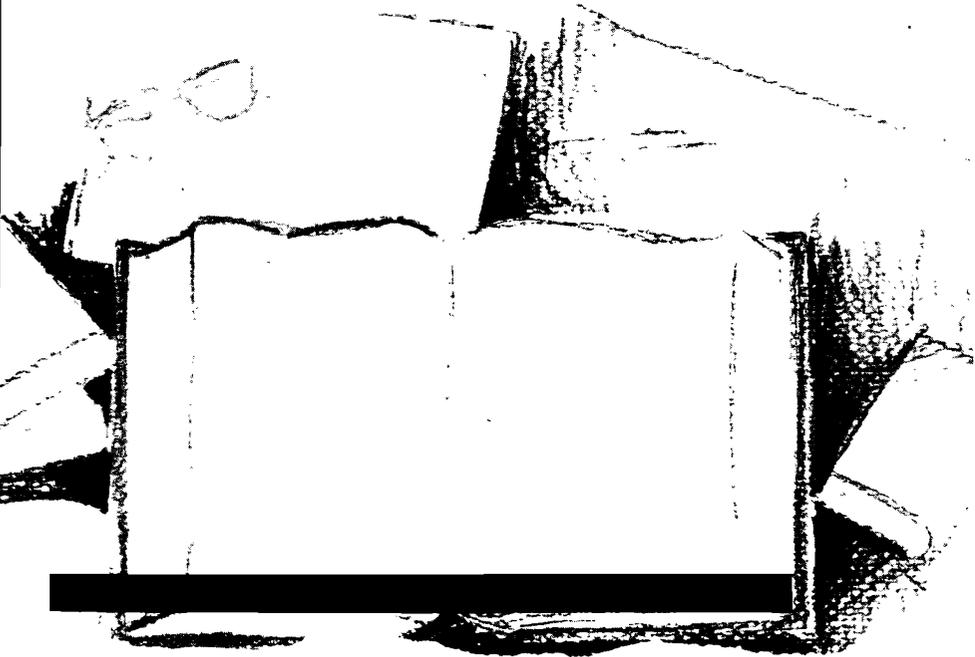


KARL BARTH
AND THE
WORD OF GOD

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I
KARL BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGY

When in the three lectures that have been assigned to me, I have to deal with Barth's Christology, his doctrine of Scripture and his view of preaching, we are touching the very heart of Barth's theology. Actually the three subjects belong together and can be brought under one heading: Barth's doctrine of the Word of God.

Barth has often been called 'the theologian of the Word', it may be debated, of course, whether this is really true, but it cannot be denied that from the beginning of his theological career this has been his great aim. And we should never forget that to him this doctrine of the Word of God was never merely theological or academic. It was born out of the need of his ministry, particularly out of the central task of the Christian minister: preaching the Word of God.

In 1911, after the completion of his theological study, Barth became a minister in Safenwil, a small mountain village in one of the cantons of Switzerland. This meant that he had to preach twice every Sunday. But how to do this? What message should he give? In one of his papers, a lecture given to a meeting of Reformed ministers, he later made the following biographical comment: "Our theology did not come into being as the result of any desire of ours to form a school or to devise a system; it arose simply out of what we felt to be the 'need and promise of Christian preaching' (the title of the paper, K.R.)..... For twelve years I was a minister as all of you are. I had my theology. It was not really mine, to be sure, but that of my forgotten teacher Willhelm Herrmann, grafted upon the principles which I had learned, less consciously, in my native home - the principles of those Reformed Churches which today I represent... Once in the ministry, I found myself growing away from these theological habits and being forced back at every point more and more upon the specific minister's problem, the sermon". (1)

The liberal theology of his teachers could not really help him. The tragedy was that they no longer knew of revelation. All they had was man's ideas about God. Since Schleiermacher - and all the great theologians of the 19th century had followed him in one way or another: Ritschl, Herrmann, Harnack, Troeltsch, etc. - revelation of God by God Himself has been exchanged for the discovery of God

by Man. This means that there is no message from God any more, but pious man speaks to himself about himself.

At the same time Barth discovered that Orthodoxy, the theology that preceded Liberalism, could not help him either. To be sure, it still knew something of revelation. But in Orthodoxy revelation was frozen into a system of truths about God. In Orthodoxy man possesses the truth of God. Especially the theory of verbal inspiration shows that the theology of Orthodoxy is a dead end too. Man has the revelation of God, can dispose of it and turn it into a system. But what then about the Reformers? Barth was convinced that their theology was much better and that we should listen carefully to what they have to say. Yet a return to the Reformers will not do either. Too much has happened since the days of the Reformation. In particular the rise of the historical critical method means that we have to look for new ways and have to rethink the whole doctrine of revelation. And then there is only one good starting point: revelation is always revelation of God by God Himself. Revelation is not a human, but only a divine possibility. God is both the subject and the object of revelation. Even though revelation comes to us in the words of men, it is not these men who are the revealers, but God Himself reveals Himself through these men.

From this starting point Barth developed his whole theology, setting out with the distinction of the threefold Word of God, namely, the Word of God as revealed, as written and as proclaimed. (2) The basic and primary form of the Word of God to men is Jesus Christ Himself. In the strictest sense of the word He is the Word of God. The second form of the Word of God is Holy Scripture. It is the witness of Prophets and apostles to the primary word in Jesus Christ. The third form is the proclamation of the Word of God by the church in its preaching and in the sacraments. Although these three forms of the Word of God are not simply identical, they are clearly inter-related, and in all three we have to do with the same Word of God, namely, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. (3)

In this first paper we shall deal with the first form of the Word of God: Jesus Christ, and we start with:

The Centrality of Christology.

In his introduction to Barth's theology Herbert Hartwell naturally includes a chapter on Jesus Christ. He gives it the following heading: "Jesus Christ, the key to the understanding of God, the Universe and Man". (4) This is

certainly no exaggeration. For Barth Jesus Christ is the point of departure for every theological proposition. Dealing with the 'mystery' of revelation Barth writes: "A church dogmatics must, of course, be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with Jesus Christ. If dogmatics cannot regard itself and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christology, it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as church dogmatics." (5)

According to Barth Jesus Christ is the beginning of all God's ways and works. In this respect Barth's supralapsarianism is a purified one, (6) but his whole approach is clearly recognizable as being of a supralapsarian nature. Everything starts with God's eternal election of the God-man Jesus Christ. Barth starts his doctrine of election with these words: "The election of grace is the eternal beginning of all the ways and works of God in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own glory" (7). Hence everything else must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ. This is true of the doctrine of creation (Church Dogmatics III,1), of anthropology (III,2), of providence (III,3), of election (II,2) and also of the doctrine of God Himself (II,1). It is therefore not surprising that at times Barth has been accused of 'Christomonism'. His whole eleven volume Church Dogmatics is one long explanation and unfolding of this one name: Jesus Christ.

The Person of Jesus Christ

Who is Jesus Christ for Barth? When we first deal with this question under the heading 'The Person of Christ', we seem to go straight against his own views. For in the introduction of his doctrine of reconciliation he has explicitly stated that the person and work of Christ can never be separated. "In the New Testament are many christological statements both direct and indirect. But where do we find a special Christology? - a Christ in Himself, abstracted from what He is amongst the men of Israel and His disciples and the world, from what He is on their behalf? Does He ever exist except in this relationship?" (8) I must say that I fundamentally agree with Barth. The person and the work of Christ are essentially inseparable. (9) Yet, for practical purposes we may distinguish them as two different aspects of the same 'reality'. In a way Barth himself has done the same when in Church Dogmatics 1, 2 he deals at length

with the question who Jesus, the Word of God, is (although, admittedly, even then he never separates the person of Jesus from being the revelation of God).

As to the view of the person of Jesus Barth stays within the framework of orthodox theology. Without any hesitation he accepts the Christology of the Early Church. "The central statement of the Christology of the Early Church is that God becomes one with man: Jesus Christ 'very God and very man'". (10) The last words are from the famous statement of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) about the two natures of Christ. Barth fully accepts this statement and rejects the charge of intellectualism that has been brought against it by such scholars as Herder and Harnack. In speaking of the two natures, of the vere Deus and the vere homo, in the one Person of Jesus Christ, the Council did not intend to solve the mystery of revelation, but rather it perceived and respected this mystery. (11)

Barth then goes on to give his own view in a profound and penetrating exegesis of John 1:14 - 'Ho Logos sarx egeneto' - The Word became flesh.

(1) First of all this phrase says that Jesus is very God. "Ho Logos, the 'Word', spoken of in John 1:14, is the divine, creative, reconciling, redeeming word which participates without restriction in the divine nature and existence, the eternal Son of God." (12) In his further exposition of the phrase Barth points to the following elements. (a) The Word is the subject of the becoming. Nothing befalls Him, but the incarnation is his own act. (b) This becoming took place in the divine freedom of the Word. It does not rest upon any necessity in the divine nature, but God did it in sovereign freedom. (c) Even in the state of becoming or of having become, the Word is still the free and sovereign Word of God. On the basis of these three statements Barth defends the title 'theotokos' (Mother of God), given to Mary by the Council of Ephesus (431) and reaffirmed by Chalcedon (451). This has nothing to do with Roman Catholic Mariology and the elevation of Mary in this theology, but it is a christological statement. "The New Testament, like the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, takes a christological and only a christological interest in Mary." (13)

(2) Jesus is very man. Very God is not the only thing to be said here (although it is the primary thing). We have to add immediately: 'very man', for the Word became 'flesh', i.e., truly man. "He became man, true and real man, participating in the same human essence and existence, the same

human nature and form, the same historicity that we have" (14). But at the same time we must add: 'without sin'. Being the Word of God in the flesh excludes sin. "In it God Himself is the Subject. How can God sin, deny Himself to Himself, be against Himself as God, want to be a god and so fall away from Himself in the way in which our sin is against Him, in which it happens from the very first and continually in the event of our existence" (15). However, we have to understand this sinlessness properly. It is not a static state of affairs, a static idea of human excellencies of character, virtue or good works, but rather it is a dynamic relationship to God. "Unlike Adam, this second Adam does not wish to be as God" (16). He is obedient, even to the extent that He is willing to be the second Adam. "In Adam's nature He acknowledges before God an Adamic being, the state and position of fallen man, and bears the wrath of God which must fall upon this man, not as a fate but as a righteous necessary wrath. He does not avoid the burden of this state and position but takes the conditions and consequences upon Himself" (17).

(3) "The Word became flesh". In the third place we must stress the word 'became'. This does not mean that the Logos changes into a man and ceases to be what He is in Himself. Neither does it mean a third kind of being, midway between God and man. No, He takes a human nature upon Himself in addition to a divine nature. Barth even defends such abstract terms as 'anhypostatos' and 'enhypostatos' (18). There can be no doubt that in all this Barth is fully in agreement with the christology of the Early Church. In fact, due to Barth there arose a revival of interest in and acceptance of an ancient christology in many circles which for a long time had been very critical or even negative. (In passing I must add that unfortunately in the years after the Second World War this interest has disappeared and in many circles a liberal or semi-liberal christology has taken over again.)

In accordance with this is also Barth's defense of the Virgin Birth. All of the older liberals had rejected this doctrine as a myth that had been added to the nativity stories to embellish them. Also some more conservative scholars, who did accept the christology of Chalcedon, nevertheless rejected the Virgin Birth. I am thinking here, for instance, of Emil Brunner. Barth, however, defends it. Why? The reason is not that it is mentioned in the Bible. As we shall see later on, Barth also accepts the critical approach to Scripture. For that matter he could, at least in theory, have gone along with Brunner. The reason why Barth accepts it is that in his opinion it is in conformity with the whole New Testament's view of the Incarnation. Barth himself finds it the sign,

the supreme sign of the mystery of the incarnation. On purpose he uses the word 'sign' and emphatically adds that the meaning of the Virgin Birth is noetic and not ontic. The miracle of the Virgin Birth does not 'explain' or make the Incarnation 'possible'. In that case it would belong to the very essence of the Incarnation. Its meaning is noetic, it is in the nature of a sign that teaches us two things in particular. (a) It makes evident that the mystery of the Incarnation, namely, the vere Deus and the vere homo in one person, cannot be understood intellectually but only spiritually. (b) It makes evident that God alone is the author of the new creation of the God-man Jesus Christ. (19) There is no place for any form of synergism here, for the active factor in every birth (the male partner) is excluded.

Even though we are grateful for Barth's defence of the Virgin Birth, we believe that the contrast noetic-ontic is incorrect. According to the New Testament there definitely is an ontic aspect to the Virgin Birth, for this birth was the way in which God's Son was born as a sinless man. I do not say that this was the only way. This we do not know. We have no right to limit God's possibilities. But the New Testament makes it quite clear that this was the way in which God has done it and that there is an inseparable connection between this miraculous birth and Jesus' sinlessness. The angel Gabriel says to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God". Very significant is the word 'therefore', indicating an inferential, if not instrumental connection.

The Work of Christ

When we now turn to the Work of Christ, we are not really dealing with a different subject-matter. Barth is, of course, right when he says that the person and the work of Christ cannot be separated. This person does this work; conversely, this work is done by this person. Therefore every time Barth deals with the person of Jesus Christ he also deals with his work.

When one reads the Church Dogmatics, one discovers that Barth actually deals twice with the work of Christ. In CD I he deals with it under the heading of revelation. In CD IV he discusses it under the heading of reconciliation. For Barth, however, there is no contrast between the two different sides of the one coin. He writes: "The work of the Son or Word is the presence and manifestation of God, which we can only designate revelation. The word recon-

conciliation is another word for the same thing. So far as God's revelation as such achieves, what only God can achieve, namely, the restoration of man's communion with God... so far as, in the fact of revelation, God's enemies are already his friends, revelation itself is reconciliation. Just as on the contrary reconciliation, the restoration of that communion, the mercy of God triumphant in wrath over wrath, can only take the form of the mystery, which we actually designate revelation" (20). Unfortunately we cannot deal with both aspects and in this one paper therefore we shall concentrate on the work of reconciliation.

Barth's doctrine of reconciliation is rather difficult. The reason lies not only in the fact that time and again he takes a new road, but it is also due to the fact that his doctrine of reconciliation comprises nearly all the other chapters of dogmatics (with the exception of the doctrine of creation and the eschatology). Thus it includes the christology, the hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), the soteriology (the work of the Spirit in the renewal of man) and the ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). In the summary that precedes his treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation Barth writes: "The content of the doctrine of reconciliation is the knowledge of Jesus Christ who is (1) very God, that is, the God who humbles Himself, and therefore the reconciling God, (2) very man, that is, man exalted and therefore witness of our atonement.

This threefold knowledge of Jesus Christ includes (a) the knowledge of the sin of man: (1) his pride, (2) his sloth and (3) his falsehood - (b) the knowledge of the event in which reconciliation is made: (1) his justification, (2) his sanctification and (3) his calling - (c) the knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit in (1) the gathering, (2) the upbuilding and (3) the sending of the community, and (d) of the being of Christians in Jesus Christ (1) in faith, (2) in love and (3) in hope (21). It will be obvious that in this paper we can only deal briefly with some of the lines of this complex doctrine.

The first thing Barth says is that reconciliation is a free act of God, (22) in which He makes a completely new start. How we know this? We can deduce it only from this act itself. It is impossible for us to deduce it from anything else. All we can say is: God has done it in Jesus Christ.

In the second place Barth emphasizes that God has done it. It is God's triumph in the antithesis, the opposition of man to Himself. "It is the lordship of his goodness in

medio animicorum - original, unilateral, glorious and truly divine - in which He acts quite alone, doing miracle after miracle" (23). In reconciliation God Himself crosses the frontier to man.

But does this mean that there is no room left to speak about man? Barth's answer is (and this is the third point he makes): we certainly must also speak about man. But not in the sense of man being a partner with God in the act of reconciliation. Man has a different place. We can only speak about him as the object and result of God's act of reconciliation, as the man who has been reconciled to God. Emphatically Barth says that this is the only way in which we may speak about man. We may no longer speak about him as the unreconciled man. For if God has reconciled man to Himself, then man is reconciled. Henceforth we may understand man only in the light of Christ. Not only the believing man, but all men. "In the atonement it is a matter of God and His being and activity for us and to us. And that means an alteration of the human situation, the result of which is an altered being of man, and not only of the Christian but of man in general, at every point we have to think and say it of his being as man reconciled in Jesus Christ (24). But does this mean that there is no difference between the believer and the unbeliever? Barth believes there are two points of difference. (a) The believer not only knows and experiences it, but it also becomes visible in his life. "To the Christian it is a matter of experience and knowledge. He knows about Jesus Christ, and the reconciliation of the world to God made in Him, and therefore the new being of man in Him". And: "The being of man reconciled with God in Jesus Christ is reflected in the existence of the Christian. That is something we cannot say of others" (25).

The nature of reconciliation

How does the reconciliation of man to God take place in Jesus Christ? Especially here we see that Barth takes new roads. Traditional orthodox theology usually showed the following pattern (26). First it offered a special doctrine of the person of Christ. Then there followed a discussion of his work, under the threefold heading of the munus triplex (threefold office): as prophet, as priest and as a king. To this was usually added a special doctrine of the two 'states' of Christ, his humiliation and exaltation.

Barth rearranges this system completely. He does maintain all the various aspects, but places them in a quite different order and inter-relationship. He divides the

doctrine of reconciliation into three main aspects. (1) First we must say that Jesus Christ is very God. In terms of reconciliation this means: He is the God who humbles Himself, the Lord who becomes a servant and therefore He is the reconciling God. Under this same heading Barth then discusses the priestly office and the state of humiliation. (2) In the second place we must say that Jesus Christ is very man. In terms of reconciliation this means that man is exalted: the servant becomes Lord. Under this heading Barth then discusses the kingly office and the state of exaltation. At first glance all this may not seem to be so very different from the traditional doctrine. But this is perhaps due to the fact that we are, almost naturally, inclined to assume that these two aspects follow each other. This, however, is expressly rejected by Barth. These two aspects are not successive, but coincide. The humiliation of God at the same time involves the exaltation of man! "As in Him God became like man, so too in Him man has become like God. As in Him God was bound, so too in Him man is made free. As in Him the Lord became a servant, so too in Him the servant has become a Lord. That is the atonement made in Jesus Christ in its second aspect. In Him humanity is exalted humanity, just as Godhead is humiliated Godhead. And humanity is exalted in Him by the humiliation of Godhead" (27). (3) But there is still a third aspect. Barth begins by admitting that actually nothing new can be added to the act of reconciliation. In the first two aspects everything has already been said. "Everything that can be said materially concerning Jesus Christ and the atonement made in Him has been said exhaustively in the twofold fact ... that He is very God and very man, i.e., the Lord who became a servant and the servant who became Lord, the reconciling God and reconciled man" (28). And yet there is still a third aspect in which the unity and completeness of this history is viewed. Jesus Christ, the God-man, is Himself also the revelation of this reconciliation. Here we get the third office, namely, the prophetic office, which does not add anything to the other two offices, but is their revelation.

It is evident that in this new structure of Christ's work, in particular in the coincidence of the two states, all emphasis is put on the being of Christ. Barth himself says: "Jesus Christ is not what He is - very God, very man, very God-man - in order as such to mean and do and accomplish something else which is atonement. But his being as God and man and God-man consists in the completed act of the reconciliation of man with God" (29). To be true, this statement is immediately preceded by the words: "We hasten to explain that the being of Jesus Christ, the unity of being of the living God and this living man,

takes place in the event of the concrete existence of this man. It is a being, but a being in a history", but it cannot be denied that the emphasis is on the very fact of his being God and man in one. This very combination means humiliation and exaltation at the same time and in this twofold fact we find the very heart of the atonement (30).

Short evaluation

It cannot be denied that this is a grandiose conception. It offers an intricate, but also comprehensive doctrine of Jesus Christ and his work, in which many genuinely scriptural aspects are found. Nevertheless we have to hold this doctrine in the light of God's Word (as a matter of fact Barth would be the first one to agree with this!) and ask whether it is fully in agreement with the teaching of Scripture. On the basis of my own understanding of the Bible I should like to make the following critical remarks.

1. The question may be asked whether Barth, with his strong emphasis on God Himself as the subject of reconciliation and with his peculiar interpretation of God as humiliating Himself, does not run the risk of falling into the old error of Theopaschitism. This, in fact, is the criticism G C Berkouwer levels against Barth's doctrine of reconciliation. "When Barth speaks of the suffering of God and even of an 'obedience of God', and this not as a bold manner of speaking but as an essential element in the being of God, he exceeds the boundaries of the revelation which we have in Christ To conclude to a tension and an obedience in God Himself, to an 'above' and a 'below' in Him, can only be characterized as speculation" (31). The Christian church has always avoided this danger by speaking emphatically of the Son in his human nature. The contrast is not between Father and Son as such, in other words, it is not an inter-trinitarian contrast or tension, but the Son in his human form subjects Himself to the Father. This also explains such words as: "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt 26:39) and even the most infathomable of all Jesus' words: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

2. My second point of criticism is Barth's objectivism. The reconciliation of man to God in Jesus Christ applies to all people, whether they believe in Jesus or not. The believers know it, the unbelievers do not know it; yet it is true of the unbelievers too. Man as such, every man, is now reconciled to God. All this is connected with Barth's supralapsarianism, which we mentioned before. In his doctrine of divine election Barth writes: "In Jesus Christ God in his free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of

man with all its consequences and elects man to participate in his own glory" (32). Here too Barth intentionally speaks of 'sinful man' in general. Since Jesus Christ is the beginning of all God's ways and works, a decision has been taken about all men. In the doctrine of reconciliation this line of thought is carried on consistently.

The question has often been asked whether this view, if we take it seriously, does not lead to universalism (32a). It is interesting to note that Barth himself rejects the conclusion of an 'apokatastasis ton panton', although he does not exclude it! In other words, he wants to keep the question open. The reason he mentions is that we have to respect the freedom of God (33). I am not so sure whether this argument is conclusive. Of course, we want to maintain, just as much as Barth, the divine freedom or the freedom of the divine grace. But we may not ignore the clear teaching of Scripture itself, which speaks of a final and definite judgment and of the condemnation of all those who have rejected the offer of God's grace in Jesus Christ. One could perhaps put it this way: Scripture takes man in his unbelief more 'seriously' than Barth does.

All this is confirmed by Barth's view of preaching. Within the whole context of his dogmatics preaching becomes the proclamation of a changed state of affairs. In Jesus Christ the real decision about man has fallen. Therefore, Jesus Christ is not simply one alternative or chance which is offered to man... He is not put there for man's choice, à prendre ou à laisser". And then Barth goes on to say that in the decision which has taken place in Jesus Christ, "unbelief has become an objective, real and ontological impossibility and faith an objective, real and ontological necessity for all men and for every man" (34). This does not mean that Barth denies the existence of unbelief. How could he? But he does deny its decisive character, for this is no longer possible after the cross and the resurrection. We believe that the Bible gives us a different picture. Proclamation is indeed the offer of grace to all, but this offer has to be accepted in faith and it can be rejected in unbelief. Rightly Berkouwer says: "The New Testament speaks of belief and unbelief as a choice, a serious, if you will a decisive choice. Whatever the judgment as to the dogmatic place of belief and unbelief, we will in any case have to take as our point of departure the seriousness with which the New Testament takes the human response to the proclamation" (35).

3. The third point I wish to mention is the 'one-dimensional' character of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation. According to Barth there is only one movement, namely, from

God to man. Barth bases this in particular on his exegesis of John 3:16 and II Cor 5:19 (where the verb 'katalassein' is used) (36). Of course, there can be no doubt that these texts put all the emphasis on the fact that God is the source of reconciliation. We too believe that God is the primary subject. But is there not more in the Bible? We believe that the Bible still knows a second aspect, namely, Jesus acting as our representative before and over against God. We are thinking of the verb 'hilaskesthai' (to expiate, to propitiate), of the wrath of God, of paying ransom, etc. The question may even be asked whether the same idea is not present in II Cor 5:19, where the apostle says that God was reconciling the world 'to Himself'. Related to all this is also the fact that Barth too quickly does away with the idea of 'satisfaction' and also with that of 'punishment'. Of the former he says that the thought of Jesus 'satisfying' or 'offering satisfaction' to the wrath of God is quite foreign to the New Testament. Concerning the latter he says that it does occur in Is 53, but not in the New Testament. I wonder whether this can be maintained in the light of the frequent use Jesus and his apostles make of this central chapter of the Old Testament. Take only what Peter writes in I Peter 2:24: "He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... By his wounds you have been healed".

4. Finally I want to draw your attention to the way Barth sets the two 'states' alongside each other. I believe that this is a theological construction, which does not do justice to the historical aspect in the work of Christ. The question may even be asked whether in this way the Incarnation itself becomes the focal point of the whole christology, at the expense of cross and resurrection (37). Is in Barth's view the Incarnation not the really crucial thing in reconciliation by which the gulf between God and man is bridged? Of course, Barth does not deny the reality of cross and resurrection. But in a sense they are relegated to a secondary place. The cross is only the consequence of the Incarnation, showing us the depth of the humiliation of God, while the resurrection is the manifestation and revelation of the exaltation of man that has taken place. The resurrection is no longer a 'turning point', for there is no real historical progression.

In the Bible we find a different picture. The New Testament places the full emphasis on the temporal aspect involved in the progression from humiliation to exaltation (38). Take only what Paul writes in Phil 2: "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name..." (verses 9ff). The word 'therefore' is very significant here, since it shows that there is an historical progression, and in this progression both cross and resurrection are indispensable and irreplaceable. The

cross is the place of the atonement. Becoming obedient unto death. Jesus brings the supreme sacrifice of his life. Hence also that Paul can summarize his whole preaching in the expression: "the word of the cross" (I Cor 1:18; cf 2:2). The resurrection is more than the unveiling, the revelation of the meaning of the cross and of the Incarnation. It is the great reversal, the great new act of God, raising his Son to eternal life and thus bringing Him to glory.

Unfortunately we have to stop here. Much more could and should be said to do justice to Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and to his whole christology. Moreover, we should not only be critical about it, but we should also appreciate the positive aspects. In the closing chapter of his book on the theology of Karl Barth, Robert W Jenson quotes a few words from the farewell sermon of Eduard Thurneysen, Barth's life-long friend, in the Minster of Basel on June 21, 1959. They are: "And God be praised, today a theology has again been given us which 'teaches rightly of grace'". Jenson himself takes these words over and says: "Here indeed is a theology which teaches of grace. And also those of us for whom Barth has not become the only master and teacher must join in thanking for this gift. There is too much theology which does not teach grace to do otherwise" (39). Indeed, there is too much theology that does not teach grace. There is too much preaching that is not born out of a theology of grace. For this reason alone the church will ever remain thankful to God for his gift of Barth. For whatever one may say in criticism of his theology (and much can be said here), one thing is certain: his theology is a theology of divine grace. For this reason Berkouwer called his book on Barth's theology 'The Triumph of Grace'. Barth himself was not entirely satisfied with this characterization of his theology and would rather summarize it in the well-known words of J C Blumhardt: "Jesus ist Sieger" (Jesus is victor). For "we are concerned with the living person of Jesus Christ. Strictly, it is not grace, but He Himself as its Bearer, Bringer and Revealer, who is the Victory, the light which is not overwhelmed by darkness, but before which darkness must yield until it is itself overwhelmed" (40). This is not only Barth's own summary of his theology, but it is also his confession, and we gladly join him in it.

Notes

- (1) Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man. 1957, 100.
- (2) Church Dogmatics (CD) I/1, 135ff. cf also J K S Reid, The Authority of Scripture, 1957, 194ff.
- (3) cf C D I/1, 136 and I,2,744.
- (4) Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction. 1964, 16.
- (5) C D I/2, 123. cf Dogmatics in Outline, 1958, 39, 65ff. On p 66 Barth says that Christology is the touch stone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense, the touch stone of all theology. "Tell me how it stands with your Christology, and I shall tell you who you are".
- (6) Cf C D II/2, 140ff.
- (7) C D II/2, 94.
- (8) C D IV/1, 124.
- (9) Cf also G C Berkouwer, The Person of Christ, Chapter 1.
- (10) C D I/2, 125.
- (11) Ibid, 129.
- (12) Ibid, 132.
- (13) Ibid, 139.
- (14) Ibid, 147.
- (15) Ibid, 155.
- (16) Ibid, 157.
- (17) Ibid, 157.
- (18) Ibid, 163. Both terms belong together. The 'anhypos-tatos' stresses the negative aspect. The human nature has no separate 'hypostasis' (person) in the abstract. The 'enhypostatos' emphasizes the positive aspect: from its very beginning the human nature has its 'hypos-tasis' in the 'hypostasis' of the logos.
- (19) Hartwell, op cit, 80.
- (20) C D I/, 468.
- (21) C D IV/1, 79.
- (22) Ibid, 79.
- (23) Ibid, 82.
- (24) Ibid, 91.
- (25) Ibid, 92, 93.
- (26) Ibid, 123.
- (27) C D IV/1, 131.
- (28) Ibid, 136.
- (29) Ibid, 126/7.
- (30) Cf Robert W Jenson, Alpha and Omega, A Study in the the Theology of Karl Barth, 1963, 124ff.
- (31) C C Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, 1956, 304.
- (32) C D II/2, 94.
- (32a) Cf Colin Brown, Karl Barth and the Christian Message, 1967, 130 ff.

- (33) C D II/2, 417.
- (34) C D IV/1, 747.
- (35) G C Berkouwer, op cit, 270.
- (36) C D IV/1, 74.
- (37) Cf Fred H Klooster, The Significance of Barth's Theology, 1961, 95.
- (38) G C Berkouwer, op cit, 315.
- (39) R W Jenson, op cit, 146.
- (40) C D IV/3, 173.

II BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Barth has devoted a great deal of his 'theological life' to a re-thinking of the doctrine of Scripture. When he and his friend Thurneysen, in their first parish, discovered that the theology they had learned in the universities could not really help them in the performance of their main ministerial task, namely, preaching the Word of God, they began to study the Bible anew. Later on Thurneysen wrote about these early years of their ministry: "We read the Bible in a new way. We read it more respectfully, more as an eternal Word addressed to us and to our time. We criticised it less. We read it with the eyes of shipwrecked people, whose all had gone overboard. The Bible appeared in a new light. Beyond all interpretations, its genuine word began to speak again: the word of forgiveness, the Gospel of the coming Kingdom". (1) One of the results of this new study of the Bible was Barth's Commentary on Romans, which first appeared in 1919.

But not only the Content of the Bible had to be read in a new way, the doctrine of Scripture also had to be rethought. As we have seen in the previous paper, Barth discovered that both Liberalism and Orthodoxy fell short in their understanding of revelation. In both cases the corruption was such that a mere reconstruction on the old foundations would not do. The only cure for theology, and thus for the church and her proclamation, would be a complete and thorough rethinking of what divine revelation is.

To this task Barth has devoted many years. Throughout all his earlier works we see him struggling with his gigantic task. The maturest results of this 'rethinking' we find in the two parts of the first volume of his Church Dogmatics, entitled 'The Doctrine of the Word of God' and published respectively in 1932 and 1938. Naturally he deals here with all three forms of the Word of God: the revealed Word, the written Word and the preached Word. In this paper we shall concentrate on the second of these three forms: the written Word or Holy Scripture.

Beginning with faith

Barth takes his starting point in faith. We have to begin with accepting the Bible in faith. We have to listen obediently and submit ourselves to its message, which has

authority over us. Barth emphatically maintains that this is the only possibility, for there is no authority outside the Bible to which we can appeal in order to 'prove' the authority of the Bible. The Lordship of the Triune God proves itself to be a fact in our obedient listening to the Bible". (2)

If at this point Roman Catholic theology would say: 'But this is reasoning in a circle; you need the authority of the church to support your claim for the Bible'. Barth is not at all impressed. He rightly answers: If the Bible is the Word of God, then there is no higher authority and it will prove itself (3). And so in fact it does. Constantly it proves itself as the Word of God to its countless readers and listeners.

There can be no doubt that this starting point is fully scriptural. Indeed, the Bible never tries to 'prove' itself on a merely intellectual basis. It simply comes with its claim and the only attitude possible is that of submission, obedience, faith.

Scripture as witness

Coming to Barth's actual doctrine of Scripture we find that he divides it into two sections: (a) Scripture as the witness to divine revelation; and (b) Scripture as the Word of God. We shall first discuss the former of the two: Scripture as the witness to revelation.

The word 'witness' has been selected deliberately and very carefully. According to Barth it contains two valuable elements. First it contains an element of limitation "A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses. This corresponds with the facts upon which the truth of the whole proposition is based. In the Bible we meet with human words written in human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we hear of the Lordship of the Triune God. Therefore when we have to do with the Bible, we have to do primarily with this means, with these words, with the witness, which as such is not itself revelation, but only - and this is the limitation - the witness to it" (4).

But this aspect of limitation is not the only one. It is not even the primary one. There is also a second, a positive element. So Barth continues: "In this limitation the Bible is not distinguished from revelation. It is simply revelation as it comes to us, mediating and therefore accommodating itself to us - to us who are not ourselves prophets and apostles, and therefore not the immediate and

direct recipients of the one revelation, witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet it is for us revelation by means of the words of the prophets and apostles written in the Bible, in which they are still alive for us as the immediate and direct recipients of revelation, and by which they speak to us. A real witness is not identical with that to which it witnesses, but it sets it before us. again this corresponds with the facts on which the whole proposition is founded. If we have really listened to the biblical words in all their humanity, if we have accepted them as witness, we have obviously not only heard of the lordship of the Triune God, but by this means it has become for us an actual presence and event" (5).

So the word 'witness' in this context has a double function. On the one hand, it indicates distinctness. The witness to revelation is not simply identical with the revelation itself. On the other hand, the word also denotes unity. The revelation cannot be heard or apprehended apart from the witness.

But why does Barth emphasize this so strongly? The answer is to be found in his concept of revelation. Unfortunately I cannot deal with it at great length. I have to restrict myself to some of the main aspects. In Barth's opinion revelation is always an event. It is never static, but always dynamic. It is always God's own act. God Himself is always the subject, just as He is always the object: He reveals Himself. For this reason it is not possible for the Bible writers to reveal God. They can only point to the divine act of revelation. They are all to be compared with the figure of John the Baptist on Grünewald's famous picture on the altar at Isenheim. There we see John pointing with a prodigious index finger to the One on the cross (6): 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world'. That's all that the witness can do. Only 'where and when it pleases God' (ubi et quando visum est Deo) to use this witness, the witness and the event become one. Then real revelation by God Himself, through the human witness, takes place. In other words, in itself there is no direct identity between the witness and revelation. We can speak only of an indirect identity. We always have to distinguish between 'Deus dixit' and, for instance, 'Paulus dixit'. (7) Yet, in the event of revelation, the two become one.

When we try to evaluate this view, we must begin with the observation that the word 'Witness' is a genuinely biblical term, which plays an important part, in particular in the New Testament. Jesus Himself calls his apostles his witnesses (Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8). The apostles themselves again and again appear to the witness-character of their office. They also include the Old Testament prophets, for

these men too were witnesses of Christ, pointing forward to his coming. But does this word, as used in the New Testament, also have the aspect of limitation? Of course, we cannot discuss the whole setting of the word in the New Testament, (8) but as far as we can see there is no ground in the New Testament for introducing this element of limitation in Barth's fashion. On the contrary, in the New Testament the emphasis is always on the fact that these men speak the truth, God's truth; they are reliable, for they speak what they have heard and seen: what they say is the Word of God. On the ground of careful analysis of the term 'witness' throughout the whole New Testament R Schippers, in his doctoral thesis on this subject, comes to the following conclusion: "In Scripture the witness is the rendering of the facts, under the pressure of the consciousness that the course of justice shall be dominated by the rendering. Therefore the witness is eyewitness and earwitness. The witnesses do not bring their faults, their follies, their views, their ideas, but the record of what they heard and saw. The witness fully disappears behind the story he records. Over against the witness all reservation falls away. To violate the legitimate witness is to violate the history. There is a historical necessity for the believers to live with this witness, but there is nothing in it, which has to be seen as limitation". (9)

In this connection I should like to mention three important texts, which all have a bearing on our subject. Luke 10:16 - "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." Matt 10:40 - "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me." John 20:20 - "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you". In these words there is no trace whatever of limitation. On the contrary, Jesus identifies Himself completely with his apostles, his witnesses, and unequivocally declares that their witness, their message, is his message. I fully agree with H N Ridderbos, when he says: "The witness is the man, who, appointed by Christ and himself belonging to the history of salvation, in the great lawsuit vouches on behalf of God and Christ for the truth and reality of what was said and happened, and who is especially authorized and equipped for this task". (10)

We should also note the close connection between the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Very important is what we read in Acts 5:32 - "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him". We also read in the report of the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15:28: "For it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us". Again there is no trace of limitation. Rightly F F Bruce comments on the first passage as follows: "Here we mark again the apostolic community's consciousness

of being possessed and indwelt by the Spirit to such a degree that they were his organs of expression". (11) We believe that the word identification is not too strong here. And it should not be taken merely in the sense of an 'indirect identity, as Barth wants us to do, but it is a 'direct' identification. Naturally, this does not at all mean that the Holy Spirit is 'locked up' in human words. We fully maintain that He is the living Spirit of God, yes, the living God Himself. In the identification the initiative is fully his. We can never possess God's Word in the sense of controlling it. It is and remains God's Word. But at the same time we wish to maintain: it is God's Word.

Human and fallible witnesses?

Our next question is: What are the implications of Barth's emphasis on the witness-character of the Bible? As we saw before, Barth distinguishes between the 'Deus dixit' and the 'Paulus dixit'.

The first thing, therefore, we must say is that the Bible is fully human. (12) In itself it is no more than an historical document for the history of Israel and the later Jewish-Christian community that evolved from Israel. In itself it is not divine at all. Precisely here do we find the great, essential difference from the person of Jesus Christ. In Him there is a personal union between the divine and the human nature. But in the case of the Bible writers there is no such unity. They were fully human and their product is fully human too.

Barth, however, takes yet another step. The Bible is not only human, but also fallible. (13) "The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word". (14) As evidence Barth mentions the following points: (1) the biblical world-view and the view of man, which are definitely not correct; (2) the writers' understanding of history, which is often faulty; (3) the overlappings and contradictions, even in the religious or theological content. From all this it becomes quite clear that Barth has no objections against 'higher criticism'. In fact, more than once he has openly and explicitly defended it. (15)

What shall we say of these implications of the witness-character of the Bible? It will be evident that we cannot and do not have any objections against his emphasis on the full humanity of Scripture. As a matter of fact, this has always been recognized by the great majority of conservative

scholars. The Holy Spirit definitely did not use the Bible writers as a kind of flute or, to use modern terminology, as a typewriter. In other words, we fully reject any mechanical conception of inspiration. Most conservative scholars would even go further and be willing to admit that this full humanity of the Bible also implies a kind of limitation. In his Homily on John 1:1 Augustine already said: "For to speak of the matter as it is, who is able? I venture to say, my brethren, perhaps not John himself spoke of the matter as it is, but even he only as he was able; for it was man that spoke of God, inspired indeed by God, but still man. Because he was inspired, he said something; if he had not been inspired, he would have said nothing; but because a man inspired, he spoke not the whole, but what a man could, he spoke (quod potuit homo dixit)". (16) In this same connection Calvin used to speak of the 'accomodatio Dei' (divine accommodation). In one of his writings he says: "Let us therefore remember that our Lord has not spoken according to His nature. For if He would speak His (own) language, would He be understood by mortal creatures? Alas, no. But how has He spoken to us in Holy Scripture? He has stammered ... So then God has as it were resigned: for as much as we would not comprehend what He would say, if He did not condescend to us. There you have the reason why in Holy Scripture one sees Him like a nurse rather than that one hears of His high and infinite majesty". (17) Conservative theologians always saw a parallel here with Christology. As the Logos became 'sarx', real flesh, in the sense of Adam's weakened nature after the Fall (but without sin), so also the Bible is really and fully human.

But does this also imply fallibility? Conservative theology has always rejected this and in my opinion rightly so. Such a rejection is already implied in the parallel with the Christology, a parallel which is also accepted by Barth. Herman Bavinck, for instance, writes in his Reformed Dogmatics: "Also in Holy Scripture we have to acknowledge the weak and humble, the form of a servant. But - like human nature in Christ, however weak and humble, was free from all sin, so also Holy Scripture is conceived without any stain (sine labe concepta)". (18)

Personally I do not find Barth's proof for the fallibility of Scripture very strong or convincing.

(1) The biblical view of world and of man. It is, of course, an undeniable fact that in the Bible we do find the old, ancient world-view (tripartition of the universe, the 'four corners of the earth', etc). The same is true of the view of man, as far as his biological and psychological structure is concerned. When the kidneys, and also the bowels, are seen as the seat of deepest emotions and sympathies,

and the heart as the seat of the mind, we are confronted with the common ancient-semitic view. But - does this mean fallibility? Does this not depend on the question whether the Bible wants to teach such matters as the divine truth? It is quite evident, however, that this is not at all the intention of the Bible. This world-view (and the same holds true of the primitive anthropology) is only the form in which the message is conveyed to the people of those days. Even the Lord Himself makes use of it in the second commandment! (19) But in no instance it is part of the message itself,

(2) The writers' understanding of history. Again we must admit that in many respects their understanding of history was quite different from that of modern historians. To bring this out Barth introduces the concept of saga. This is definitely not an easy concept to define. It can readily be misunderstood and easily be confused with another concept that is quite popular in modern theology, namely myth. Barth, however, rejects the idea of myth. A myth has nothing to do with an historical event. It is nothing else than a certain truth, philosophical or theological, which is clothed in the garment of an historical event that in reality never took place. Take, for instance, present-day existential interpretations of the story of the Fall. In reality, of course, there was never a Fall. From his (evolutionary) beginnings man has always been a sinner. It belongs to his very essence and existence, although God does not want man to be such. To express this the Bible tells us the story of the Fall. This is definitely not Barth's conception. Saga, in Barth's theology, is quite different. It does deal with history. It does refer us to a real historical event. But - and this is the reason why the form of the saga is used - there are some events that cannot adequately be expressed in human words and pictures. This is especially true of many events narrated in the Bible. In many of these biblical events we have to do with God's acts, which naturally cannot be expressed in ordinary human words. Some events are even purely divine, such as the creation of the world and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Summarizing his own view Barth says: "To put it cautiously, the Bible contains very little pure 'history' and little pure saga, and little of both that can be unequivocally recognized as the one or the other. The two elements are usually mixed. In the Bible we usually have to reckon with both history and saga" (20)

There is no doubt that this concept of saga is much better and, for conservative scholars, much more acceptable than Bultmann's conception of myth. In Barth's saga we see a clear awareness of the historical nature of the Christian faith, and a serious attempt is made to safeguard the reality

of the history of salvation. One could apply it, for example, to the story of the Fall, explain its individual features as 'sagenhaft' (legendary) and yet maintain the full historicity of the Fall (which, by the way, Barth himself does not seem to do). (21) Yet there are some important aspects, which seem to exclude the application of the term 'saga' to the biblical history. First, the Bible itself nowhere gives the impression of speaking in the form of saga or legend. (22) Admittedly, it often describes matters in a way different from what we in our day are used to, but this fact does not yet give us the right to speak of saga. Further, the word 'saga' is too tainted. It normally carries the connotation of being poetical and therefore not 'real'. Finally, even when used in bonam partem the term seems to derogate from the truly historical nature of biblical history. One may ask here: What is left of the fact itself when its description is just a matter of poetry? Is it not like a skeleton without flesh? But who would ever recognize the person to whom the skeleton belonged? In other words, does a fact not cease to be this particular fact when its accidentia are taken away? Is such a fact not a pure abstraction?

We do not deny, of course, that in the Bible we find a special kind of historiography. The Bible is never interested in 'bare' facts, but always gives us facts plus interpretation. It always sets facts in a framework of interpretation. This explains, for instance, many of the differences between Samuel and Kings, on the one hand, and Chronicles, on the other. The author of Chronicles approaches the material from a different point of view, namely, that of the priest. But all this has nothing to do with saga. Both authors give us the real facts with their accidentia. All that happens is that they place the facts in a special context and thus give them a special emphasis. One could call this a 'prophetic' historiography, but this qualification has nothing to do with fallibility.

(3) The overlappings and contradictions, also in the religious and theological contents. At this point Barth does not give specific examples. He only mentions in a very general way the relation between the Synoptics and John, between Paul and James. Personally we do not believe that it is correct to speak here of contradictions and overlappings. I would rather speak of different emphases, different approaches, different contexts, which, of course, is quite different from speaking of contradictions.

The Bible as the Word of God

Does the foregoing mean that Barth accepts dualism as the solution for the problem of Scripture? By no means. In fact, he utterly rejects all dualism. He knows too well that

it always leads to subjectivism. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him declare emphatically that we have no right to make any selection. If we want to hear God's Word we have to go to these texts. Here we hear the witnesses speak. We who come after them are bound to their words. "We are absolved from differentiating the Word of God in the Bible from other contents, infallible portions and expressions from the erroneous ones, the infallible from the fallible, and from imagining that by means of such discoveries we can create for ourselves encounters with the genuine Word of God in the Bible. If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words in the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their judaism, but adopted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when He wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible". (23)

In this connection Barth even speaks of the 'relative' rightness of the verbal inspiration theory. Yet this theory went too far when it assumed a direct identity between the texts and the Word of God. It simply identified the Word of God with the texts and the texts with the Word of God. As we saw before, Barth does not want to go further than an 'indirect' identity. Yet, even so, it is our task to knock at the door of the texts and wait. We have to listen to the witnesses and pray the Lord to speak to us through their witness. We have to rely on his promise that He will do so at his time. Then, and only then, there is a direct identity. Then, and only then, the Bible is the Word of God. Yes, Barth too wants to maintain the word 'is'. "We believe in and with the Church that Holy Scripture has ... priority over all other writings and authorities, even those of the Church. We believe in and with the Church that Holy Scripture as the original and legitimate witness of divine revelation is itself the Word of God." (24) But this 'has' and 'is' does not mean that man under any circumstances has God's revelation at his disposal. These words point to God's disposing, his action and his control. The Bible is the Word of God, so far as God lets it be his Word. It is the Word of God in the act of God making it his Word, or in the fact of becoming the Word of God. More than once Barth has used the illustration of the Pool of Bethesda. The water did not possess the healing power as an inherent quality, but it became effectively healing when it pleased God to send his angel to stir the water. In a word, the whole thing is a miracle. (25)

Inspiration

After all this it is not surprising to find that Barth has a different conception of inspiration. To him inspiration is one act of the Holy Spirit, taking place in two phases.

(a) There is his action upon the Bible writers: He inspired them in the writing down of their witness. (b) There is his action in the listeners or readers, who now hear the witness as the Word of God for them. I give two quotations, which make this quite clear. "The theopneustia is the act of revelation in which the prophets and apostles in their humanity became what they were, and in which alone in their humanity they can become to us what they are". (26) And: "The circle which led from the divine benefits to the Apostle instructed by the Spirit and authorized to speak by the Spirit now closes at the hearer of the Apostle, who again by the Spirit is enabled to receive as is necessary. The hearer, too, in his existence as such is part of the miracle which takes place at his point". (27)

In our opinion there is some confusion in Barth's thinking at this point. We also believe that the Bible speaks of a twofold action of the Spirit, but - it calls only the first one 'inspiration'. The term is reserved for the operation of the Spirit upon the writers, who had to pass on to others the revelation they had received from God. Only through this operation of the Spirit can their human word at the same time be the Word of God, and not simply a pious word of man about God. But according to the Bible this operation of the Spirit upon the original writers is a completed action. The second action, namely, that upon the later readers and listeners, which is equally necessary and which is also an action of the Spirit Himself, is never called 'inspiration'. The Bible uses a different term: illumination (photismos). This is the action of the same Spirit in the subject of the reader or listener, opening his blind eyes, quickening his cold, dead heart. Only through this action does the Word of God 'come home' to the sinner.

The fact that Barth combines the two actions into one is, of course, linked in with his conception of revelation. Revelation must always be an event. Therefore there cannot be a revelation that is completed with the inspiration of the original authors. Therefore the second phase must be part of the whole action. Without it there cannot be a revelation at all, but only a human, fallible witness.

God's sovereign freedom

What is the background of this whole conception? As far as we can see, it is Barth's conception of divine freedom. Time and again he emphatically states that God

is the free and sovereign One, who is free and sovereign in all his actions, particularly in the act of revelation. To say that one of the attributes of the Bible is its being the Word of God is to violate the Word of God, which is God Himself speaking, to violate the freedom and sovereignty of God.

God is free and sovereign. That means: man has no power or control over God's Word. Barth's great objection against the older Liberalism is that it had no idea of this freedom and sovereignty of God. It had no idea even of revelation at all. But Orthodoxy did not have the proper view either. It believed it 'had' the Word of God in the Bible and therefore had power over the Word of God. Only the Reformers really recognized God's freedom. They knew that revelation always remains God's own prerogative and that we can only receive his Word as a miracle of grace. It was the great tragedy of the following centuries that Protestant Orthodoxy forgot this great discovery of the Reformers and returned to the wrong views of the Early Church, with its mechanical conception of inspiration. (28)

We have no quarrel with Barth as to his statement that God is free and sovereign. This is a genuinely scriptural idea. One needs only to read the story of I Samuel 4. The Israelites, having been defeated by the Philistines, bring the ark of the Lord into the camp. They believe that through the ark they can force God to help them. He will have to defend and protect his own ark and in this way He will have to give them the victory. But God can never be coerced by man, not even by his own chosen people. God gives both Israel and the ark into the hands of the Philistines. Does this mean, however, that the ark is not really God's ark? Read chapter 5 and you see how the same God forces the Philistines, who believe that they have captured Israel's God, to let his ark go and send it back to Israel. When we apply this to the Bible, we can say that God does not allow us to misuse his Word by thinking that we have his revelation and can do with it whatever we like. Then the Bible becomes dead and powerless in our hands. And yet it is and remains his Word that never returns to Him empty (Is 55:11). Perhaps we could summarize it as follows. Barth's error is not that he over-emphasizes God's sovereignty, but it is rather the opposite. He does not emphasize it enough! God is so great that even when He gives his Word to us, it still is his Word. He remains sovereign also in and over his gifts.

The authority of the Bible

There is still one aspect I wish to mention: Barth's view of the authority of the Bible. Here we have a point on which we can wholeheartedly agree with him. He defends

the absolute authority of the Bible against two attacks. On the one hand, there is the Church of Rome, which by its view of the church derogates from the authority of the Bible. On the other hand there is Neo-Protestantism, which places man's authority (either through reason or experience or existential analysis) over against that of the Bible. Barth rightly maintains that, if the Bible is God's Word, there is but one correct attitude for man: one of complete submission. God speaks to us - we can only hear and obey.

Let us remember that this is also true of theologians and theological students. Perhaps it is more difficult for us than for any other category of believers. For us the Bible is also a tool, a kind of textbook, which becomes so familiar because we use it so often. There is the constant danger of forgetting that it is God's Word. For us, too, there is only one right attitude: 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears'. It is not we who have to speak first and put our ideas into and upon the Bible, but He has to speak and we can only listen, reverently, believingly, obediently.

Notes

- (1) Quoted by John McConnachie, The Barthian Theology and the Man of Today, 1933, 94.
- (2) C D I/2, 458.
- (3) In actual fact, of course, the Roman Catholic view is not an improvement on the Protestant 'logical circle'. The only thing that happens is that Rome replaces the circle (with its one centre: the testimony of the Bible itself) by an ellipse (with two foci: Bible and church). The circular reasoning as such remains. It is only more intricate, because there is a constant oscillating between the two foci!
- (4) C D I/2, 463.
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) C D I/1, 126.
- (7) C D I/1, 127.
- (8) See for a fuller discussion my book, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture, 1962, 33 ff.
- (9) R Schippers, Getuigen van Jezus Christus in het Nieuwe Testament, 1938, 202.
- (10) H N Ridderbos, Heilsgeschiedenis en Heilige Schrift, 1955, 119. E T The authority of the New Testament Scriptures, 1963, 64.
- (11) F F Bruce, The Book of Acts, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1956, 122.
- (12) C D I/2, 495 f.
- (13) C D I/2, 507.
- (14) C D I/2, 529.
- (15) Cf my book, 61 ff.
- (16) Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Augustine's Works, VII, 7.
- (17) Corpus Reformatorum, 26, c 387.
- (18) H Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Vol I, 406.
- (19) For the New Testament, cf Phil 2:10.
- (20) C D III/1, 82.
- (21) Cf C D IV/1, 508/9. Cf Also my book, 101 ff.
- (22) The latter term is used by Barth when historical persons are involved.
- (23) C D I/2, 531.
- (24) C D I/2, 502.
- (25) C D I/2, 528.
- (26) C D I/2, 508.
- (27) C D I/2, 516.
- (28) C D I/2, 522 ff.

III
BARTH'S VIEW OF PREACHING

In this paper we intend to deal with what Barth has called the third form of the Word of God, ie, the preaching of the Word, or the Word as proclaimed.

For Barth preaching has always been one of the central categories of his whole theology. As we already indicated in the first paper, Barth's theology was born out of the need of his ministry. We then quoted some biographical words from a lecture Barth gave in 1922. There is no need to repeat them. We only want to add that this origin of Barth's theology has always remained noticeable in all his theologizing. Rightly Walther Fürst wrote in the Festschrift, dedicated to Barth on the occasion of his seventieth birthday: "Indirectly his whole theological work is 'Predigtlehre' (Homiletics); what it wanted to be in its beginning, it has always remained and increasingly more become". (1) His Church Dogmatics starts with the statement: "Dogmatics is a theological discipline. But theology is a function of the Church". (2) The great task of the church is to confess God, which she does by speaking of God. But she should always be aware of what she is doing and therefore the church also has the task of criticizing and revising her own speaking of God. The criterion of this speaking of God is Jesus Christ, God in his gracious approach to men in revelation and reconciliation. Theology therefore asks three essential questions: Has Christian language its source in Jesus Christ? Does it lead to Him? Is it in conformity with Him? This results in the three main branches of theology. "Thus as biblical theology, theology is the question as to the foundation, as practical theology it is the question as to the aim, as dogmatic theology it is the question as to the content, of the language peculiar to the church". (3) As you see, all theology is ultimately concerned with the proclamation of the church.

What is proclamation?

But what is proclamation, according to Barth? He speaks extensively about this in C D I/1, 51 ff. He begins by saying that actually all man's speaking ought to be speaking about God. This was certainly true of man in his original state and will be true of man in the realm of glory. But we are fallen people. To be true, we are people met by mercy, but in this dispensation we remain people who again and again have to be met by mercy, also in the church. Our speaking, also

in the church, is not naturally and automatically speaking of God, but can only become such 'ubi et quando visum est Deo' (where and when it pleases God). But where and when this happens, it really is proclamation of the Word of God.

Barth then goes on to give the following definition of proclamation, under the sign of the 'ubi et quando': "Proclamation is human language in and through which God Himself speaks, like a king through the mouth of his herald, which moreover is meant to be heard and apprehended as language in and through which God Himself speaks, and so heard and apprehended in faith as the divine decision upon life and death, as the divine judgment and the divine acquittal, the eternal law and the eternal gospel both together". (4)

We want to draw your attention to four aspects.

(1) Proclamation is human language. There is nothing sacred about the language used by the church. She has no separate language all of her own. In C D IV/3 Barth comes back to this and states unequivocally: "Whatever the Christian community has to say, it can say only after wordly fashion, each term being wordly at root and each expression wordly in its original meaning". (5)

(2) But in and through this human language God Himself speaks. God is the actual subject of all real proclamation. The comparison with the herald makes this quite clear. When we hear the voice of the herald, the actual speaker is the king whose message the herald conveys.

(3) This message has to be heard in faith. This is the only way of hearing God's Word, otherwise we only hear a human opinion.

(4) The content is the divine decision upon life and death, the divine judgment and the divine acquittal, the eternal gospel both together. Real proclamation is not concerned with general truths, but it speaks God's truth about man and this is a message of life and death.

It is quite obvious that here we have a very high conception of proclamation. It is therefore not surprising at all that in this very context Barth himself quotes the well known statement of the Confessio Helvetica Posterior (the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566): "Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei" (the preaching of God's Word is God's Word). (6) He further points out that this proclamation of the Word of God cannot be limited by our intention to speak the Word of God. (7) As it is ultimately a matter of God's free grace, God may also use other language than

that of the sermon. "God may very suddenly be pleased to have Abraham blessed by Melchisedek, or Israel by Salaam, or to have him helped by Cyrus". (8) On the other hand, we should not only ask what God can do in his sovereign freedom, but also what is commanded us. And then it is clear that God has given to the church a very special commission to proclaim. The two main forms of this proclamation are: 1. preaching, and 2. the sacraments, the symbolical act which accompanies and confirms preaching, an act which aims to attest to the event of God's revelation, reconciliation and calling. (9) However, we here leave aside the doctrine of the sacraments and concentrate on the first form of proclamation: preaching.

The definition of preaching

Barth offers the following definition: Preaching is "the attempt, essayed by one called there to in the Church, to express in his own words in the form of an exposition of a portion of the Biblical testimony to revelation, and to make comprehensible to men of his day, the promise of God's revelation, reconciliation and calling, as they are to be expected here and now". (10)

When we compare this definition with the earlier one of proclamation, we can say that this is a definition 'from the other side'. The first one approached the mystery of proclamation from God's side. It is God Himself speaking in and through human language. Here the mystery is approached from the human side, the side of the church, or, if you wish, the side of the preacher. (11)

Again there are four aspects to which I would draw your attention.

(1) Preaching is to be done by one called thereto in the Church. Actually it is a task given to the Church herself, who in turn calls certain persons (usually, but not necessarily always, ministers) to perform this task. But whoever it may be, the person concerned does not do it on his own authority, but because he is called to this task.

(2) This person cannot himself speak the actual Word of God as such, but he can only repeat the promise: 'Lo, I am with you alway' (Matt 28:20). In other words: he repeats the promise of God's revelation, reconciliation and calling, as they are to be expected here and now.

(3) This person therefore is not allowed to deliver his own arbitrary religious speech, in which he expresses his own religious feelings, but his speech must be controlled and guided in the form of a homily. In other words, it must be an exposition of a portion of Scripture. For in Scripture

we hear the original witnesses of the revelation that has taken place in Jesus Christ.

(4) His sermon, however, should not be a simple repetition of what the text says, but he must be willing to make the promise given to the church comprehensible in his own words to the men of his time. (12)

So there are four aspects or four important determinants in the concept of preaching: calling - promise - exposition of Scripture - actuality. Each one of them is indispensable. Yet all of them cannot alter the fact that this preaching as such and in itself is and remains a human activity. Decisive in the second definition of Barth is the word 'attempt'. That is the most we can do: to make an attempt. We cannot do more. We cannot speak the actual Word of God. Only God Himself can do this.

'Becoming' the Word of God

But how can this ever happen that God speaks in and through human words? Barth's answer is: this can only happen through the act of God Himself, through the Holy Spirit. Here we meet again with the 'ubi et quando visum est Deo' (13), and this time Barth quotes from the Confessio Helvetica Prior (the First Helvetic Confession of 1536), art 15: "Therefore we also believe that the Church's ministers are God's co-workers, as St Paul calls them ... Yet with the understanding that in all things we ascribe all efficacy and power to God the Lord alone, and only the imparting to the minister. For it is certain that this power and efficacy never should or can be attributed to a creature, but God disposes it to those He chooses to His free will" (14) In this same connection Barth rejects the views of Schleiermacher and Tillich. In these views preaching becomes a matter of religious man conversing purely with himself. (15) But this is the death of preaching. In the long run it becomes superfluous.

In the next section, where he speaks explicitly about the three forms of the Word of God, the idea that the proclamation of the church must become the Word of God returns again and again. Speaking about 'The Word of God as Preached' he starts with the statement: "Indeed time and again proclamation must become proclamation" (16), and then points to the sacraments to which the same applies. "What holds of proclamation and of the Church in general cannot be better represented than precisely by the sacrament". Calvin says of the tree of life in Paradise and of Noah's rainbow that they did not have their efficacy within themselves. The tree could not give immortality, nor could the rainbow itself refrain the waters, but God gave this meaning to them 'so that they began to be what they were

not before". Similarly Bullinger says of the earthly elements in the sacraments: "By the Word of God they become sacraments, which they were not before".

This 'becoming', this 'event', is in the real sense of the word the Word of God. (17) Barth calls it a miracle. But then he adds that we have to understand this miracle properly. The miracle is not that the human word suddenly disappears and that in the gap a new, purely divine Word comes into existence, but the miracle is that in and through the human words God speaks his own Word. And this last expression has fully to be taken seriously. It is indeed nothing else and nothing less than God's own Word. In this connection he expresses his full agreement with the Reformers who used very strong words at this very point. For instance, Luther said: "Now I and any man who speaketh Christ's Word may freely boast that his mouth is Christ's mouth. I am certain that my word is not mine but Christ's Word, therefore my mouth must also be His whose Word it speaketh" (18) Likewise Calvin said of preaching that God Himself manifests Himself in this means (of grace) and further spoke of 'some little man risen from the dust', who in no way is better than ourselves, but in whose mouth the Word of God meets us. (19)

When Barth so strongly emphasizes the 'becoming' of the Word of God, we should avoid two misunderstandings. In the first place, he does not mean to say that in preaching some kind of transubstantiation takes place. In C D IV/3 he explicitly rejects this idea. The human words remain fully human. They do not lose their secular character or undergo any inner transformation or transubstantiation, but require a function and capability which they did not have before, but which they now receive and have, as they are claimed by the omnipotent Word of God. (20) In the second place, Barth does not mean that we do not have to do our utmost. On the contrary, Christian dogmatics finds its task at this very point. It is our duty to pass the message of Scripture on in as pure a form as possible. The section on 'The Word of God and the Word of Man in Christian Preaching', in CD 1/2, is immediately followed by the section on 'Pure Doctrine as the Problem of Dogmatics'. (21) Dogmatics deals with the content of the preaching of the church and its central question concerns the agreement of this preaching with the revelation attested in Scripture. (22)

At the same time, however, we must say that however pure our preaching may be it is not in our power to make it the Word of God. It remains a miracle that God Himself must bring about. Yes, ultimately we must also say of pure doctrine that it is an 'event'. "Pure doctrine is not identical with any

existing text - whether it is that of specific theological formulae, or that of a specific theological system, or that of the Church's creed, or even the text of the Bible. Pure doctrine is an event". (23) It is "the event of the grace of the Word of God and of the obedience of faith created by this grace. It is a divine gift".

As far as we ourselves are concerned we never get beyond the attempt. From our human point of view we can never go beyond an 'indirect identity' between our preaching and the Word of God. It becomes a matter of 'direct identity' only in the moment or the hour of the 'ubi et quando visum est Deo'. Here we have the decisive difference between the incarnate Word of God, on the one hand, and the written and preached Word of God, on the other. The 'ubi et quando' does not apply to the incarnate Word. Here we must say: 'Illic et tunc visum est Deo' (there and then it pleased God). (24) "Here we have to speak not of a possibility to be realised, but of the reality of the Word of God." As to the Bible and our preaching, it is different. In themselves they only have an indirect identity with the Word of God. Only when it pleases God to use these human words as vehicles of his divine Word, they really become the Word of God. But in that case they are indeed and fully God's Word. In that case there is no real difference any more between revelation and the Bible and between revelation and preaching. In that case we have to do 'really and truly with the one integral Word of God, with God Himself, with Jesus Christ through the Holy Ghost" and it is "to be believed as such by those who speak and those who hear it". (25) Unfortunately we must stop our exposition of Barth's view here. As you all will realize, we have given a very short summary only. Yet we do believe that the main points have been mentioned. When we now proceed to an evaluation of this view, we wish to do this from two different angles. In the first place, from the viewpoint of systematic theology and secondly, from that of practical theology.

An evaluation from the viewpoint of systematic theology

It is abundantly clear that Barth's description and definition of proclamation and preaching is of a dogmatical nature. In doing this he rightly concentrates on the relation of preaching and the Word of God. At this very point he appears to be in the vicinity of the Reformers. There are some very important points of agreement and he therefore is not out of order when time and again he appeals to their statements. Take, for instance, his appeal to the famous phrase from the Confessio Helvetica Posterior, written by Bullinger: "Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei". There is a great deal of agreement indeed. Both Bullinger and Barth emphasize that revelation is an act of God. It is not

man who out of the most inner core of his being discovers God, but God comes to man and of his own free accord makes Himself known to man. The initiative is always on God's side, for He dwells in unapproachable light and no man has ever seen Him or can see Him (I Tim 6:16). There is therefore only one possibility: God Himself must come out of this unapproachable light and reveal Himself to man. Both Bullinger and Barth also agree that God has revealed Himself. In his incarnate Son Jesus Christ God has shown us who He is and the witnesses of this revelation we find in the Scriptures, the Old Testament prophets pointing forward to the coming revelation and the New Testament apostles pointing back to the revelation that has taken place.

But at this very point we also come to the parting of the ways. According to Bullinger and all the other reformers this witness of the prophets and the apostles now is God's revelation to us. We see this very clearly in the opening statement of the Confessio Helvetica Posterior. The heading of the first chapter reads: 'Of the Holy Scripture being the true Word of God' and then the first paragraph says: "We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God (ipsum veram esse verbum Dei), and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God Himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures (et locuitur adhuc nobis per scripturas sanctas)". (26) A little further we read: 'Scripture is the Word of God' (Scripture verbum Dei est), which is followed by an appeal to I Thess 2:13 - "When you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God" - and to Jesus' words to his apostles: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you"; therefore 'he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects him who sent me' (Matt 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). This is quite different from what we find in Barth's dogmatics. According to Barth the witness of these witnesses is not itself revelation. It has again and again to become revelation, and only after this 'becoming' we can say that it is revelation. In other words, Barth gives an actualistic or punctualistic interpretation (27) of the 'est'. Revelation is always a 'dandum', but never a 'datus' without more. In the Confessio Helvetica Posterior we find quite a different approach. The relationship between Bible and revelation is not one of 'indirect identity', but the 'est' is an indication of a 'direct identity'. 'Scripture verbum Dei est'.

The same difference we observe concerning the nature of preaching. Here too Barth begins with 'indirect identity', which may be changed into 'direct identity' 'ubi et quando

visum est Deo'. The confession speaks in a much more massive way. It posits the thesis: 'Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei'. Again the 'est' is emphasized and it is interpreted in the following statement: "Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful: and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven; and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good". In this statement Bullinger mentions two conditions: 1. This Word of God (hoc Dei verbum) must be preached, and 2. it must be preached by preachers lawfully called. But then the conclusion is quite unequivocal: the very Word of God (ipsum Dei verbum) is proclaimed, and received by the faithful.

Now we realize that Barth also appeals to this confession and states that he agrees with it. To some extent this is true. Certain statements or expressions of the confession can also be used by Barth, but we should not lose sight of the fact that Barth uses them within the context of his own actualistic concept of revelation. And this implies that such statements or expressions receive a different interpretation and that in some cases a real shift takes place. A clear example of the latter is the expression 'ubi et quando visum est Deo'. Barth has borrowed it from Article V of the Augsburg Confession (1530), which deals with the 'Ministry of the Church'. The first part of the article reads: "In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God (ubi et quando visum est Deo), in those who hear the Gospel." (28) It is obvious that the Confessio Augustana does not speak about what Scripture or preaching are, but about their power or efficacy. The question is not whether preaching is the Word of God (one may say: this is simply understood), but the question is: when does this Word have effect? And at this point the 'ubi et quando' is used. In other words, it serves as an indication of the correlation Word - Spirit and of the necessity of the illumination by the Holy Spirit. In the meantime the confession presupposes that both the Bible and preaching are the Word of God. The 'est' is the starting point. The 'ubi et quando' is mentioned only when the question arises: is it also an 'est' for me? If Bible and preaching are to become God's Word for me (here indeed we may use the term 'becoming!'), the activity of the Holy Spirit is necessary. But this 'becoming' always presupposes the 'est'. To put

it in a very simple formula: according to the Reformers it is not necessary that something happens to the Bible and preaching, but to me, the listener. In Barth's conception all this is reversed. The 'becoming' applies primarily to the Bible and preaching. They are not in themselves the Word of God, but have to become such. The 'est' follows after the 'becoming'. And so the 'ubi et quando' is applied to the 'becoming' of the Bible and preaching, instead of to the illumination, which follows the 'est'.

An evaluation from the viewpoint of practical theology

Especially in the period after World War II Barth's view of preaching has been increasingly criticized by practical theologians. In the period between the two world wars Barth's 'solution' was experienced by many ministers as a kind of liberation. The older liberal theology put all emphasis on the preacher himself. According to the Schleiermacherian conception it was his task as a strong religious personality to transfer his religious fire to his listeners. In addition, he had to translate the message in such a way that it was understandable and acceptable for the people of his own day. But this is an impossible task. It not only means that the preacher's religious emotions take the place of God's revelation, but it also means that in the long run nothing is left of the biblical message. The latter is eroded in a process of constant adaptation to the insights of modern man.

Barth's solution meant a totally new approach and gave encouragement to many a weary preacher. In the first place, he called the church back to the message of the Bible. The main thing is not our religious feelings, but God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In the second place, he put the preacher under the promise that God Himself will take care of his Word. We are not only unable to bring God's Word, but we need not do it either. Of course, we must do our utmost to bring the message of the Bible as purely as possible (cf the section on 'pure doctrine'), but the real work is done by God Himself, who 'ubi et quando visum est Deo' will take our human words and speak through them.

All this meant a tremendous relief for many a preacher. Yea, it gave him new courage and new hope for his 'impossible' task. Gradually, however, Barth's conception also raised new questions. Does he not too much ignore the fact that this message has to be brought to people of this modern age? Does he not put so much emphasis on the content of the message (the 'what' - question), that he cannot do justice to the aspect of the communication of the message (the 'how' - question)?

In my opinion it cannot be denied that Barth himself has given occasion to this kind of criticism. At times he has made statements which seem to indicate clearly that he underrates the questions which concern the practical theologian. For instance, in C D I/2, when he deals with 'pure Doctrine as the Problem of Dogmatics', he states as his opinion that, since it is essential for the church to concern itself about the purity of its doctrine, the question of the church's ministry is decided in dogmatics. Consequently he states: "Bad dogmatics - bad theology - bad preaching". (29) I fully agree with this, but then Barth goes on and reverses the statement: "Good dogmatics - good theology - good preaching". Apparently Barth was aware of the question such a statement might raise, for he adds: "The suspicion and reproach of hybris seem unavoidable when we put it in this way". Yet he maintains it, for the real decisive thing is the content of the message and its purity is decided upon dogmatics. Other statements give the impression that, since all depends upon God's gracious act, all our attempts at real communication cannot help and are of little importance. At times one even gets the impression that they may be an obstacle! What are we to think, for instance, of the following statement: "The highest completeness would not make human speech into proclamation nor the most insignificant prevent it from being proclamation" (30) Or of the following description of practical theology: "The question of practical theology is how the Word of God may be served by human words ... What is involved is not the idle question of how those who proclaim this Word should 'approach' this or that modern man, or how they should 'bring home' the Word of God to him. Instead, the real question is how they have to serve this Word by pointing to its coming. This Word has never been 'brought home' to any man except by its own freedom and power"? (31) Or of these words from Barth's Homiletics: "The real point is not so much to come close to the people, but rather to come from Christ. Then one will as a matter of course come close to the people"? (32)

I believe that Barth is creating a false contrast here. Undoubtedly it is true that we are unable to 'bring home' the Word of God to modern man (or to any other man, for that matter, including the man of the church). This is God's own prerogative. He is and remains the sovereign Lord of his own Word. It is also true that under no circumstances we are allowed to 'adapt' the Word of God to modern man and his ideas. Adaptation always means reduction and, in the long run, annihilation of the message. But all this does not mean that the situation in which the listeners find themselves is not important. Or that the preacher does not have to do his utmost to relate the message to this situation. On the contrary! The Word of God never falls into a vacuum,

but it always comes to people in a concrete situation. This was true of the Word that came through the prophets, of the Word that came in Jesus and of the Word that came through the apostles. For this reason today too it is our task to bring the Word of God in such a manner that people can really hear it. Once again, the actual hearing is not in our power. In this respect I agree with Barth: "This Word has never been 'brought home' to any man except by its own freedom and power". One can also say: it is the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit works through the mediation of human words and human concepts and He does not annul the attempts of the preacher to reach the listeners, but rather includes them in his own sovereign dealings with the proclaimed Word. Therefore we must indeed give much attention to the question how this message is to be conveyed to people who live in the cultural climate of the last quarter of this 20th century. This is decidedly not an 'idle question'.

At the same time I also believe that in doing this we must constantly keep in mind the deepest intentions of Barth's conception. I mention three in particular. (1) It is not in our power to make people hear the Word of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. (2) Let us never make the mistake of thinking that we already know the message and that the only important question left is how to bring it to the people. Then we have fallen into the error of liberalism. God's Word always remains new and we have to discover it again and again. The gospel does not lie behind us as a known entity, but it always lies ahead of us. (3) The situation is not decisive for the Word of God is decisive for the situation. God's grace always precedes everything we do. The congregation does come to church with all its questions, but in the Bible the answer of God always precedes our questions and we have to learn from the answer how to formulate our questions and also which of them are really relevant. Preaching (and also the preparation of a sermon) is the event between the two poles of the text and the situation, but decisive and final is the message of the text which enters into the situation and transforms it.

Notes

- (1) Walther Furst, 'Karl Barth's Predigtlehre', in Antwort, 1956, 147; cf 137.
- (2) C D I/1, 1.
- (3) C D I/1, 3.
- (4) C D I/1, 57.
- (5) C D IV/3, 735.
- (6) C D I/1, 56.
- (7) C D I/1, 58.
- (8) C D I/1, 59.
- (9) C D I/1, 61/2.
- (10) C D I/1, 61.
- (11) Cf the two fold definition Barth gave in his lectures on Homiletics in 1932/33, published as The Preaching of the Gospel, 1963 (The Westminster Press / The SCM Press has included them in the volume Prayer and Preaching, 1964). The twofold definition reads as follows:
 1. Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken: but he makes use, according to his good pleasure, of the ministry of a man who speaks to his fellowmen, in God's name, by means of a passage from Scripture. Such a man fulfills the vocation to which the Church has called him, and through his ministry, the Church is obedient to the mission entrusted to her.
 2. Preaching follows from the command given to the Church to serve the Word of God by means of a man called to this task. It is this man's duty to proclaim to his fellowmen what God himself has to say to them, by explaining, in his own words, a passage from Scripture which concerns them personally.
- (12) C D I/1, 65.
- (13) C D I/1, 79.
- (14) C D I/1, 80. We have taken the translation given in Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century, edited by Arthur Cochrane, 1966, 105, since it is more accurate than the one given in the English edition of the Church Dogmatics.
- (15) C D I/1, 68.
- (16) C D I/1, 98. This translation is, I believe, more accurate than the official version, which says that it has to happen 'from time to time'.
- (17) C D I/1, 104.
- (18) C D I/1, 107. Cf also the quotation from Luther in C D I/2, 747. "For a preacher must not say the Lord's Prayer, nor ask forgiveness of sins, when he has preached (if he is a true preacher), but must confess and exult with Jeremiah: Lord, thou knowest that what has gone forth from my mouth is right and pleasing to them. He must boldly say with St Paul and all the apostles and prophets: Haec dixit dominus, Thus saith

God Himself; or, again: In this sermon, I am a confessed apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ. It is neither necessary nor good to ask here for forgiveness of sins, as though the teaching were false. For it is not my word but God's, which He neither will nor can forgive me, and for which He must always praise and reward me, saying: You have taught rightly for I have spoken through you and the Word is mine. Whoever cannot boast thus of his preaching repudiates preaching; for he expressly denies and slanders God".

C D I/1, 108.

C D IV/3, 737.

C D I/2, 758 ff.

C D I/2, 766.

C D I/2, 768.

C D I/1, 133.

C D I/2, 744.

Note the present tense "speaks" (loquitur).

Cf O Weber, Grundlagen der Dogmatik I, 1955, 210.

The Book of Concord, ed by T G Tappert, 1959, 31.

C D I/2, 767.

C D I/1, 58.

Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology, An Introduction, 1963, 182. The first underlining is mine (K R).

K Barth, Homiletik, 1966, 38. The underlining is mine (K R). The German text uses the words "von selbst".

These words are missing in the English editions.

A Note on Books

1. Books by Barth. Barth's magnum opus is the Church Dogmatics (13 vols, ET Edinburgh 1936-), but it is perhaps more helpful to begin with his shorter works, such as his expositions of the Apostles' Creed Credo (ET London 1964) and Dogmatics in Outline (ET London 1949) or his late lectures Evangelical Theology: An Introduction (ET London 1963). His earlier work includes a well-known commentary The Epistle to the Romans (ET Oxford 1933), a set of essays The Word of God and the Word of Man (ET London nd), and Theology and Church, Shorter Writings 1920-1938 (ET London 1962). His theological method is set out in the very important study Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum (ET London 1960), and his views on past theologians and philosophers in Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century (ET London 1972). Two later works should be mentioned: the collection God, Grace and Gospel (ET Edinburgh 1959) which contains the lecture 'The Humanity of God', and the little book Fragments Grave and Gay (ET London 1971) from the end of Barth's life.

2. Biography. The standard work to date is E Busch, Karl Barth (ET London 1976), although there are shorter accounts given in T H L Parker's Karl Barth (Grand Rapids 1970) and in J Bowden, Karl Barth (London 1971).

3. General Studies. From an evangelical standpoint there are two good studies: C Brown, Karl Barth and the Christian Message (London 1967) and G C Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (ET Exeter 1956) - this latter is especially good and was commended by Barth himself. Cornelius Van Til's two books on Barth, The New Modernism (London 1956) and Christianity and Barthianism (Philadelphia, 1962) are very obscure and often fail to understand what Barth is talking about.

A helpful summary of the Church Dogmatics is offered in G W Bromiley, Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth (Edinburgh 1979), and H Hartwell gives a good overall picture in The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction (London 1964). T F Torrence's Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931 (London 1962) is very important on Barth's earlier stages. For studies of his later work, see H U von Balthasar's fine book The Theology of Karl Barth (ET New York 1971) and two books by R W Jenson, Alpha and Omega (New York 1963) and God after God (New York 1969). An extremely skillful collection of essays on Barth has been edited by S W Sykes in Karl Barth, studies of his Theological Method (Oxford 1979), and many new lines of thought are suggested there.

4. Particular Studies. Barth's doctrine of Scripture is covered thoroughly in K Runia, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids 1962). His Christology is enthusiastically interpreted in J Thompson, Christology in Perspective in the Theology of Karl Barth (Edinburgh 1978). H Kung has written Justification. The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection (ET London 1964). C Gunton's book Becoming and Being (Oxford 1978) gives a good account of Barth's doctrine of God by comparing it with process thought. E Jungel's book The Doctrine of the Trinity. God's Being is in Becoming (ET Edinburgh 1976) paraphrases Barth's doctrine in a masterly, but very difficult, way.

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