

# Dr. Barth Stirs a Maelstrom of Discussion Here

## Opinions Cited in Seminaries, Schools

BY RICHARD PHILBRICK

Fervent discussions about the religious convictions of the Rev. Dr. Karl Barth whirled thru theological schools in the Chicago area yesterday in the wake of the famed theologian's lectures last week at the University of Chicago.

His addresses, entitled "An Introduction to Evangelical Theology," were the first he has presented in this country. Rockefeller Memorial chapel on the Midway, where he spoke, was crowded for each of his appearances.

Some of the theologians who attended had studied under Dr. Barth at the University of Basel, in Switzerland, where he was a professor until recently. Nearly all of them were acquainted with his book, "Epistle to the Romans," and his other writings that have made him world famous.

### Praised by Dr. Schomer

"The sense of enchantment that has reigned in Karl Barth's great audiences is more than a tribute to his personality and his theological system," said the Rev. Dr. Howard Schomer, president of Chicago Theological seminary, after the lectures.

"They have been fascinated to find a powerful modern mind totally dominated by the Bible—by all the major events and doctrines set forth in its pages, not just by one of its themes,

or a verse from here or there. "His lectures have brought his hearers into the vast thought-world of the Bible and held them there as if there were no other worthy of notice. Now thousands of American churchmen have discovered at first hand the hypnotism of an intelligent, but radically orthodox, theology.

"They themselves have experienced the kind of great simplification of the theologian's task which has brought about a certain renewal of the church in Europe during the 40 years of Barthian predominance.

### "Responsible Civic Leader"

"Karl Barth has always been, a responsible civic leader in his Swiss homeland," Dr. Schomer continued, yet "no one has ever been able to make quite clear how he gets from the ancient biblical world to his forthright positions on contemporary social and cultural issues.

"His Chicago audiences, who listened to him even as the United States resumed nuclear tests which they had understood he personally opposed, learned nothing about the grounds of his ethical reasoning.

"Since he so radically distinguishes biblical knowledge from every other kind, it is hard to see how he becomes so sure of his own judgment on the life-and-death questions faced by humanity today."

However, said Dr. Schomer, "even if we are not shown the chain of his reasoning on general ethical and cultural matters, we can rejoice that he so often—like his beloved Mozart

—is 'on the side of the angels!'"

### "Greatest Since Reformation"

Another president of a theological school, the Rev. Dr. Benjamin P. Browne, head of Northern Baptist Theological seminary, 3040 Washington blvd., remarked first of the size and type of audiences Dr. Barth drew.

"Chicagoans must have been surprised," he said, "to discover 2,000 intelligent persons assembling day and night to listen to a man talking about the esoteric subject of theology.

"This was undoubtedly due," he continued, "to an awareness that Chicago had in its midst a man whom history probably will record as the greatest theologian since the Reformation—his greatness recognized by Catholics and Protestants alike.

"Whether or not his listeners entirely agreed with Karl Barth—and many did not—his influence has been so profound and so provocative that no theologian and few clergymen are uninfluenced by his work.

### Unique Aspect Cited

One of the unique aspects of Dr. Barth's theological stand, in Dr. Browne's opinion, is that "he has a present election [appraisal] for Israel which puts the present Jewish economy under the favor of God."

Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer, professor of theology and philosophy of religion and chairman of the division of Bible and philosophy at Wheaton college, found Dr. Barth's lectures lacking at some points.

Like Dr. Browne, he stressed the importance of the lectures

to the audiences, saying they "made Dr. Barth's true greatness a living reality for many who previously had known of him only as a legend."

However, he commented that they "offer little new to those already familiar with Barth and his writings."

### "Questions Unanswered"

"Unfortunately," he said, "the questions left unanswered before remain unanswered still. Barth wants the Bible to be normative for all Christian proclamation. We dare not, so he insists, 'assume the role of the schoolmaster picking out flaws in the copy book of scripture.

"A simple 'the Bible says so' settles matters." But, Dr. Kantzer said, "he also argues that the Bible as a human book unavoidably teaches theological error. That the Bible is a thoroughly human product no one denies; but if it also teaches error, how can it be normative for preaching the truth?" Dr. Kantzer asked.

"In asserting that the Bible teaches error, is not Barth assuming precisely the role of the schoolmaster? If only parts of the Bible are true, where is his criterion for distinguishing the true word of God from the fallible word of man?"

### Student Attends Talks

"Similar questions," said Dr. Kantzer, "persist regarding Barth's position on mythological elements in Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, biblical denials of universalism, the nature of evil and of human responsibility, a hit-and-miss attitude towards human logic,

and the absence of any common ground with nonChristians.

"Until Barth does something to fill these lacunae," Dr. Kantzer concluded, "he cannot expect orthodox Christians to endorse his theology."

John Bond, a Cambridge university graduate studying at Seabury-Western Theological seminary, Evanston, on a World Council of Churches scholarship, like many other students, attended all of the lectures.

"We all knew that Karl Barth was a great theologian, he said. "What we have learned from this series of lectures is that he is also a great man with a wonderfully endearing sense of humor.

"As an English student of theology, who has not been overexposed to Dr. Barth's work, I have found his lectures a most rewarding and stimulating experience. He challenged us by the claim that theologians must allow the biblical tradition to look over their shoulders and correct their work.

### "Provoking and Inspiring"

"He provoked us," Bond continued, "by his finally expressed contempt for the 'Balls of the philosophers,' inspired us by his towering Christology, which reduces the principalities and powers to 'unreal realities.'

"Finally, by his appeal for a theology of freedom, he reminded us that the church is responsible in the fullest sense for the whole of society. This week has undoubtedly been the highlight of my year's stay in Chicago."

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