

Es ist unser aufrichtiger Wunsch und unsere Hoffnung, daß auch durch das vorliegende Werk dem Katechismus neue Türen aufgetan werden.  
Pilger.

## Miscellen

**Zu Barth's Theologie.** Dr. Brünner von Zürich ist zur Zeit in unserem Land und wirbt für seine und Dr. Barth's Theologie. Da ist es am Platz, das Urteil eines Presbyterianers alten Schlags über diese neue Form reformierter Theologie zu hören. F. D. Jenkins schreibt in *The Presbyterian* (21. Febr.) unter der Überschrift "Is the 'Crisis Theology' of Europe Historic Calvinism?" das Folgende:

Bearing the name of Reformed Theology, but more widely known as the Theology of Crisis, a group of five Swiss and German theologians have originated a new religious philosophy with which they intend to bring a "Crisis" into all modern Christian culture, morality and religion on the one hand, and Reformed orthodoxy on the other. Professors Barth, of Muenster, Germany, and Bruenner, of Zurich, Switzerland, are the coryphaei of the movement.

Professor Barth, the founder, is the son of a Calvinist, a former minister, theologian and author of Switzerland. Having engaged in the attempt to socialize Christianity in his parish in Switzerland, Barth finally became through discouragement, convinced of the futility of such an application of the gospel, and found escape from it by experiencing what he termed a "crisis" in his spiritual life, a crisis in which the sovereignty and primacy of God became the new emphasis. Thenceforward arose what Dr. Adolph Keller in the just-appeared work, "Protestant Europe: Its Crisis and Outlook," enthusiastically describes as a "movement of thought" which is "spreading like wildfire throughout the Continent." It is of immense importance because of the power and influence which it is having, especially over large sections of idealistic youth who feel frustrated by the devastating effects of the war." He continues and concludes that for the students it has led to "a genuine spiritual revolution." In what sense this spiritual revolution can be called "genuine," and the movement "important" remains for comment.

The new phenomenon is not at such a stage as to evoke confident predictions of its future domination of Continental Thought, though it is reported that Tuebingen is now rapidly submerging this group of theologians. To the sixty odd students attending the lectures of Barth last year there are over 600 reported at Tuebingen, which has in one year doubled its attendance. Already there exists a feeling in Europe that the high-water mark has been passed.

To emphasize the importance of the *Crisis Theology* with such extensive notice in these columns were hardly justifiable were it not for the fact that it has been taken too seriously by Reformed theologians and that in the literature of the hour it is fairly commonly accepted as Calvinism. The German Reformed Church of America financially sup-

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ported the chair of Professor Barth in Goettingen, and has been in general quite exercised over his theological pros and cons. And the recent lecture tour of Professor Bruenner through America, including the Calvinistic Seminary at Dayton, Ohio, and Princeton Seminary, where two addresses were made and given large attendance, has at least stirred up a certain curiosity. American theological periodicals, for example, The Harvard Theological Review, Crozer Quarterly, and Congregational Quarterly, have given extensive consideration. In Europe, the Reformed theologian, Lange, commends the movement, and before the Pan-Presbyterian World Council of Reformed Churches at Cardiff, enthusiastically declared this new revolution to be a second Reformation. Professor Barth himself was indeed given a place on the program of that convention as a Calvinistic theologian. Professor Lecerf, of the Faculté Protestant in Paris, a leading Calvinist (of the several now left) of France, declares that the movement should be endorsed rather than rejected for its emphasis upon Calvinism. The Methodist Crozer Quarterly for January openly declares that this school "is decidedly Calvinistic in its theological complexion," and that "it is too Calvinistic to suit most Germans," attributing its dubious success in Germany to that rather than to other more obvious and un-Calvinistic facts. Another writer compares Barthianism as the analogue of American "Fundamentalism." Dr. Adolph Keller goes so far also as to say that Barthianism has combined "Fundamentalism" with critical methods, apparently not fully understanding what Fundamentalism is. The Richmond Union Seminary Review in its last issue, in a not unsimilar fashion, has all to uncritically estimated this most extraordinary deflection from Calvinism that has appeared in church history. Rev. Douglas Horton, translator of the only English work of this movement, most incautiously says in his Introduction, "Theologians and historians have variously hailed, challenged, condemned and acclaimed his (Barth's) books because they see in them—in thoroughly modern form, but in all its ancient strength—a resurgence of the *Calvinism of Calvin*" (italics mine).

From modern liberal theology, on the other hand, bitter criticisms have been hurled against Professors Barth and Bruenner. An incisive French theologian, writing in the *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*, vigorously repudiates the system as "un-Biblical," unphilosophical, "destructive" and "pessimistic" and comparable in certain aspects with Buddhism and early Christian Gnosticism. Dr. W. P. Paterson, Professor of Theology, author of the recent Gifford Lectures and formerly head of the Edinburgh University Divinity School, describes the phenomenon as a pronounced "agnosticism" in its theism, something like that of Herbert Spencer, and more comparable to that of the heathen Upanishads of India. Professor Adolph Von Harnack has trenchantly attacked Professor Barth in a polemic duel with him in "The Christian World," a German periodical, where he stamps this theology as a revival of ancient Gnosticism.

From the side of genuine Calvinism the most telling repulses have

come from "The Reformation," an organ of the conservative Holland Calvinists who have fought its entree into Calvinistic circles there where it attempted through the writings of Haitjema to masquerade in the clothes of Calvinism. Thus repudiated in general by all Protestant thought, the Crisis Theology is unmercifully ground between the upper and nether millstone of orthodoxy and liberalism in particular.

At the very same time it must be thoroughly understood that interest in, and very limited endorsement of Crisis Theology have come from liberals. Professor Lange, of Halle, speaker at the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance, says Barth is "the greatest theologian since Schleiermacher." Count Keyserling declared that Barth is the "one hope" of Protestantism. Dr. Adolph Keller, a liberal leader of the European Reformed Church, rejoices in "the entire liberty to use modern critical methods" which this movement brings to the Reformed theology. It is "thus able to liberate orthodoxy from its fear of betraying the revelation in the Gospel by use of critical methods applied to its historical expression" (The Congregational Quarterly, January, 1928). Prof. H. R. Mackintosh, in The Expository Times, as so many seem interested in doing, gives a careful exposition of Crisis Theology, without either attaching himself to it or outrightly repudiating it on a four-square Calvinistic basis. Another liberal declares that Barth "saved" Protestantism in Europe. Dr. Richards, professor of the Reformed Seminary of Lancaster, Pa., is reported to be endorsing Bruenner. The liberal Congregational minister who translated Barth's "Word of God" eulogizes to the effect that "people have heard Professor Barth gladly because he seems to understand their inner needs." Lovers of speculation and rejectors of predestination, plenary inspiration, the substitutionary atonement, theological system and pure historic Calvinism alike, choose to worship at this altar of such strange fire.

The strenuous attack of Crisis Theology against Modernism has misled a large part of the theological world, including Calvinists. There has never come forth from the Continent a more trenchant single assault against modern art, aesthetics, general culture, science, evolutionism, psychology of religion, humanism, naturalism, history of religions, mysticism, and experiential theology. So fiery and vigorous is it, and so much to the forefront, that a fairly deceptive appearance has been given to this theology of being more conservative than it really is.

There is indeed no doubt that it has actually arrested in a most solemn and revolutionary manner the humanizing bent of Protestant theology universally current in Europe since Schleiermacher. And Calvinistic orthodoxy in general arrays itself against the same general aspects of modernity. But unfortunately the heavy ordnance of Crisis Theology has a back-fire: the attack is as remorseless against orthodoxy itself. And the polemic against modernism discloses when the smoke of barrage is cleared away, only a pyrrhic victory for Calvinism. Dr. Abraham Kuyper once styled Modernism a *fata morgana*—a mirage like that seen by the Sicilian mariners. The Crisis Theology would agree,

but go one further than Kuyper, and define the theology of Calvinism as in many respects an equal mirage. "Whoever speaks of God," says Professor Barth, in the "Dogmatik," his latest work, "asserts therewith a fact which, viewed from the world, must be taken as a perhaps beautiful but certainly very unpractical dream." Those who heard in his Princeton Seminary lectures the denunciation of modern theology by Bruenner, were eye-witnesses of this subtly paradoxical attack against the "rigid forms" of orthodox doctrine. Lo, the dialectic! The essence and genius of the Crisis Theology lies in its being what we might call a "universal negative" to all human thought and belief, systems and ideas as such. In so doing, it offers cold comfort to the Calvinist who momentarily rejoices when it negatives modernism. Behind this series of "Everlasting Nays" resides the easily-detected nihilism, the "hidden God" who can never be confidently conceived or experienced. The liberal therefore may as well, indeed more profitably, exult in their indiscriminately directed negations as the orthodox. Barth somewhere alleges that he can stand side by side with every Protestant and Romish system of theology, and say: "You are right—that is, with the disquieting proviso that you, too, are wrong."

In his book, "The Word of God," Professor Barth gives a chapter to "The Reformed Doctrine, Its Nature and Task." "Why and in what sense are we Reformed?" he asks. He rejects the Calvinism which is traditional and ecclesiastical, which says, I am Reformed because Calvin and Zwingli are *my* and *our* fathers. On the other hand, he rightly rejects the most modern extreme of Calvinism "whose shibboleth is piety" and recognizes only the religion and ethics of Calvin. Then he gives the view of Calvinism, which maintains all of the teachings, the church government, and the ethics of the great Reformer, as for example is pre-eminently done in our own Presbyterian Confession and communion. But this type is likewise rejected upon the chief ground that it is too complex, i. e., contains too many ideas and formulas. Calvinism is "not the correctness of a formula, and not the systematization of a whole," it is not an "idea," a "principle," a "doctrine." "It is simply God: not concepts of God, but God himself as given through the Scripture and the Spirit." But if Calvinism is simply the God of Calvinism and not any definite idea or doctrine about such a God, what is left? It is a "hidden and terrible God," he says, later on. A God who can be ventured only as the "Origin" and "Source" of all thought and systems, but who is himself unknowable. With Calvin he would assert the absolute sovereignty and majesty of God, but what even this means is not clear. God remains, in Barth's writings, the "Totally Other One," an eternal "Question," a "Possibility" for thought and experience, but at the same time a strictly "Impossible Possibility," a "Presupposition," a dark and concealed "Background," which (as Bruenner at Princeton put it) stands in flat and diametric contradiction to our present world with its creaturely humanity. "A church lives not on truths, even be they ever so many, so deep and

vital, but on *the* truth," namely, this speculative notion of God. Barth and Bruenner begin and end their whole train of thought, with the abstract idea of God. It is woven through every idea presented. In this characteristic of God-centeredness lies claim to be truly Reformed. However, not only the attributes of wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth are repudiated, but even the essential being of God as defined by traditional metaphysics. Deity is, for all practical purposes, stripped to bare existence.

With this abstract, inaccessible, and very grim God-idea before us, it is immediately apparent what the rest of this novel system must be. It must explain away the revelation of the entire Scripture, either by discarding Scripture entirely; or, less openly, by retaining it and its terms, using them as convenient symbols and figures to denote the one and only Principle of theology.

The latter method is chosen. Professor Bruenner writes a large work on "The Mediator," in which it becomes apparent that behind the subtle stimulations of Biblical and theological terms there is no Jesus of Nazareth at all in the commonly accepted historic sense. We cannot find his divinity in his person, moral character or in his teachings and example. As Barth puts it, "Jesus has simply nothing to do with religion." Bruenner is still stronger on this point, though it is apparent that it is the *religiosity* of the liberal who too intimately experiences and portrays a humanized Jesus which the Crisis Theologians have chiefly in mind. Jesus is only a symbol of the mysterious dogma that truth lies ultimately outside of and above history, and touches it only as a tangent to a circle. His distinction and revelation of God consists in his abstract "once-ness," and the finality of the "decision" with which he confronts every human creature. The significance of the Mediator lies in the fact that he revealed that God cannot and must not be known by any mortal.

Truly, we have one great resort remaining to us, namely, "faith." And faith is for this whole group the sole means of salvation, the center of the Christian message. But what is "faith"? we inquire. It is an abject "not-knowing"—as it has been styled, a "vacuum," and one in which there is no possibility of normal religious respiration. For it is the supreme other-worldly act of throwing the soul upon the "Will" (unknown will) of the quality-less "hidden background," a resort in which there can be no confident feeling or thinking when reduced to its ultimate analysis. The supreme event in the Christian life is the moment of "crisis," or of "decision," when through this act of faith, a divine despair descends upon the inquiring soul and lays low its human pride, reason, "will to live," nay, its to us most rightful intellectual self-respect.

We betake ourselves to the climax of the Redeemer's work, the crucifixion. This, we are given to understand, is the supreme revelation of God to the race. But here again we are baffled with the same cryptic reply, that the crucifixion is not in its inner meaning an his-

torical event, though forsooth, the event happened in history. Here there appears the radical cleft which Crisis Theology makes between history, humanity and the world on the one hand, and God, the all-unknowable, on the other. The death of Christ, the outstretched hand on the cross, merely point us to this eternal or totally other world, to the "hidden God" whose righteousness cannot be transmitted to his aeon and this creaturely race. The despairing cry of dereliction, renunciation of the life of this world, of self-sufficiency and spiritual complacency is the highest meaning of the Atonement. It does not make satisfaction to justice for human guilt. It marks the death and finale of all human morals, history and religion. From it we learn the abstract symbolic truth that man must die to self in order to live. Of Calvin's substitutionary atonement we hear nothing.

Or what of the Resurrection? "The Resurrection of Christ is no historical event," it is reiterated in the same minor mode. *In* history it is not *of* it—to use Barth's distinction. "Resurrection is eternity!" It is the in-breaking of the "new world"—by which is meant the invisible, "totally other" world—that is, "the meaning of Easter" ("The Word of God," page 95). In quality, the "new world" is indescribably different from that of this world. But what it is, we are never given by Barth to thoroughly understand. The conception is purposely left incomplete. And so it is that each event in the process of salvation conducts the thwarted religious aspiration directly and unwillingly into this supra-mundane sphere where only clouds and darkness are made to surround the Almighty throne.

Did space permit, it might be shown how on every other fundamental doctrine of our system, Barth specifically attacks Calvin and Reformed "orthodoxy," by name as well as by thought. For example, the doctrines of "verbal inspiration" (pages 344 and 358 of the "Dogmatik"), Biblical infallibility and revelation are dissolved away. The species, unremitting emphasis on the Word of God when exposed reveals only mystery. The Bible is only the "word of God's Word." Predestination is repudiated (page 40). Sin is fundamentally finiteness of nature given a quasi-ethical turn. Man is born to be condemned, and condemned because he is born. Regeneration (page 29) and justification (pages 122, 197) follow suit.

Further refinements are not required to evince the impossibility of such a Calvinism, as necessary as they may be for deeper interpretation of the intricacies of their thought. A few concluding points will summarize its consequences.

1. Man is thoroughly determined by this transcendent Unknown God to whom personality, attributes and even being cannot be safely ascribed. God can know and act upon man, but the reverse of this is never true. God is only a "subject," never an "object" of human thought and action. This religious philosophy may, therefore, justly be termed a form of fatalism. Fatalism differs from predestination chiefly in denying the personality of God. But, we are halted. Crisis theo-

logians affirm the personality of God. Dr. Bruenner did so at Princeton. However, let us quote his very words: "God is the mysterious and Unknown One, for he is personal, that is, secret, mysterious." We do not allow such trifling with inviolable traditional philosophical usage. Ever since Sir William Hamilton and Robert Flint, we have learned to equate personality with knowability, and unknowability with impersonality. Several sentences further on, Dr. Bruenner affirmed that "Revelation is the entering into the world of God's will, which has not and cannot be known." Is this personality, we ask, or abysmal skepticism? Such an unclothed "Will" is a menace to the world which it enters: a "crisis" or "decision" imposed upon any individual by such a causality is what theology calls fatalism. Let not the dialectical quibbling and equivocating over a term of such good conventional standing as "personality" deceive the inquirer.

2. Though claiming to revive Pauline and Augustinian theology as their distinguishing characteristic, this type of thought can with much force be called pagan. Dr. Bruenner at Princeton declared the orthodox view of a miraculous theophany (held at Princeton), wherein God was directly met and manifested, sheer "paganism." He therein seized a two-edged sword. Since this distasteful term was employed, it might with potency be employed in a retroactive direction. Dr. Bruenner's idea of God is capable of coming out of the very heart of Africa, or as Dr. W. P. Paterson says, from the heathen Upansheds of India.

3. The school places the doctrine of God supremely first. "There is only *one* question which is wholly a serious one: the question of God. For out of it every other acquires its meaning and its importance. It is for every period and every man the decisive question." So Bruenner begins his latest and largest work. But God is utterly "Incognito," the "Silent" one, despite all dialectic vacillations. We are virtually limited to "existential thinking" regarding him. It follows with inevitable consequence that the whole system of theological ideas and Biblical truths and sacred historical events constitute a train of illusionism. Sacred history is a pantomime of religious symbols and silent gestures where nothing is known or understood except that we cannot ultimately know and understand, and therewith give honor to the hidden "Origin." The Scriptural and doctrinal language of orthodoxy is invested on an imposing scale with hidden and very unfamiliar meanings. Behind precious Biblical terms, *volens volens*, we can hear only the jargon of paganism. The Biblical realism is denominated "a crude, brutal, theatrical spectacle." Bruenner's work, "The Mediator," and Barth's "Epistle to the Romans," constitute the most aggressive deception that has in recent time been imposed upon the theological world.

4. Preaching is futile. Though nothing is more emphasized than this duty, Professor Barth decries its ultimate possibility from his own view-point. Two truths confront us, he says, (a) "That we should

speak of God": (b) that "we cannot." "We should know both, the necessity, and the impossibility of our task."

5. Christian ethics is very difficult to maintain. Here every school of theology joins to give their most telling invective. (See Dr. Keller, in *The Expositor*, March, 1925). Conduct is reduced to the task of escaping from this world and human endeavor by means of this very un-Biblical doctrine of "crisis" whereby we yield ourselves in an abject other-worldly fashion, and with heads bowed, into the hands of the unknown "Origin" of all things. Good works are an offense to God. We are known and acted upon by God, but never is the converse true. Submission, not action letting God speak and not conversely, is the role of man. We are, said Dr. Bruenner at Princeton, mere "outsiders" to the divine knowledge, being and actions. "From man there proceeds no way upward to that which he seeks, to God, neither the way of knowledge nor of actual being."

6. Similarly the Church's great task of education is clearly unjustifiable. All definite theological knowledge, except the knowledge that we can not know, is "insolence" to God. For all doctrinal and Biblical data keep leading us on as by an *ignis fatuus* to the abstract incomprehensible "Presupposition" behind and beyond, before and after. Professor Barth himself, in his latest book, claims to be only a theological "beginner" and pretends to no "system." I have only a "standing-point," I have no "solution" is his trite expression. Bruenner still more emphatically expresses it. He deplores thinking and systems which are "finished." Barth is constantly changing his own emphases and does not exempt his own system from the danger of becoming passé. Further, the dialectic method which keeps balancing the positive and negative aspects of every truth can produce only constant intellectual turmoil, unsettlement and indecision of judgment—less favorably stated, a skeptical attitude.

7. Creeds, confessions and doctrines are hardly longer tenable. Though paradoxically maintaining that we should not discard our present creeds, with their content, the Crisis Theology summarily empties them of their traditional meaning and substitutes for them the magisterial authority of their grim minatory dogma of God. Barth professes to merely make a marginal comment on creeds. Thinking wholesomely to amend creeds in a confusion of thought, he ends them. He mistakenly regards his "standpoint" as being behind all creeds, not contradictory to them. The fact is that it displeases them.

8. The Gospel is simple and directed to the plainest man. The Crisis Theology can be directed only to religious philosophers, to the intelligentsia, and even to such the learned philosophemes and theologoumena are hardly within reach.

Einstein once said that no one in the world understood him. Barth voices a similar complaint. Is this a foil or a fact? The universal charge against him of agnosticism, for example, is repudiated as unfair. With a deliberately paradoxical method of theology, a roving



unsystematic style, and a tendency to change opinions and emphases at liberty, and finally with an unconventional and figurative, almost cabalistic employment of terms the burden of proof cannot lie entirely upon the theological world which so generally fails to comprehend him.

One of the commonest misapprehensions frequently heard (endorsed by Professor Julicher, for example) is that this theology is a mysticism. A whole book has been written on this subject. But nothing is so inveighed against by Barthians, though indeed, in their other-worldly attitude, their passivity, and antiethical implications analogies do exist. Another fallacy is that this theology presents a wholesome emphasis on faith for an age of reason. Remarks have already demonstrated the utter vacuousness of this faith (it is called a "shell-hole" or "shell-crater"). The basis of faith in knowledge, will and feeling, as defined by Calvinism is rejected. It is rather, therefore, an obscurantism, a pious willingness to be unintelligent, unhistorical, and rationally bewildered.

In conclusion, we confront here, despite Barth's repudiation of the charge, an outstanding expression of the post-war pessimism which has made its pathetic traces upon continental literature and life for some time. A human despair and a sighing of tragic sadness which jealously seek refuge in Christian ideas lies at the root of this theological disaffection. The "Literarischer Jahresbericht" of Germany not ineptly called this mooted "Calvinism," a "desperado-theology." What European theology needs is not a "crisis," but a Biblical "re-birth" through the overturning operations of the Almighty Spirit of God.

In the meantime, where is historic Calvinism? we ask. Where is the faith and thought of John Calvin and John Knox? Of Beza and Turretin? History has been recording with an all too precise hand, the slow fading of pure Calvinism from the face of the earth. It was the moribund condition of his inherited Reformed religion that drove Barth to hurl his "Crisis"-challenging philippics at it. His eye was keen to the corruption and the need. In Germany, Switzerland, France, England, Wales, Scotland, and New England, the rugged Calvinistic churches which thrived of yore have become virtually lost in antiquity or blended into the enervating spirit of the age. Numerically small groups in academic circles still remain in Holland, Scotland, Canada and America. And the impure Calvinism of American Presbyterianism is threatened with absorption into Protestant Pan-union. At this very hour, the vigorous and characteristic doctrinal interest of historic Presbyterianism has become attenuated into "evangelism" and its discouraging minimum of "essential" doctrines. The vast remaining system which marks the distinctiveness of Presbyterian theology has for the time being been retired into the background. What is needed is a revival of doctrine, with which the widely expected revival of religion will be made possible.

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