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It was "the Godness of God in his Revelation" that Barth had discovered. What God reveals in the Bible is none other than *himself*: not just something divine, not something like God, not something coming from God. "No, God himself is the content of his revelation." Divine revelation is so utterly unique that it cannot be put on the same level as anything else. "As a man can have only one father; as he is able to look at one time with his eyes into the eyes of only one other man; as he can hear with his two ears the word of only one man at one and the same time; as he is born only once and dies but once—so he can believe and know only one Revelation." That is what happens, Barth held, when we meet Jesus Christ and know that he is the Way, the Truth and Life, and that there is no other way to the Father but by him.

When he made that discovery, Barth resigned from the Social Democratic Party, for he did not want to mislead his congregation by confusing the Gospel with politics. That did not mean that the minister of the Gospel must refrain from proclaiming the Word of God to politics, but it did mean that he must address moral, social and political problems *solely on the ground of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ*. That was the stand Barth took up as a professor in Nazi Germany, when he wrote the famous "Barmen Confession" which galvanized the confessing Church in its resistance to Hitler. It is on the Gospel of the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ, Barth taught, that all the powers of evil and tyranny must shatter themselves as on a mighty "Rock of Bronze." When he refused to take the oath of loyalty demanded by the Nazis, Karl Barth was deposed from his Chair in the University of Bonn and deported back to Switzerland.

After the war Barth was more convinced than ever that it was the loss of the Godness of God in his revelation that brought about the secularization of the church in Germany—which was still rampant in all our churches where a secularizing ministry confuses moral and social renovation with the Gospel of redemption through the cross and resurrection of Christ. It was of supreme importance for the Church again to take up the battle for the essence of the Gospel that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and that there is no other revelation and no other salvation than that embodied in him. That was the supreme truth for which the early Church had struggled in its great theological crisis when the Nicene Creed was born,

and for which the Reformers had struggled when the doctrine of justification by grace was at stake. What God freely gives us in grace is not just something which might be controlled and dispensed by the Church, but his very own Self incarnate in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of mankind.

That is what Karl Barth's theology is all about: *the uniqueness and centrality of Christ and his Gospel*. It is through Christ and in his Spirit alone that we have access to authentic knowledge of God, and through the blood of Christ alone that sinners are reconciled to him in forgiveness and rebirth. If we really believe in Jesus Christ, we cannot place Christianity alongside some other religion, or engage in some sort of interfaith approach to God; for God's unique self-revelation in Christ tells us that there is no other revelation of God and no other possibility of being reconciled to him except through the cross. It is at this very point that the Church today urgently needs to be warned against watering down the Gospel, and secularizing the ministry of the Word of God!

Karl Barth's own commitment to Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life makes him subject the foundations of human knowledge and culture to the most radical examination. In Jesus, God has become one with us *as we are*. He has taken our actual human nature and made it his own, with all its sin and guilt, misery and death, in order to heal us in the dark depths of our human existence, not the least in the twisted state of our alienated minds. That is why Karl set himself to think out in a quite unparalleled way the nature of human reason in the light of God's revealing and saving activity in Jesus Christ, and to show how God means us to use it in understanding the truth of the Gospel and its implications for all human activity and behavior. In so doing he has given us in his *Church Dogmatics* an account of the Christian faith second to none in the whole history of Christian theology, and one that I find excitingly relevant for our modern, scientific era.

What Shakespeare is to English literature, and Mozart is to classical music, Karl Barth is to Christian theology today. Anyone still unfamiliar with Barth today must be judged theologically illiterate! But what I like most about his theology is that it is evangelical to the core, for it is utterly faithful to the Gospel and its message of the reconciling love and grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

How Karl Barth Changed Their Minds

by Donald K. McKim

1986 is a vintage year for centennials in the theological world. Most notably this is the 100th anniversary year of the birth of two of the 20th century's "giant" theologians—Paul Tillich and Karl Barth.

A couple years ago, when I realized the Barth centenary was coming up, I conceived the project of enlisting prominent contemporary theologians to reflect on how they have dealt with Barth's thought in their own theological development. To do this, I suggested a twist on the rubric made famous by the series of articles in the *The Christian Century* for a number of years, called "How I Changed My Mind." To this series, Karl Barth himself contributed three times. But to have contemporary people reflecting on their interaction with Barth through the years would be of interest right now, I believed. For it would show not only what elements in Barth's life and

thought had made lasting impacts on people but would also indicate how some of the shapers of contemporary theology have either accepted, rejected or remained unmoved by Barth's theological views. In that sense we would have a kind of "freeze-frame" of contemporary theology showing where theologians are now, 100 years after Barth's birth. So I solicited essays from a number of people, not all of whom are able to contribute. I asked them to write short, personally-oriented pieces instead of formal "scholarly" ones and to be honest in their assessments of their dealings with Barth's thought whether he had actually "changed their minds" or not. I have now assembled 26 essays that are being published by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company this fall with the title, *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*.

This has been an intriguing project which has also been lots of fun. Many revealing "Barth stories" emerged. I sought a variety of contributors and am fortunate to have essays from Barth's two sons, Christoph and Markus, as well as from a

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number of Barth's students who shared their memories of *Carolus magnus* as he was called. Eberhard Busch, Barth's biographer and assistant, also granted an interview. The given titles of some of the essays are interesting. Paul Lehmann writes of "The Ant and the Emperor," a reference to Barth's description of his many visitors to his vacation hideaway in 1950 who came, as he said, "like a procession of ants." Dietrich Ritschl calls his piece "How to be Most Grateful to Karl Barth Without Remaining a Barthian." That these essays do not turn out to be merely "puff pieces," praising Barth with no demurs, is seen in the titles by Donald Bloesch, "Karl Barth: Appreciation and Reservations" and by John Cobb, "Barth and the Barthians: A Critical Appraisal."

Of course, it's impossible to summarize the diverse contributions short of going through all the essays. But I would like to indicate some general topics where Barth's influence has been appropriated in this sampling of theologians and then some areas as well where divergencies and critiques arise.

APPROPRIATIONS

Dogmatics

In the realm of dogmatics generally, Paul Lehmann has argued that Karl Barth "delivered theological language and conceptuality from bondage to propositional logic and joined

lamation of the church under scrutiny, subjecting them to testing by the Biblical norm, pointing out the need for addition, correction, or subtraction as the church lives out the Christian life and proclaims the Christian message in the diverse cultures and shifting circumstances of the world. In this sense Barth treats theology as itself a form of ministry, for its scrutinizing is not an exercise in domination but an act of service which protects the church against error and secularization, which helps it to achieve a purity of teaching and preaching and which first and supremely and continuously theology must also render in exemplary fashion to itself.

This emphasis of Barth's on God as the object and the subject of theology is also expounded by T.F. Torrance. He tells of showing Barth how Barth's own approach to epistemological preconceptions in theology paralleled that of Einstein in physics. "In theology as well as in natural science," says Torrance, "theoretical and empirical components in knowledge always operate inseparably together: the only true epistemology is that which is embodied in and is natural to the material content of knowledge." "What is needed," Torrance says, is "an epistemological structure that is indissolubly bound up with the essential substance or positive content of knowledge. That is why the epistemology offered by Barth is not presented in abstraction or detachment from the material

Martin Marty pays tribute to Barth's doctrine when he writes that "what remains above all, however, is the confidence he gave us that we must, and perhaps can, speak of and about and to God."

them once again to poetry." This he did, says Lehmann, by exploring "the metaphorical content and meaning of the language of Dogmatics." Barth himself, according to Lehmann, was not fully aware he was doing this. Yet by his "pioneering a metaphorical interpretation of the knowledge and obedience of faith," Barth was brought "to the transforming edge of the world of today and the church of today and tomorrow in their need and search for 'an essential metaphor.'" This was probed by Barth's continual turning to the *analogia fidei*, his description of the task of dogmatics as reflection upon the agreement between the church's language about God and the revelation of God attested in Holy Scripture, and more specifically in his "evocative and provocative re-appropriation of the Chalcedonian *vere Deus-vere Homo*" description of Jesus Christ. Lehmann sees Barth's appropriation of this formula in its metaphorical meaning as illuminated by the conundrum from a friend which asks: "When is an analogy not an analogy?" to which the answer is: "When it is a metaphor." This, according to Lehmann, is what the Chalcedonian formula has been and is all about. And it was Barth's contribution to recognize this in order to regain a poetical perspective.

At the same time, Geoffrey Bromiley, Barth's major English translator, sees Barth as having rendered a twofold service in theology.

First, he has called theology back to its proper object of God and given it a more truly scientific basis under the control of this object, who is always also subject. In so doing he has restored to theology its integrity as an academic discipline in its own right which need not disguise itself among the humanities. But second, he has also related theology firmly to the church's mission. Theology for Barth is no mere academic exercise. It does not serve only to satisfy intellectual needs or to provide apologetic arguments. It brings the whole life and proc-

content of knowledge, but in the heart of his dogmatic theology, as in *CD II.1* where it is bound up with the doctrine of God as he has made himself known to us in space and time through Jesus Christ his Incarnate Son."

God

Barth's doctrine of God with its focus also on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is highlighted in T.H.L. Parker's essay. Parker writes that "from Barth I learned (gradually, no doubt) the central truth of all truths, that the objectivity of God, the otherness of God, the Sovereignty which [God] will not give to another, is not to be separated from his becoming one with [humanity], from [God] becoming the one who serves [humanity] and even puts himself at their disposal. These are not two contradictories or even two counter-truths to be held in balance, but as Christ is one, the sovereign Lord who is the Servant, the Servant who is the sovereign Lord, so these are one. It is not an *either-or*, not even a *both-and*, but it is *simul . . . et simul*. In being the one [God] is at the same time the other."

Martin Marty also pays tribute to Barth's doctrine of God when he writes that "what remains above all, however, is the confidence he gave us that we must, and perhaps can, speak of and about and to God." While the language analysts, symbolic logicians and philosophers can readily point out the problems in God language, Marty cites Saul Bellow's comment: "Being a prophet is nice work if you can get it, but sooner or later you have to talk about God." And Marty goes on to say: "It has been my experience that in the contexts of agnostics, secular-minded pluralists and those suspicious of the claims of faith, it is expected that this be sooner, not later. Ancillary theological themes can be postponed, made part of trivia quizzes. Theme Number One, *theos + logos*, God-thought, God-language, most efficiently and focally comes up first. Barth

certainly is not the only model when this agenda comes up, and he may not even be the best. But no twentieth century serious thinker more consistently pressed it to the front of thought, writing and preaching than did he. For that, he will live as fashions come and go."

Jesus Christ

Barth's theology is often said to be Christocentric. As Robert McAfee Brown points out: "No Christian theology worthy of the name can be other than Christocentric, and whatever else Barth's theology is, it is Christocentric. God did something, Barth constantly reminds us, in a narrow strip of history on a narrow strip of land, in Palestine and we are forever bound to respond to the nature and the content of that action. If the 'early Barth' stressed the theme of Koheleth that 'God is in heaven and you are on earth,' the mature Barth sings praises to the God who is also on earth as well."

In the realm of dogmatics, Paul Lehmann has argued that Karl Barth "delivered theological language and conceptuality from bondage to propositional logic and joined them once again to poetry."

Barth's Christological interpretation of the doctrine of predestination was another of his important contributions. For Brown, as a Presbyterian, this allowed him to reclaim the doctrine of election. For him, "it was 'II/2' that emancipated me. It was liberating to read Barth's comment that when he approached this topic he had expected to follow his master Calvin, and then discovered that in faithfulness to Scripture he had to break with Calvin, and declare that the doctrine of election was not a doctrine of impenetrable darkness but of indescribable light, God's ultimate 'yes' to humankind. The Scriptures, Barth affirmed, proclaim God's unconditional choice for us rather than against us, the preeminence and prevenience of God's grace, the God who has already chosen us before the foundation of the earth." As Béla Vassady noted in this regard, "Only a consistent Christocentricity can secure and guarantee a thoroughly non-speculative character for our theocentric theology."

Barth's focus on election and Jesus Christ leads to what Langdon Gilkey has found to be "the most 'modern' aspect of Barth, paradoxically united to what is most traditional—i.e. the centering of all salvation on Jesus Christ." This is the aspect of what Gilkey calls Barth's "universalism." He writes: "I find his clarity and breadth, and absolute originality, here endlessly inspiring. To me, something like this represents the only possible way to interpret Christian faith, that is in terms of the universality, the priority, the all-encompassing character and the triumph of God's redeeming love. It is also the only basis on which a Christian can genuinely enter into dialogue with other religions—although this was (I am sure) hardly what Barth had in mind! The paradoxical greatness of the man is brightly illuminated here. At the very point where today his theology seems most 'parochial': explicitly centered in and concerned for the Biblical history, its tribulations and triumphs, at that *same* point it suddenly bursts into transcendence and glory and includes, as few other viewpoints do, the furthest reaches of God's creaturely domain."

Politics

A word should also be said about the influence of Karl Barth on politics according to some of the contributors. This issue is touched on at a number of points but is brought out

most clearly in the essays by Lehmann, Brown, and specifically Harvey Cox who titled his piece, "Barth and Berlin: Theology at the Wall." Cox tells of his year living and working in Berlin in 1962 and how in his trips across to the Eastern side, pastors, teachers and lay people most of all wanted copies of Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* to read. Cox tells of how Frederick-Wilhelm Marquardt argued that Barth's whole corpus had to be read from the perspective of Barth's perspective to socialism as Barth's *sitz im leben*. Barth was writing, said Marquardt, a kind of political theology. Then Marquardt pointed Cox to a section in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 (p. 386) where Barth in referring to Amos 5:24 said that "God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied and deprived of it." Living in Berlin, Cox found that the real life and death question for all people there was not the question of Bultmann, of how modern per-

sons should understand themselves or of the disappearance of the mythical world-view. It was rather the question of Barth—the question of justice and peace. When Cox then later encountered the theology of Liberation and the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez, he writes, "I had been made ready by the Barth I got to know in the shadow of the Wall, from the pastors and ordinary Christians who lived in Berlin bravely during those hard but heady days and who seemed to know with some wonderful assurance that they were just where God wanted them to be. For me, the step from Barth to Liberation theology was a natural and easy one."

Barth's relation to Liberation theology is also mentioned in Brown's essay and, interestingly, the same passage from *C.D.* II/1 (p. 386) is cited. Brown argues that there are some "mutually reinforcing convictions" between Barth and the Liberationists including among other things the fact that "neither position starts *de novo*." Barth was a socialist even before he read the Epistle to the Romans in a new light, and Gutiérrez defines theology as a "second act" which is a "critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God." Thus, says Brown, "If Barth brings an implicit praxis to his examination of Scripture, Gutiérrez brings an implicit Biblical orientation to his examination of praxis." Brown sees the Biblical rootedness of Barth's theology as the source of Barth's "courage to issue a clear 'No' to Hitler" and that likewise this Biblical rootedness "gives Latin American Christians the courage to say 'No' in their own situations of tyranny."

In this regard also, there was a story in *The New York Times* in November 1985 which I cite in the "Introduction" to the volume. It was about Dr. Nico Smith, a white man and formerly a professor of theology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa and now pastor of a Black Dutch Reformed Church in Mamelodi, South Africa, who told of the "enormous influence" Karl Barth had on him and his attitudes toward apartheid. In 1963 Smith had met with Barth and Barth asked him, "Will you be free to preach the Gospel even if the Government in your country tells you that you are preaching against the whole system?" Smith said, "That made a deep impression on me," and it subsequently helped shape his decision to leave his theology professorship and now live in a black township near Pretoria. So Barth's influence in political matters contin-

ues to have an effect.

Divergencies

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barth Today

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

Karl Barth: Socialism and Biblical Hermeneutics

by Steve de Gruchy

In Search of the Strange New World in the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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