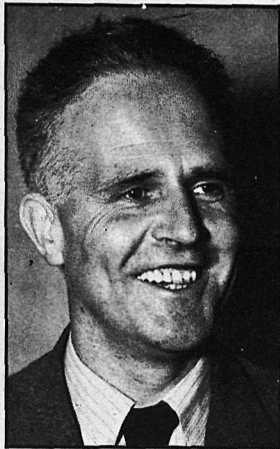


**Good Fences, Good Neighbors?**

Dr. Marcus Bach of the University of Iowa School of Religion calls himself a "religious sleuth." For 15 years (partly financed by a Rockefeller fellowship) he has been investigating the state of Protestantism in the U.S. Published this week is the result: an autobiographical *Report to Protestants* (Bobbs-Merrill, \$3), which is well-timed for this month's big conference of churches at Amsterdam.

Some 15 years ago, when young Pastor Marcus Bach first went to his Evangelical pulpit in the town he calls Fairfield, Kans., most of Fairfield's farmers and cattlemen



EMIL BRUNNER  
*Silence is denial.*

Frank Kane

were members of the Evangelical and Baptist churches. The same kinds of cars nudged the two churches on Sunday mornings and the same kinds of God-fearing Kansans sang and prayed inside. Why shouldn't the two become one flock? To Pastor Bach and the young Baptist preacher across the way, the 200-odd-sect division of Protestantism in the U.S. was "inherently wrong and sinful."

**Songs & Candles.** The Church of Christ, they thought, ought to be a united fellowship of all believers. They plotted to nudge their congregations into eventual unity, and for a while the experiment seemed to prosper on joint choir recitals, Christmas festivals and church socials. But when the two eager young pastors frankly talked merger to a joint meeting of their church boards, they learned something about the wellsprings of faith in the U.S.

"Why shouldn't there be denominations?" asked one Baptist leader. "Lots of them. All kinds of them . . . Some folks want candles burning in the church. Others don't. Some like one song. Others like an-

other kind . . . Practice what you believe . . . Good fences make good neighbors, as every farmer knows."

Bach and his church board finally decided that he had better take his dreams of unity elsewhere. He went back to college and began studying U.S. Protestantism in earnest. Eventually, he began to agree with Fairfield's old Doc Reynolds: "Churches aren't built on a sense of brotherhood, young man. They're built on things to be believed . . . Unite the churches and you'll kill what religion there's left."

**The Man in the Pew.** Dr. Bach's report to Protestants is a hopeful one: "Historic Protestantism," he says, "will continue to dominate 'Church Street' just as it has since the birth of American freedom." His early crusade for church unity in Fairfield now seems to him "as unimportant as it was impractical." Protestantism's very multiplicity he now considers its strength. As Doc Reynolds once told him: "Protestantism ought to remind a man of spring . . . New life beginning to move. New cells splitting up . . . Did you ever think of Protestantism like that? . . . The multiplication of cells is one of the manifestations of an inherent vital force."

The church leaders at Amsterdam, warns Marcus Bach, must remember the individual Protestant worshiper and his spiritual needs: "I had traveled 15 years only to agree that the personal religious life must come first in any Protestant plan . . . If the leaders of the World Assembly failed to challenge the individual . . . they would declare unity with their lips but retain plurality in their mission."

**The Temptation**

Europe's leading Protestant theologians are Karl Barth of Basle and Emil Brunner of Zurich. For years their religious arguments have set the world's theological seismographs to jiggling. Last week, through a paraphrase prepared by Dr. E. G. Homrighausen of Princeton Theological Seminary and published in the *British Christian News-Letter* and the U.S. *Christian Century*, the English-speaking world was registering the rumbles of another Barth-Brunner set-to. The timely subject: Protestantism *v.* Communism.

It began in April when Barth, recently returned from a lecture trip in Hungary at the invitation of the Hungarian Reformed Church, published an article on his visit in a Swiss church paper. He declared himself much impressed by the Reformed Church's refusal to join with the Hungarian Roman Catholics against the present Communist-controlled government. The Reformed Church, wrote Barth approvingly, was holding aloof from both East and West; instead of concerning itself with politics, it was concentrating on formulating the Word of God in fresh terms.

**Into Battle.** Theologian Brunner lost no time in challenging this position. In an open letter to Barth in the same publica-

tion he said that he was unable to understand why Barth, one of the first and most uncompromising opponents of Nazism, has not taken a similar stand against Communism—and long since. Is not Communism totalitarianism? Brunner asked. And is not totalitarianism "in principle" unrighteous and inhuman? Must not Christians join in this battle? To remain silent is to deny a fundamental Christian principle, which Christians must never do.

Barth's reply may spark many a controversy among Christians. He holds that the church does not act according to eternal and abiding principles but by the authority of the Word of God, which may change according to times and conditions. The situation in 1948, he contends, is not the same as it was in 1933. Hitler's and Stalin's regimes may both be totalitarian.



KARL BARTH  
*Negation is cheap.*

© Max Kettel

But what is important is the special temptation Hitlerism was to the church in pre-war days, when many prominent people were extremely friendly to the Nazis. Thus, says Barth, it was necessary for the church to take an uncompromising stand against Hitler from the very beginning.

**Hold Fire.** But the evil of Communism is no such "temptation" today. It is too easy to be against it. Who but Communists, he asks, are tempted to go along with Communism? "Whoever wants a political negation from me against this system? . . . can have it immediately," writes Barth, adding that it is cheap to give. He cannot admit that it is a Christian responsibility to say now what every citizen can read in his newspaper and what Mr. Truman and the Pope are saying often and well.

Therefore, says Barth, the church should not prematurely shoot off its ammunition in the present conflict. Let the church—in Hungary and elsewhere—not adhere to "principles" but to its Lord to find the time to speak and to remain silent.