

PRESS CONFERENCE TUESDAY AUGUST 24th, 1948.

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First question.

You said yesterday that we are here in Amsterdam not to formulate programmes and general principles but to practise concrete obedience. I should like to ask you to be a little more concrete about that "concrete obedience" and to tell us what that concretely means.

Dr. Barth:

This is a misunderstanding. I did not say that we are here in Amsterdam to practise concrete obedience but to exercise ourselves in being obedient concretely. We come together here in Amsterdam as Christians living in very different situations and we are here to hear and to learn from each other how we are to act in those circumstances. I am absolutely against general principles. We have always to decide hic et nunc in the moment and in the situation in which we find ourselves, but I think we have got to learn from each other what it really means to be obedient.

Second Question.

What do you think about Dr. Dodd's paper given yesterday?

Dr. Barth:

For technical reasons I could not understand all Dr. Dodd said, but I think I might say that we are rather near to each other. Dr. Dodd uses a very different theological language and comes from a very different theological background and tradition, but I have the impression that in fact we are not very distant from one another.

### Third Question

I would like to ask Dr. Barth if he really meant what he said when he said that we must not care if the number of Christians increases or diminishes.

Mr. Taft: (Smiling) As Chairman, I cannot allow a question expressing doubt that our speakers mean what they say.

Dr. Barth: As to the general question "Do I really mean what I say", I do not care to answer it, but I think I will answer the concrete question which was put to me. What I said is just what the Bible and especially the New Testament do say. There we do not find a word about the number of Christians always increasing until every-one calls himself a Christian. On the contrary, what the Bible and the New Testament say is that it might be only a small flock. I wanted to draw your attention to this fact and to stress it in view of the wide-spread optimism concerning the future of Christianity. I am not a prophet. I do not say that the number will diminish. I only say that the Bible makes us reckon with, and not to care too much about small numbers.

### Fourth Question

In your paper you put Rome and Moscow very close together. Is not that rather daring and liable to misinterpretation. What do you think about the encyclopedical letter from the Roman Catholic bishops which was read in the Catholic churches in the Netherlands on Sunday last concerning the Amsterdam conference?

Dr. Barth: To answer the second question first, I can only say that I have not yet seen that letter. As to the first question, I want to say "It is not I who put Rome and Moscow close together." They did it themselves by declining the invitation to the Amsterdam conference. All I did was to comment on this remarkable fact.

Fifth question.

You said that you were amazed that in all the papers of the third section there was no word to be found concerning the problems of private property, money, capital and so on. Didn't you know that this question is looked upon as so important that it will be treated in a special volume?

Dr. Barth: I have to comment on those papers we have got. I have studied very earnestly all the papers in the four volumes that we have got during the last year and I cannot help repeating today what I said yesterday. I think it is quite amazing that there is a whole volume of papers on the social order and disorder in the world where the problem of private property and so on is not treated. That is what I wanted to say and I think it really ought to be treated.

Mr. Taft: Don't you think that these special questions were left aside because they were very fully treated in the papers for the Conference on Church Community and State in Oxford, 1937 and in the Report of that Conference?

Dr. Barth: We do not live in 1937 any more, but in 1948. The question is put in a new manner, in new circumstances and in a new context today. I cannot admit that it is possible simply to refer to answers given eleven years ago. I cannot admit



either that it is possible to speak about social questions without earnestly taking into consideration this specific issue.

Dr. Van Dusen: Perhaps I may be allowed to say something as Chairman of the Study Committee. I do not quite understand what Dr. Barth means because I think there are many references to money, property, capital and so on in this volume. I think that if you were to take a red pencil and go through the English text you would find each of these words ten or twelve times.

Dr. Barth: To make quite clear what I mean, I would like to say this: when the whole of Christendom meets here for the first time in history, to speak of the question of social order and disorder in the world, then the word of such an assembly should have the quality and profoundness of the Communist manifesto of 1848. It will be by this comparison that the world will weigh up and measure what we say. It is, therefore, insufficient, in my view, that the word "money" occurs twelve times and the word "property" ten times in this volume. What is needed is a fundamental answer to the challenge put before us by Socialism and Communism. What we find in the third volume is only a sociological essay but not a real answer to the problem of Communism. If we do not grasp the seriousness of this challenge our answer will certainly not be heard on the other side i.e. the Socialist and Communist side. Just let me add one word. I did not say and I did not mean that I would be able to give that answer which is needed myself and I am not at all sure that the Church of today is able to do it, but I am quite convinced that if we are to speak on the question of social order we have to give an answer to the problems raised by Socialism and Communism in our time.

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First draft.

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