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ues to have an effect.

Divergencies

As I mentioned, many of the contributors not only have appropriated much from Barth, but they have also diverged from him as well. A few of these divergencies can be mentioned.

Hendrikus Berkhof tells of how he had to widen his pneumatological thinking to include the realm of experience which Barth had rejected. He writes: "I could not agree with those Barthians for whom experience was a dirty word. I never had believed that Barth's 'No!' to Brunner's 'Nature and Grace' could be the last word. If the Spirit is active both in creation and in redemption, the Spirit must also be conceived as the bridge-builder between these two realms."

Dietrich Ritschl is critical of Barth's developed theology as done "entirely within the categories of Continental Protestantism and Catholicism. To put it more strongly," writes Ritschl, "I think that Barth never in his life had a conversation in depth with a truly non-religious communist, an atheist, a Muslim or a Hindu." When Ritschl told Barth near the end of Barth's life that his (Ritschl's) ambition was "to be a good player in the orchestra of theologians," Ritschl says, Barth "quite strongly disagreed and smilingly admonished me to play a solo-instrument." "I thought and I still think," says Ritschl, "that the time for this is over."

Donald Bloesch finds Barth's "denigration of human virtue" disturbing. He believes Barth "underplays the Scriptural injunction that apart from our striving after holiness we will not see God (Heb. 12:14; Rom. 6:19; Mat. 5:8). The call to sainthood, which is an integral part of the tradition of the

church catholic," says Bloesch, "is sadly neglected in his theology."

One of the most sustained critiques of Barth is from John Cobb. Cobb rejects Barth's rejection of a "natural theology" in favor of, in Cobb's terms, a "Christian natural theology." He sees Barth's approach as at the root of what led to the "death of God" movement—an unwillingness to speak of God in terms other than those of the Bible and not in terms of "this world." Cobb questions Barth's concept of "nature" and believes his theology down plays ecology and therefore all the problems related to the rape of the environment.

Barth Today

Enough has been said to see how some of the contributors have viewed Barth, both positively and negatively. There is much more in the book and from other contributors whose names have not been mentioned. For many, Barth has been a starting point, a norm, a way of doing theology by which other systems and other thought can be evaluated. Yet even those whose theology today moves in an orbit other than Barth's do acknowledge his contributions and can find points at which he has been helpful personally. As John Cobb concluded his essay: "So what of Barth? That I could not follow him does not mean I cannot admire him or appreciate much of his legacy. That appreciation can best be shown today, not by becoming Barthians, but by responding as creatively to our situation, as we understand it, as he did his, as he understood it." For a theologian who always said he did not intend to found a "school," Karl Barth in this centennial year of his birth would perhaps be gladdened by that perspective.

Karl Barth: Socialism and Biblical Hermeneutics

by Steve de Gruchy

In Search of the Strange New World in the Bible

In the period 1916 to 1921, while a pastor at Safenwil, Karl Barth discovered and began to give expression to a new understanding of the Bible and its interpretation. It is our contention that major elements of what became of Barth's mature hermeneutic as expressed in *Church Dogmatics 1* were articulated in this "early" period. Barth entered academic work not with the intention of discovering a new understanding of the faith, but to articulate and provide a theological foundation for what he had already discovered.

What Barth had discovered, and what he voiced in a lecture in 1916, was "the Strange New World within the Bible." The first concern evident here is his belief that the content of the Bible is God's Word to us rather than history, morality and religion.

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God, but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us. . . . It is this which is in the Bible. The Word of God is within the Bible.¹

A second concern is the role of faith in interpretation. Barth makes himself clear: in spite of all our human limitations, Holy Scripture will interpret itself for us if we "read it in faith."²

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One can only understand the Bible if it is read in faith because really to understand it means to recognize that it "makes straight for the point where one must decide to accept the sovereignty of God. . . . One can only believe . . . or not believe. There is no third way."³

Two years later, in August 1918, the "Strange New World" exploded on the wider public in the form of Barth's first commentary on *Romans*. We meet a third concern here: to have the Bible speak with importance in the twentieth century.

What was once of great importance is so still. What is today of grave importance . . . stands in direct connexion with that ancient gravity. If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours.⁴

This concern led Barth to assign the historical-critical method to its "place" as mere "preparation of the intelligence," and to admit that were he driven to choose between that method and the classical Reformed doctrine of inspiration, he would "without hesitation adopt the latter."⁵ This concern surfaces again in another lecture in 1920. Once again Barth wants to assign historical-critical work to a preliminary stage: "For it is clear that intelligent and fruitful discussion of the Bible begins when the judgment as to its human, historical and psychological character has been made and put behind us."⁶

Just before Barth left Safenwil, the second and wholly revised edition of *Romans* was published. While he saw fit to re-write the commentary, the concerns were still there. In his

foreword to this edition, he responded to the basic criticism that he was an enemy of historical-criticism by arguing that he was more critical of others because he took concern of the text as his fundamental key to interpretation. In this context he uttered his famous comment that "the critical historian needs to be more critical!"⁷

Also in this foreword, he explicitly refers to a fourth concern, the responsibility of biblical theology and hermeneutics toward the life of the Church and its proclamation:

I myself know what it means year in, year out to mount the steps of the pulpit, conscious of the responsibility to understand and interpret, and longing to fulfill it; and yet utterly incapable . . .⁸

What Barth had discovered, and what he voiced in a lecture in 1916, was "the strange new world within the Bible."

The fifth concern that is evident at this period is expressed in the lecture mentioned above, "Biblical Questions, Insight and Vistas." Here Barth said, "The Bible tells us more, or less, according to the much or little that we are able to hear and translate into deed and truth."⁹ The application of the Word of God to the world around one is fundamental to the interpretation of the Bible.

It is clear then that five crucial and vital elements of Barth's biblical hermeneutic were already expressed while he was a pastor at Safenwil, in the two lectures and the two editions of *Romans*. This is not to say that we meet here his mature and articulated thoughts on the matter. Indeed, Barth had still to make his "false start," to read Anselm and most importantly to discover a trajectory within the thought of Calvin and the Reformation that would provide him with a framework to express that hermeneutic.¹⁰ Nevertheless we are justified in saying that the discovery of this hermeneutic and its fundamental concerns had already been made.

Socialist Praxis at Safenwil

The work of Karl Marx has decisively influenced the way we understand human thought. "Consciousness," he tells us, "can never be anything else than conscious existence,"¹¹ and historical materialism "does not explain practice from the idea, but explains the formation of the idea from material practice."¹² In other words, who we are and what we do—particularly in relation to the material production in society—determines what we think and specifically how we understand the world around us. This is equally true of religious as it is of political or economic theories that attempt to *understand the world*. All attempts at understanding—i.e., all hermeneutics—are decisively influenced by the social praxis of the interpreter.

Nowhere in the field of biblical hermeneutics is this understood better than in liberation theology. Using the insights of Marx, liberation theologians raise questions about the relationship of the interpreter to society, grounding what Heidegger and Bultmann called the hermeneutical circle and pre-understanding in *real history*. Weir has commented that:

Form criticism has taught us to seek the *sitz im leben* of the text. The hermeneutics of Liberation Theology are challenging scholarship to discuss the *sitz im leben* of the interpretation.¹³

The liberation theologians make clear that there is no possibility of coming to the biblical text with a *tabula rasa* because

we all bring our own agendas to the study of the Bible. Miguez Bonino has commented:

What Bultmann has so convincingly argued concerning a *pre-understanding*, which every man brings to his interpretation of the text, must be deepened and made more concrete, not in the abstract philosophical analysis of existence, but in the concrete conditions of men who belong to a certain time, people and class, who are engaged in certain courses of action, even of Christian action, and who reflect and read the texts within and out of these conditions.¹⁴

As these insights are applied to the way the Bible has been interpreted in North Atlantic countries, we became more and

more aware that its message is captive to the material and hence the ideological interests of the interpreters. Any attempt to respond to an interpretation of the Bible must begin with *suspicion*: "Every interpretation of the texts which is offered to us . . . must be investigated in relation to the praxis out of which it comes."¹⁵

In response, then, to our discussion of the relationship between consciousness and social existence, biblical interpretation and praxis, and most specifically the hermeneutic suspicion which leads to the above demand of Miguez Bonino, we need to inquire into the praxis which gave rise to Barth's hermeneutic. Because, as we have seen, the orientation of this hermeneutic is already clear in Safenwil, we need to focus on Barth's praxis as a pastor in this Swiss Village.

In 1972, Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt set the theological world abuzz with his four theses on Karl Barth's theology and radical politics. Marquardt maintained that:

1. Karl Barth was a Socialist.
2. His theology has its life setting in his socialist activity.
3. He turned to theology in order to set the organic connection between the Bible and the newspaper, the new world and the collapsing bourgeois order.
4. The substance of his turn to theology was the construction of a concept of "God."¹⁶

The fact that these theses were initially rejected by the Kirchliche Hochschule in Berlin¹⁷ indicates that much of Barth's radical political commitment has been obscured by First-World theologians. George Casalis writes that

the dominant theologians and the ecclesiastical powers, having an inkling of the danger represented by an outstanding man who refused to be confined in the accepted political, academic and ethical framework, took steps to reclaim him. . . . As a result, conformist theologians and pastors could declare themselves "Barthian" without in any way calling into question the structures and values of social orders and ecclesiastical establishments.¹⁸

Through the work of Marquardt, Gollwitzer, Casalis, Hunsinger and others, there has been a growing awareness of the radical nature of Karl Barth's political commitments and activities at Safenwil. In a letter in the year of his death Barth reminisces:

When as a young parson in Safenwil in the Aargau I saw the unjust situation of the workers, who were deprived of their rights, then I believed that as a theologian

I could meet both them and the other members of the community only by taking their side and therefore becoming in practice a Social Democrat. In so doing, I was less interested in the ideological aspect of the party than in its organizing of unions. And "my" workers understood me on this matter. For them I was their "comrade parson" who was even ready on one occasion to march with them behind a red flag to Zofingen. . . . With that concern, I used the fathers and doctors of socialism to enlighten them as to their rights and possibilities both politically and especially in relations to unions. I successfully taught them to make use of their rights and options, and at times I even represented them at various congresses. Once I was almost elected to the Aargau council of government by the socialists.¹⁹

Gollwitzer summarizes some of the other activities that Barth was involved in when he notes that in Safenwil Barth "established three unions, organized strikes, travelled up and down the countryside as a party speaker, offended the well-to-do in his community, urged his presbyters to join the party, [and] formed a 'red' presbytery. . . ." ²⁰ These comments and Barth's personal reflection enable us to understand what we would call the praxis of Karl Barth the pastor. They describe the *sitz im leben* out of which Barth could say: "Real socialism is real Christianity in our time."²¹

Barth and Segundo's Hermeneutical Circle

In the attempt to integrate Barth's socialist praxis and his discovery of this new way of reading the Bible, we will rely on Segundo's model of the Hermeneutical Circle, for this articulates most clearly the way in which social activity and biblical interpretation interact. This is Segundo's preliminary definition of the circle:

It is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present day reality, both individual and social.²²

There are four stages or "decisive factors" in the hermeneutical circle. We shall examine each in turn with reference to Barth.

1. As one experiences reality, one becomes suspicious that all is not as one is led to believe. Ideological suspicion arises, in which one recognizes that the dominant way of explaining things does not fit with reality. Behind talk of peace and order lurks violence and exploitation. This is Segundo's first precondition: one has to become critical of one's society in order to begin to participate in the circle.²³ "A human being who is content with the world will not have the least interest in unmasking the mechanisms that conceal the authentic reality."²⁴ It should be clear from our discussion that Barth's embracing of socialism involved a critical attitude toward the ruling class of his day. It is clear too from this period that Barth looked upon the "fathers and doctors of socialism" with appreciation,²⁵ and the recorded correspondence with Herr Hussy indicates that he understood the prevalent socio-economic situation from a Marxist perspective.²⁶ What is clear from all of this (remarkably so in a letter from *Letters 1961-1968*), is that all of this grew out of his deep commitment to the workers of his parish. It was not just intellectual games!

2. This critical awareness and ideological suspicion grows to include even theology. Here one recognizes that the dominant theology and interpretation of the Bible cannot deal adequately with reality. Prior to the First World War, Barth had made himself "a committed disciple of the 'modern school.'" ²⁷ The suspicion that it could not deal adequately with reality arose most dramatically with the advent of that War. Not only was the whole project of the "modern school" thrown into

disrepute, but Barth was deeply shocked at the moral support his theological teachers gave to the German war effort.²⁸ This was an "ethical failure" that had its roots in theology. He wrote:

The unconditional truths of the gospel are simply suspended for the time being and in the meantime a German war theology is put to work, its Christian trimmings consisting in a lot of talk about sacrifice and the like.²⁹

Ideological suspicion also arose in the area of his day-to-day praxis of *preaching*. The responsibilities Barth faced as a preacher in a working class congregation raised serious questions about the legitimacy and adequacy of the theology he had been taught. He communicated to his friend Eduard Thurneysen his "increasing realization that our preaching is impossible from the start."³⁰ It must be remembered that in the case of both the War and homiletics, Barth's suspicion received its primary stimulus from his commitment to the workers in his parish and hence to socialism. Hunsinger has written that "the problem of the sermon was for Barth a problem of praxis, and praxis for him included socialist politics."³¹ Barth speaks of a radical rejection of prevalent theology when he writes that

a whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching which I had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy, was shaken to the foundations, and with it all the other writings of the German theologians.³²

3. While the second step involves a rejection of prevalent theology, it can also mean the rejection of the Christian faith. If, however, one does not want to reject the faith itself, then one moves to this third step where one seeks to investigate "the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account,"³³ and therefore that it is the expression of the faith and not the faith itself which cannot deal with the unmasked reality. Against Marx, who would have had similar views to him on the first two steps, Barth believed that the failure of liberal Protestantism did not mean the failure of the Christian faith. It meant rather that the Christian faith had to be restated. This involved having an "exegetical suspicion" that what his teachers propagated as "Christian" did not in fact have its roots in the Bible. Thurneysen refers to this shared suspicion:

It happened as something basically very simple: the Bible struck us in a completely new way. It was already familiar to us, but we read it through certain filters and interpretations. When the theology and the world-view which created those filters were shaken, the interpretation began to fall apart.³⁴

4. The fourth point in Segundo's circle is the appropriation of a *new hermeneutic*. We have examined Barth's new hermeneutic in detail above. The evidence we have in terms of responses by representatives of the "old school" bear witness to its novelty. Harnack branded him as being in line with Thomas Munzer, and according to one of the highly regarded New Testament professors, Julicher, he was a new Marcion!³⁵ The inability for Barth and Harnack to correspond over the issue of biblical interpretation also illustrates the profound paradigm shift initiated by Barth's new hermeneutic.³⁶

Because we have been speaking of a circle and not a straight line, factors four and one are related in such a way that the affirmation of a new hermeneutic—the grasping of new possibilities in the biblical text—leads on to a deeper commitment in the struggle for a better world. For the reason that the stress is on *action in response to God's Word* rather than mere con-

templation from afar, George Casalis has suggested the term *hermeneutical circulation*. This linguistic change carries with it a change in emphasis which recognizes that the interpreter does not sit still and let his or her mind go round a carousel of thought, but is actively moving in real life.

This constant circulation is also true of Barth. He continued to move around the circle again and again. New issues such as the 1918 Russian Revolution, the Swiss General strike, the rise of Nazi Germany, and the 1948 Hungarian Invasion led him to new suspicions and new insights into reading the Bible.³⁷ Marquardt quotes Barth himself as recognizing this: If "political relationships change, then Christians will simply take that as an occasion to read the Bible anew. . . . And quite certainly this: a new understanding of Scripture . . . is the community's decisive participation in the change of the political order."³⁸ As events led to a new reading of the Bible, this in turn led to a deeper political involvement which included membership in the SDP in Nazi Germany and his refusal to resign from it in 1933; his political activity in the war years, his deportation, and his involvement in the Church struggle; his participation in the communist led *Committee for a Free Germany*; and his continuing rejection of capitalism and the "American Way of Life."³⁹

Conclusion

In this essay we have argued (1) that biblical hermeneutics and social praxis are inextricably linked, and that a change in one involves a change in the other. This we have seen is true for Barth. His new hermeneutic which he discovered at Safenwil arose out of his socialist praxis. At the same time we have argued that (2) the orientation of this new hermeneutic remained the same throughout his life and that the themes articulated in the Safenwil period remained dominant in his mature theology.

We conclude with two remarks that flow from the above. (1) If Barth's hermeneutic arose from a socialist praxis, and if his hermeneutic did not change in orientation throughout his life, this lends further credence to the view that Barth remained committed to socialist praxis (at least in principle) throughout his life. Any basic change in praxis would have led to a corresponding basic change in his hermeneutic. (2) If Barth's hermeneutic arose out of socialist praxis, and if it was a *Reformed* hermeneutic, then he has a pivotal role to play in the search for Reformed theology that can be mature enough to be open to the challenge of liberation theology, to be in dialogue with

it, and to learn from it while at the same time remaining true to the best of its tradition.

¹ K. Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible" in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Trans. D. Horton (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p.43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ K. Barth, Preface to the First Edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: OUP, 1933), p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ K. Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas" in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp.60f.

⁷ K. Barth, Preface to the Second Edition of *Romans*, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ K. Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas," p. 95.

¹⁰ We are speaking here of that trajectory in Calvin which sees a relationship between the Word of God and the words of the Bible, but which avoids verbal infallibility and inerrancy and links together faith, the Spirit and the Word. See for example E.A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1952) for a discussion of the two trajectories in Calvin.

¹¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*. Ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ J.E. Weir, "The Bible and Marx," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 35, p. 344.

¹⁴ J. Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (London: SPCK, 1975), pp. 90f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁶ F-W. Marquardt, "Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*. Ed. and Trans. G. Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 46.

¹⁷ See *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 10.

¹⁸ G. Casalis, *Correct Ideas Don't Fall From the Skies*. Trans. J.M. Lyons and M. John (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), p. 90.

¹⁹ K. Barth, "To an Engineer in East Germany, June 1968," in *Letters 1961-1968*. Trans. and Ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 303.

²⁰ H. Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 79.

²¹ K. Barth, "Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 36.

²² J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*. Trans. J. Drury (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1976), p.8.

²³ For a discussion on what Segundo considers the two pre-conditions for entry into the circle, see *Ibid.*, pp. 8f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ K. Barth, "To an Engineer in East Germany, June 1968," p. 303.

²⁶ See K. Barth, "Answer to the Open Letter of Mr. W. Hussy in Aarburg" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, pp. 40ff.

²⁷ K. Barth in E. Busch, *Karl Barth*. Trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), p. 46.

²⁸ On the very day that the war broke out, 93 German intellectuals including Harnack and Hermann issued a manifesto in support of the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg.

²⁹ K. Barth in *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: The Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925*. Trans. J.D. Smart (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), p. 26.

³⁰ In E. Busch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

³¹ G. Hunsinger, "Toward a Radical Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 202.

³² In E. Busch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

³³ J.L. Segundo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

³⁴ Quoted in F-W. Marquardt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

³⁵ See K. Barth, Preface to the 2nd edition of *Romans*, p. 13.

³⁶ See H.M. Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge UP, 1972).

³⁷ For a short discussion of this see F-W. Marquardt, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 60f.

³⁸ In *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁹ See R. Petersen, "An analysis of the Nature and Basis of Karl Barth's Socialism" (Unpublished MA Thesis, UCT, 1985) and the essays by Marquardt, Gollwitzer and Hunsinger in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* for a fuller discussion of these events and their significance. For Barth's response to capitalism and the "American Way of Life" see specifically K. Barth, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land*, Ed. R. McAfee Brown (New York: Association Press, 1959). See also G. Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Liberation Theology" in the *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 4, 1983, in which he contends that one of the concerns that unites Barth and liberation theology is a highly critical response to capitalism.

The Evangelical Witness To the Poor and Oppressed

by Thomas D. Hanks

For our consideration of the evangelical witness to the poor and oppressed, I would like to outline ten fundamentals of biblical theology that shape and characterize the proclamation of the Good News to the poor.¹

1. Oppression and Poverty

Essential to the faithful proclamation of the gospel to the poor and oppressed is the recognition of the fundamental

character of oppression in biblical theology and in human history. Explicit vocabulary for oppression occurs more than 500 times and constitutes a fundamental structural category of biblical theology. In more than 150 biblical texts oppression is explicitly linked to poverty and is viewed in Scripture as the basic cause of poverty. True, more than 20 other causes for poverty can be found in Scripture—such as idolatry in Judges or sloth in Proverbs. However, all other causes occur but a few times each and lack the massive emphasis Scripture places on the causal link between oppression and poverty.² Since 1968, Latin American theologians have insisted that if we recognize oppression as the fundamental cause of poverty, then neither simple charity nor economic development proj-

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