

# Karl Barth and his Influence upon Continental Theology of To-day.

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The writer is Professor of Theology in the University of Gronigen, Holland, and is an Old Woodbrooker. His book on Karl Barth, originally written in Dutch, is now being published in a German translation (ed. H. Veenman and Wageningen, Holland). It is hoped that an English edition will follow.

WHO is Karl Barth? Only about ten years ago hardly anybody outside Switzerland had heard the name of that young minister, only well-known in his Swiss mountain parish, Safenwil, as a devoted preacher of the Gospel and a man who deeply suffered under the decline and fall of Western culture during the Great War,—a man who lived among his people like Ibsen's Brand and nearly broke under the weight of that enormously responsible work: to speak the word of God in that critical war-time, in which all human words failed and human certainties showed themselves unreliable. Were his parishioners not hungry after God's Word? And did he, their pastor, not give stones instead of bread Sunday after Sunday, while he preached from the Bible-text and tried to apply his knowledge of academic theology and scientific exegesis in grateful remembrance of Germany's great teachers of modern theology, philosophy of religion, and comparative history of religions? Karl Barth wrestled in that dreadful time of the Great War with the words of the Bible, the book about which he instinctively felt that it kept more in it than his University professors had taught him. Especially in St. Paul's letters Barth was absorbed again and again, and in the study of St. Paul's letter to the Romans he tried to find in the midst of the waves of relativism and disaster and sin his "Blickpunkt" in God, the Alpha and the Omega. Out of a deep agony of this kind the book of Barth was born which became very soon a famous book, the *Römerbrief* (1st edition 1918; 2nd edition 1921, etc., etc.). Especially after the publication of the second edition of this book which appeared in Germany (Kaiser Verlag, München) and showed a further development of Barth's religious insight in such a way that he himself speaks in the preface of a total change of position, Barth began to make a school also far over the frontiers of Switzerland. Nearly every theological discussion on the Continent mentioned his name and book. In Germany the world of theologians and philosophers of religion began to talk about a "Schweizer Bewegung"; in Holland and Scandinavia began the Christian Student World first of all to be enthusiastic for Barth and his fascinating book. From Denmark I even heard lately that the whole Christian Student Movement is nearly on the point of breaking into two sections upon Barth and his "dialectic" theology.

In 1921 Barth was called to Göttingen as a Professor in Dogmatics by the Reformed Alliance (*Reformierte Bund*). In spite of passionate opposition from the side of most official University professors in theology, students flocked thither from all parts of Germany and from

different "faculties" to his lectures and classes. Though not adherents of Barth's fundamental thoughts, the members of the *Evangelisch-theologische Fakultät* in Münster (Westfalen) showed at least appreciation for Barth's work by giving him the doctor's degree in theology first, and some years later the invitation of coming to Münster as a *Professor Ordinarius*. Barth accepted the appointment of the German Government and has lately been teaching Dogmatics and New Testament Theology in Münster University.

Besides his main book, the *Römerbrief* (more than 500 pages), Barth has written several articles and addresses in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, the periodical journal of the young Swiss theologians (ed. Kaiser Verlag, München), a book on 1 Cor. xv.: *die Auferstehung der Toten*; and very lately a treatise on *The Christian life*, stenogram of two lectures given in a Bible Circle for Christian Students in Münster.

What is Barth's fundamental position in the problems of Christianity and modern life? He wishes to be, before all, a theologian, not a philosopher of religion. Barth wants to take the word 'theologian' entirely earnestly. A theologian has to speak about God. But who can speak about God really, truly, unless in the moment of revelation when God sets the theologian in His "vertical" light? True theology presupposes always a knowing subject who has living relationship with God Who knew him first. Barth's theology therefore is, as he likes to say himself, "critical" theology. This expression suggests a comparison with Immanuel Kant and his new position in the realm of philosophic thought. Just as Kant in the problems of philosophy introduced a "kritizismus" with his theory of knowledge, showing that in all true knowledge the relation object-subject in presupposed and that it is impossible to reckon earnestly with this presupposition and remain a dogmatist of whatever Aufklärungstypen you may like to choose, so Karl Barth has introduced in our days a theological "kritizismus" which also means a necessary revolution in the world of all current theology. . . . All theological systems of our time are dogmatist systems full of abstractions, that means the object is "abstracted" from the knowing subject. Ideas pass as on a theatrical scene before our eyes; the theologian speculates as if he can sit quietly and look at his conceptions about God and Christianity; he forgets that he is himself one of the figures of the scene who has to work in his "to be or not to be." This essential thought of Barth is not new truth; on the contrary, it is a very old truth (Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Kierkegaard), but practically forgotten, especially by theologians of our age.

and thirdly, land segregation: more bills must follow as the policy develops.

The rudiments of Colour Bar legislation in South Africa were formed in the time of President Kruger, but in 1896-1898, owing to pressure from Cape Colony, the regulations were somewhat relaxed. In 1903, however, they were stiffened up again, and yet again in 1905-1906, shutting out coloured overseers, "bosses," and surface foremen, etc. Then in 1911 to 1913 came regulation after regulation until as the *Cape Times* said at the time: "Owing to the wide scope and general character of the Regulations affecting coloured persons made since the Union, it is practically impossible to give an exhaustive list of the occupations affected, the general tendency being to make it impossible for coloured persons to hold any position of responsibility." In the same issue of the *Cape Times* a general list was given of the seventeen articles designed to exclude coloured labour from any other than the unskilled trades. Under these articles no native or coloured person could become a banksman, manager, signaller, overseer, surface foreman, foreman of shifts or machine minder.

In 1923 came the historic decision in the Supreme Court of South Africa upholding the decision of the Johannesburg Magistrate in which he declared to be *ultra vires* the regulation in the Transvaal Mining Law. But it soon became clear that the Trade Unions would refuse to acquiesce in the decision of the Supreme Court, and upon the fall of the Smuts Government the "Secessionist"—Trade Union Coalition came into power and a demand was at once made by the white Trade Unions for the passing of a Colour Bar Bill, giving legal force to all that the Supreme Court had declared to be *ultra vires*. The Bill became law in May last, but only by taking the exceptional step of summoning a joint sitting of both Senate and Assembly, thereby securing a majority of 16 in favour of a measure which makes South Africa "Half Slave, Half Free."

General Hertzog, finding himself upon a very slippery slope, has now gone much farther by embarking upon a far-reaching policy of general segregation, which may be divided into a category of five main divisions:—

In the first place, natives of Cape Colony are to be deprived of the franchise; secondly, as a "concession" the natives of the Union are to be allowed to elect seven representatives in the Union House of Assembly, that is, two for each of the Provinces of the Cape, the Transvaal and Natal, and one in the Orange Free State. But these members so chosen must be Europeans appointed in addition to the present Assembly, but precluded from voting upon the question of representation of natives. The third main feature is that the coloured people of the Cape are to be exempted from the proposed disfranchisement. Fourthly, there is to be established a system of Native Councils for the discussion of native legislation. The fifth main feature is the segregation of industries—or the Colour Bar Bill.

The most recent development of this policy of helotry is yet another land Bill, one section of which is indicative of its whole character. This

particular section is designed to drive from the land all natives who are not *registered owners*, into service for the landlord; at the same time it sets up machinery for distributing this landless labour to the Europeans as and when they need it for one year at a time. It will thus be seen that the native may be passed as a kind of chattel from farmer to farmer according to the needs of the farmer. One of the most responsible and highly respected white men in South Africa sums up the position in a private letter in the following striking passage: "South Africa is at the parting of the ways. Although this is not purchase and sale of human beings, it is equivalent to the *Government leasing* them, and this leasing completely justifies our saying 'that the proposals contained in this Bill will mean slavery.' These natives are taken possession of body and soul by the Government, and if this is the case, what temptation is there for the employer to become their legal owner. On the contrary, he will be pleased to find that he has them entirely in his power, while his capital is free for investment in other directions."

The white peoples of the British Empire cannot realise too clearly that the policy of the Colour Bar upon which the Coalition Government of South Africa has embarked, is not merely fatal to ordered progress, but that it is admittedly a violation of definite pledges, agreements and treaties with the native people of Africa made by successive Rulers and Parliaments of Great Britain. Many times throughout our history British Generals after "native wars" and British Statesmen framing Treaties or Settlements have in all sincerity put their signatures to explicit undertakings that neither in legislation nor in administration shall there ever be discrimination against race or creed or colour. If we cannot treat the Indian or the African as a "brother," then surely we must insist that he shall be treated as—a man!

## AN AMERICAN NUMBER.

The December issue of "The World Outlook" (which will appear in THE FRIEND, December 3rd, and will be reprinted as usual for separate circulation) will be devoted almost exclusively to questions particularly affecting America.

It is expected that this issue will include articles by one or two American Friends, including O. Benjamin Gerig, of Boston; and, as well as an unsigned leading article endorsed by the Board, there will be included general articles by John William Graham and A. Winifred Cramp, both recently returned from service of considerable duration in the States.

It has always been the aim of the Board to make "The World Outlook" in fact what it is in name; and towards this end the Board is constantly seeking the active co-operation of Friends resident in other parts of the world.

In view of the widespread and growing co-operation in service, in Europe and elsewhere, between British and American Friends, the Board is particularly anxious to secure full representation of the American point of view in the pages of "The World Outlook."