

188A 15671

Barth Says Man in Perpetual Revolt

By ARTHUR BURTON, Ph.D.

BASLE, Switzerland—In this small, bustling university town, a stones throw from the historic Rhine River, lives Karl Barth.

A short, dark man, with greying hair, he has the intensity of a zealot but the benevolence of a patriarch.

Karl Barth has spent his life studying the meaning and function of God and religion and has been called the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas. For the past 25 years he has been Professor of Theology at the University of Basle and before that held professorships at Bonn, Göttingen, and Münster in Germany.

His most noted work—Christian Dogmatics—is still unfinished even though 10 volumes have been completed. In the United States, Harper and Brothers have just published his "The Word of God and the Word of Man," a collection of his early writings.

At 71 Professor Barth teaches every day and continues work on his "Dogmatics". He mentioned, with a twinkle in his eye, that he had a class of American theological students at the university and that he enjoyed working with them.

We talked about the prevalence of anxiety in Western culture and the suffering and distortions it produced in the life of man. In his earlier writings he said that he considered anxiety a defense against the need for God.

"Man is now in perpetual revolt—and flight—and has good reason to feel anxious. Man knows that he is not on the right road, that is, to God," thus spoke Karl Barth. The manifestations of this conflict are fear and anxiety.

Barth sees a place for psychiatry and psychology but considers it a "small means", with a "larger means" needed. Since hospitals serve a purpose; he accepts psychoanalysis as merely an intermediary form of "hospitalization" in the world.

Barth is critical of formal education today pointing out at the same time that he is a teacher. He said that education is useful if only to prevent "meaner" disasters. It does permit achievements based on knowledge and the importance of knowledge was continually emphasized by him.

(Editor's Note: Dr. Arthur Burton, chief psychologist at nearby Agnews State Hospital, is traveling and teaching in Europe. This is the first of a series of interviews with noted writers, theologians, psychoanalysts, and others on the contemporary problems of mankind.)

Apparently, he sees two forms of knowledge—that of external fact and internal truth. In total, Barth feels that modern education is "like music being played while the ship is sinking."

When I accused him of being a pessimist, he said that to the contrary a Christian could only be an optimist and that he is quite confident about the future of man. The question of optimism or pessimism is really irrelevant for there is no place for such questions in Christian

discourse. God is gracious and All Mighty.

What is missing from current education, he believed, is the "beginning" and the "end;" that is; the goals of education and their fulfillment.

Suffering reminds us that we are not God but creatures with limits to our existence. It is a condition of man and humanity. Suffering is an exercise or proof by which we take up the fight for life. It is in a sense a benediction and means that important work remains yet to be done. The sufferer by his suffering receives a distinction

that no general or politician, let us say, who does not suffer can have.

Barth believes that individual and political morality cannot be separated, but that there is more in the latter than in the former. Individual morality is to be found in the Gospels and in Christ. While there is more religion today than ever before, it is not fundamental in his view and we need a "great breakthrough."

Man has not changed, but Barth looks for the arrival of a new man based upon the Old and New Testament. He sees all human nature in light of the Gospels.

With this we parted and Professor Barth resumed his work on the "Dogmatics."



KARL BARTH
... On Right Road?