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God's Joyful Partisan

an appreciation of Dr. Karl Barth

by the Rev. Arnold B. Come, Th.D.

ON MAY 14 KARL BARTH arrived in San Anselmo and so did something most of us thought he would never do—leave Europe for a tour across the whole of the continental United States. Throughout most of his career he had been very critical of the American way of life, of the American church and of American theology. But in recent years his son Markus, Professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago, had been feeding him news and views and books (including detective novels) from America. Moreover, since the war a flood of American students had been filling his lectures and seminars at the University of Basel. So, upon retirement this spring at the age of 76, this amazing man who had been confounding the continent of Europe since 1921, again upset the expectations of all and announced he would cross the ocean.

A flood of interest

HOW WOULD HE BE RECEIVED? Many thought he would be ignored because few Americans had been reading him since the bombshell of his revolutionary interpretation of the *Epistle to the Romans* in 1921, considered to be past history now. Yet the sheer weight and indirect influence of his twelve volumes of the as-yet-uncompleted *Church Dogmatics* could not be forgotten. And his vigorous involvement in the political issues of both Nazism and Communism in Europe had made him to be a continually controversial figure.

However, not even his few devoted American followers were prepared for the flood of theological and popular interest in this man. Everywhere he went newspapermen, ordinarily unimpressed by the great and

Arnold B. Come, *Stuart Professor of Systematic Theology*, a long-time student of Barth's theology, spent his sabbatical in Basel becoming a friend as well as a student of the great teacher.

near-great, were charmed by his person and fascinated with his quick and pointed answers to their questions. Thousands attended, and thousands were turned away from his lectures in Chicago and Princeton. He even received the ultimate popular accolade, a *Time* magazine cover article. At San Francisco Theological Seminary great interest heralded Dr. Barth's only public appearance west of Chicago. Requests for lecture tickets flooded into the Seminary offices from persons and groups of every denomination on the West Coast, and weeks before Dr. Barth's arrival requests far outstripped the Seminary's largest lecture facilities. Therefore, the lecture was moved to the largest church in San Francisco, and even here auxiliary halls and closed circuit television were needed to meet the overflow crowds.

Responding with joy

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? Whatever Americans think of Barth's theology (mostly out of ignorance), they were overwhelmed by the warmth, vivacity, good-humor, and the depth and clarity of conviction that swept out from the person of this man and held enthralled several thousands in a large auditorium or a handful of people in someone's living room. Here was a genuine human being rich in years, experience and wisdom, perhaps as noteworthy for what he is as for anything he has said. But the real secret of his personal power is probably best indicated by the German periodical *Der Spiegel* which in 1959 also put his picture on its cover with the caption, "God's Joyful Partisan." Barth has a great respect for, and curiosity about, man and all his ways, but always "under God." An age in which men are "waiting" they know not what for responds with enthusiasm to a man who knows the God in whom he believes and who proclaims him not with threats of doom but with joy.

introduction to EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

by *Karl Barth*



On May 15 Dr. Karl Barth delivered to the Seminary community a lecture entitled "Introduction to Evangelical Theology," which will form the first chapter of a forthcoming book. Dr. Barth graciously has allowed us to reprint the following abstract of that lecture.

MANY THINGS CAN BE MEANT BY THE WORD "GOD." And there are correspondingly many kinds of theologies. There is no one who does not have his own god or gods as the object of his highest desire and trust or as the basis of his deepest bond and commitment. There is no one who is not to this extent also a theologian. There is also no religion, no philosophy, no world-view that is not dedicated to some such divinity. Every world-view, even those confessed in the Swiss and American national anthems, pre-suppose a divinity interpreted in one way or another and worshipped to some degree, whether thoroughly or superficially. There is no philosophy that is not to some extent also theology. Not only does this fact apply to philosophers who desire to affirm, or who at least are ready to admit, that divinity in a positive sense is the essence of truth and power of some sort of highest principle. The same truth is valid even for thinkers denying such a divinity, since a denial would in practice merely consist in transferring an identical dignity and function to some other object. This might be "nature," creativity, or an unconscious and amorphous will to life. It might also be "reason," or the man who thinks and acts progressively, or even a redeeming nothingness into which man would be destined to enter. Even such apparently "godless" ideologies are theologies.

The best theology

THE BEST THEOLOGY, not to speak of the only right one, concerning the highest or even the exclusively true and real God would have the following distinction: it would *prove* itself—and in this regard Lessing was altogether right—by the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. However, if it should acclaim and proclaim itself as such, it would by this very fact betray that it certainly is not the one true theology.

The God of the Gospel is the God who mercifully dedicates and delivers himself to the life of all men, including their theologies. Nevertheless he transcends, together with undertakings of all other men, also the enterprise of evangelical theologians. He is the God who again and again discloses himself anew, and must be discovered anew, the God over whom theology neither has nor receives disposal. The separation and distinction of this one true God from all the others can only be continually his own deed. This deed cannot be re-duplicated by any human science, not even by a theology which is dedicated specifically to him. Even in this basic consideration he is without a doubt a wholly different God than those other gods. Those others do not seem to prohibit the theologies which are dedicated to them from boasting that each one is the most right or even the only right theology. On the contrary, those gods even seem to urge the respective theologians to engage in such boasting. Evangelical theology, on the