeared with a sheet of paper which Barth gave to me. It was the first page of the lectures of that academic year in Barth's own handwriting. This, I thought, was generosity beyond description.

Barth As A Theologian

The third question that at least some students eventually ask is how much Barth has influenced my own theological thinking. First, a word of warning. Many different books and theologians have influenced me. I don't want what follows to be understood as the only significant theological influence in my theology. I think if it were on a line-by-line basis I would be in far more agreement with G. C. Berkouwer than Karl Barth.

1) Barth's theology has helped me break out of the theological bind so prevalent in America. We tend to box ourselves in as if the only options were liberal or evangelical. This has created a polarization in one's theology and methodology. Historically things were never this black and white. But a good deal of the literature is written as if we were limited to these options. Some of the third options suggested were not creative or powerful enough to break up the stalemate.

Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is filled with illustrations where he goes his own third way. It gradually unlocked my own theological reflection so that I could think a third way and not suffer to the end the polarization of liberalism and evangelicalism. It has made me a freer and happier theologian. My book *After Fundamentalism* could be called a study of how Barth tried to find a third way in specific theological topics.

2) My reading of Barth has given me a great respect for historical theology. We are not the only people with the truth, so that when we die the truth perishes with us. The history of theology has a very important place in Barth's theological methodology. Although dogmas of past ages are not infallible, neither are they merely materials for historical research. They had some normative function in the writing of theology. In this regard it is an interesting phenomenon that the great Scottish Reformed theologian, James Orr, defended a view of the history of dogmas which is identical to Barth's (*The Progress of Dogma*, 3d. 1908).

Barth declared that no theologian has the right to lecture or write until he has first studied what the great theologians of the Church had already said. He did not mean that we could not differ with the theologians of the past nor that we should limit ourselves to them. But the very nature of the Church as the people of God through the successive centuries requires of the theologian that he first hear those older voices before he begins his own speaking and writing in the church. This contrasts so very radically with some American liberal theologians who totally bypassed historical theology and wrote their theology based on religious experiences or the philosophy of religion.

. . . The greatest contribution Barth made to my thinking was his constant emphasis in his seminars that, if we believe with all our hearts that the Christian faith is God's truth, we need not fear any other truth.

This high regard for historical theology has materially governed the manner in which I lecture and teach. Almost always my lecturing takes some aspect of historical theology as the point of departure.

3) One of the more interesting things about Barth was that even though he believed and defended so many of the older dogmas ("a fundamentalist in a tuxedo"), he was everywhere welcomed and respected. He mentions that on one occasion he sat next to Jean-Paul Sartre in a conference! Barth has shown that, if an evangelical theologian knows theology, reveals genuine competence, and has decent manners, he or she can get a hearing in a world of theologians which is usually prejudiced against evangelicalism.

I teach in a consortium of nine schools ranging from Unitarian to Roman Catholic. In any given class I will have some sort of ecumenical mix. It has been my experience as an evangelical that if I teach competently, fairly, and objectively, I have no problems in relating to my students. One could not be a hawker of evangelicalism in that setting and survive.

The most delicate part of the whole year of instruction is when I must lecture on the Reformation. In such a class I have had Roman Catholic students, Lutherans, Episcopalians and others. I found out what Barth has found out earlier. If a theologian is competent, honest, fair and courteous, there is no difficulty in lecturing about such sensitive materials.

4) Doing my graduate work in philosophy and writing books on Christian apologetics had kept the issue of theology and philosophy on the front burner. Nobody I read on the subject

helped me out until I read Barth. To begin with, it must be said that Barth has repeatedly stressed that competence in philosophy is necessary for competence in theology and therefore every student of theology must also be a student of philosophy. Barth set up the relationship of theology and philosophy in three propositions. (1) Theology is an autonomous subject worthy within itself and does not need the imprimatur of any philosophy in order to achieve respectability. (2) No human philosophy is a perfect counterpart of divine revelation, and therefore no philosophy can claim the right to be the best companion of Christian theology (i.e., neither Plato, Aristotle, nor Whitehead). (3) We may learn something from any philosophy. Materialism warns us not to be given to excessive spiritualizing and idealism warns us not to overemphasize our knowledge of material reality.

(5) I have written elsewhere that the greatest contribution Barth made to my thinking was his constant emphasis in his seminars that, if we believe with all our hearts that the Christian faith is God's truth, we need not fear any other truth. We will then be fearless and not afraid to open any window or any door, for truth cannot embarrass truth.

(6) Barth has forced me to take a longer look at certain texts in order to plumb their depths. This applies to many passages but especially to what is known in New Testament literature as "cosmic Christology." These are the texts which attribute creation to Christ, which a good Jew would only attribute to God (e.g. John 1:1-3, Col. 1:15-20, Heb. 1:1-3). Also, such texts attribute revelation to Christ as one would only attribute it to God (John 1:14, Heb. 1:1). Although this has generated the Christomonism versus Christocentrism controversy, one cannot deny that such texts have not historically received the attention they deserve. The result in my own theology has been to move very radically in that direction.

As I have again written elsewhere, one reads Barth not to become a Barthian. Theology is on the move, and he certainly did not want to present a fixed and settled theology but rather to be a stimulus to more theology. One reads Barth to learn how one can be a better theologian. In other words, Barth's greatest impact on my thinking has been more from his methodology than from particular doctrines.

The Legacy of Karl Barth

by Donald G. Bloesch

An Evangelical Theologian

On this 100th anniversary of the birth of Karl Barth, the eminent Swiss Reformed theologian, it is appropriate to reassess his theological contribution to the church universal. Pope Pius XII hailed Barth as the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas, surely a singular tribute by any standard.

We should see Barth first of all as an evangelical theologian. Whereas in his earlier phase he was heavily influenced by Kantian and existentialist philosophy, when he embarked on the *Church Dogmatics* he broke with this philosophical heritage, desiring only to be a theologian of the Word of God. In his later years, Barth had no compunction in describing his theological position as "evangelical," but by this he meant neither a rigid adherence to the letter of Scripture nor a belief in biblical inerrancy. Instead, he thought of himself as evangelical in the classical sense—committed to the gospel of reconciliation and redemption, the message that we are saved by the free grace of God alone as revealed and confirmed in Jesus Christ. For Barth, this entailed an acknowledgement of the authority of Holy Scripture as the primary witness to God's self-revelation in Christ. It also excluded any recourse to natural theology—the appeal to new revelations in nature and history that could supplement or fulfill the one revelation of God in the biblical history culminating in Jesus Christ. In Barth's view, natural theology is the antithesis of evangelical theology. It is the difference between dependence on natural wisdom and trust in the gospel of God.

In contradistinction to liberal theology, Barth was adamant that the gospel cannot be reduced to ethical principles or spiritual experiences. Instead, it is the story of God's incomparable act of reconciliation and redemption in the life and death of Jesus Christ. While some of his early critics accused Barth of ignoring the doctrine of creation, he tried to see creation in its rightful place—for the sake of redemption. Redemption, moreover, is not the completion or perfection of creation but the dawning of a wholly new reality that opens up creation to a glorious new future. For him, redemption is even prior to creation, in that behind creation is God's predestining love.

Thanks to Barth, the atonement has once again become a credible doctrine. It is no longer the appeasement of a wrathful God who would not otherwise forgive, but the expression of a loving and holy God who forgives despite our unworthiness. Like Aulén he rediscovered the patristic motif—*Christus Victor*. The atoning sacrifice of Christ means the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness, powers that have held the world in servile subjection. Barth does not repudiate the satisfaction motif but now sees satisfaction as rendered *by* God rather than *to* God.

Barth has made it possible to speak again of hell, the wrath of God and predestination, and to preach these doctrines as good news. The wrath of God is but one form of his love, and predestination means foreordination to the kingdom of God. Hell has been done away with by the victory of Jesus Christ, though Barth allows for a subjective hell that exists when people deny and repudiate their election.

Barth has also helped the church rediscover the ethical seriousness of the Christian faith. Sanctification, he contends, must be reflected and attested in a life of costly discipleship. The gospel has social and political implications, though it itself is not a political message. While urging Christians to get involved in the work of social justice, Barth warns against utopianism, the illusion that the kingdom of God can be ushered in through social engineering. He sharply distinguishes between divine and human righteousness; the first is a divine gift, whereas the second is a human possibility, which can witness to but never reduplicate the first.

Another signal contribution is Barth's recovery of the objectivity of salvation. He sees the drama of salvation in terms of "God's search for man," not "man's quest for God." The object of theological reflection is not the relationship of "man to God in religious experience" (as in Schleiermacher) but that

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