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BARTH IS EXTOLLED FOR DEFYING NAZIS

Cadman and Leiper Liken the
Dismissed Bonn Professor
to Calvin and Knox.

DERIDED 'ARYAN' THEORIES

His Removal Is Regarded as
Giving Him New Scope for
Expressing Opposition.

By Dr. S. PARKES CADMAN and
Dr. HENRY SMITH LEIPER.

It is highly probable that the average reader found nothing particularly surprising in the simple announcement a few days ago that a professor of theology in a German university had refused to sign an oath of personal allegiance to Hitler and for his refusal had been dismissed. The news in October of 1937 that a young German priest had nailed some statements about theology on a church door in Wittenberg probably did not seem exciting to the people of that day.

To assert that there is a direct parallel between the two events would be going too far, since only history can adequately assess the permanent significance of Professor Karl Barth's dismissal from the University of Bonn. Its repercussions, however, can only be appreciated by one who knows the extent to which his name has been identified with a vigorous and widely influential new school of thought.

Annoying to the Nazis.

The Nazi régime was anxious to find a way to get rid of this annoying theologian who said "absolutely no" to the commands of the Nazi State in church affairs. Indeed, it was extremely provoking to have a man of eminence, whose lectures were attended by 500 enthusiastic students daily, saying to the Nazi theory:

"It has no abiding place in the Evangelical Church. If it prevails it will be the end of the Christian church. Better that the church be reduced to a small company and go back to the catacombs."

In particular the Reich Bishop squirmed under his fearless onslaught, for Barth announced that the Nazi principle of leadership or dictatorship in the church was "pure and simple nonsense." Reich Bishop Mueller's reiteration of the necessity for Aryanizing the church met the response:

"The fellowship of the church is not through blood and not through race. If the German Evangelical Church excludes the Jewish Scriptures or regards them as of secondary importance it ceases to be a Christian church."

Began Preaching in 1909.

Curiously enough, this modern successor to the great reformers has been placed by circumstances in various dramatic settings. His first preaching, when he was an assistant to Dr. Adolf Keller in the Reformed Church in Geneva, was in the Auditoire in 1909. There John Calvin thundered forth his pronouncements and John Knox, who later reproved Mary Queen of Scots, moved the multitude to tears. Little did the hearers of Karl Barth in those pre-war days dream that he would come to occupy a place reminiscent of Calvin and Knox. What he has said to Hitler differs only in minor points from what Knox said to Mary.

Despite Barth's Swiss background and citizenship, he has been thought of as the intellectual and spiritual leader of the church opposition in Germany, his adopted land, where he took out naturalization papers. After teaching at Goettingen and Muenster, he was called to Bonn, where in recent years his most famous lecturing has been done.

But even more important has been the dissemination of his personal influence through the great company of students from Germany and from lands beyond the sea who have sat at his feet. His style is dynamic and his intellectual power of such magnetic quality that, despite his customary use of notes, his lectures are jammed. Whenever he preaches in the university chapel every seat is taken and people stand four or five abreast in the aisles. This in spite of the fact that his sermons are over an hour long and read from manuscript.

Liberal on Biblical Criticism.

His particular concern from first to last has been the absoluteness of the Divine in history and in man's experience. Although he has often been called a fundamentalist, the term is in no way descriptive of his thought. He is a liberal in his acceptance of biblical criticism and of the historical method in dealing with religious literature, the Bible included.

But he insists, as did the great reformers of the sixteenth century, that man's only source of authoritative knowledge concerning the inward nature and implications of the Christian faith is the Word of God. This he does not define in a narrow, literal manner. Rather it is the inner voice speaking to the con-

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science of man as he studies the spiritual autobiographies recorded in the Scriptures.

This central interest of Karl Barth has been reflected in all his writings, beginning with his first book, "The Epistle to the Romans," and has been reflected particularly in the first of his works translated into English in this country, "The Word of God."

Hitler is, of course, correct when he says that to the average man in the street the sort of thing that Barth talks about in his lectures is unintelligible, but it is not unintelligible to the trained mind, particularly the mind versed in philosophy and awake to the deeper implications of the business of living.

Insisted on Reservation.

It is from this deep source of inner conviction that Barth has derived the courage to open the eyes of Germany to what Hitlerism is at heart—a philosophy of racialism, State absolutism, militarism and intellectual obscurantism. He has refused to sign an oath of loyalty to the head of this new State unless allowed to add the qualifying phrase "so far as I can as an evangelical Christian."

In this connection, however, it is necessary to point out that Barth's essential leadership of the opposition in the church is not to be regarded as implying complete agreement on the part of the protesting pastors with his theological position.

The consequences of what has now happened are beyond confident prediction. It may even be that the volume of support for Barth in Germany will bring about a reconsideration of his dismissal. On the other hand, the government has been able to create a situation in which even the support for Barth is divided by reason of debate over the meaning of the oath that he refused to sign but which many thoroughly Christian professors have found it possible to sign.

New Freedom for Him.

Barth in exile from Germany will not be "a man without a country," and in his homeland, Switzerland, speaking and writing in German, he will have a freedom that he has not been able to exercise within Nazidom. The leadership that he has exercised will hardly terminate with this change in his relations to German academic life, and the degree to which he can be regarded as a martyr for his convictions may determine the increase of his power over German hearts. On the other hand, it is necessary to say that with nationalism running wild, the fact of his being a Swiss may be used to create the impression that after all his attitudes and actions are not of particular consequence to Germans.

Looking at it from across the sea, we may be, and probably are, prevented from reading aright the contemporary reaction to Barth's removal. But we are not prevented from seeing in it, as a large body of German opinion will see in it, an indication of the logical consequences of State totalitarianism pressed against the loyalty and conviction of the religious man. What happened the other day on the Rhine at Bonn may well go down in history as another dramatic demonstration of the Christian conviction born of the Hebrew prophecy that "we must obey God rather than man."

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