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THE NEW BARTH¹

OBSERVATIONS ON KARL BARTH'S *Doctrine of Man*

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THE sixth volume of the Basel theologian's monumental *Dogmatics* (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 2) is not only, like the earlier volumes, a significant work, but like the fifth, and even more than it a work full of surprises. I have no hesitation in associating myself with the judgment of my Danish colleague Prenter,² who calls it "the culmination so far of the whole powerful work". Barth devotes several pages of this volume to a notable discussion of my own anthropology, published fifteen years ago (*Man in Revolt*). In it he puts to me the question whether we mean the same thing or not (p. 155 ff.). There arises thus for me not merely the occasion but also the necessity of abandoning our mutual practice of not reviewing one another's works. The following pages are not intended to provide a survey of the whole work but only to bring out some specially important points. Naturally, then, they will be fully understood only by those who have some knowledge of both works. I have already given a brief affirmative reply to Barth's question in the second volume of my own *Dogmatics* (p. 95) after a hasty glance through his *Doctrine of Man* which came into my hands only after the completion of my own MS., but feel myself now obliged to state more precisely the reasons for this assent and to add some qualifications.

To begin with here is the impression left on me by the book as a whole: that the reader who previously thought he had some idea of what Barth taught and what he attacked, will pass from one surprise to another. Such readers as still remember Barth's *No! Answer to Emil Brunner*, whatever side they took in that controversy, will be more or less perplexed when faced by the new theses of Barth. Here are a few propositions chosen at random as a sample of them: "There is a human nature unaltered and unalterable even by sin" (p. 50), "a similarity be-

¹ Translated by Rev. John C. Campbell, B.D., Dunnottar Manse, Stonehaven.

² *Theologische Zeitschrift*, Basel, May 1950, p. 215.

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tween the (divine) determination of man and his human nature which can be neither lost nor destroyed" (p. 245). The creature "is not changed into something else by the Fall" (p. 330). One should not be unduly concerned "lest too little credit be left to the grace of God, if so much is conceded to human nature" (p. 333). It is wrong "to think you can exalt the grace of God more highly by representing man as a page written as badly as can be or at best not at all". On the contrary, "we must assume some common humanity between Christian and non-Christian" (p. 336), and therefore "one ought not to stand up in the pulpit and denounce as downright bad what amid all evil is still one's own manhood" (p. 336). There is between Greek, pagan and Christian humanity "a common bond" (p. 341) and therefore "the witch-hunt against Greek culture noticeable in our theology for decades is no good thing" (p. 341).

Is it Karl Barth who wrote these things? Indeed it is: not however the Barth of 1934, but of 1948—the new Barth.

II

Do we now really mean the same thing? At least we have come a great deal closer to one another. I will now proceed to select some central points which we are together in maintaining and then I shall be able to put some questions of my own to Barth. Let us first bear common testimony to one thing: that we have both made a really honest effort to understand one another. In the case of Barth this is difficult not only on account of the colossal range of his work, not only owing to his often difficult style, but above all because he appears to be making so many contradictory statements. But as a matter of fact this is just the very impression that the development of my own thought seems to make on Barth (p. 153). Again and again it has occurred to me that you understand Barth best when you take him not so much as a systematic theologian but as one who has first one insight and then another which he puts into words as they come, without worrying whether they fit closely together in a system. Barth himself will surely not contest the fact that what stands in this sixth volume is in contradiction to much that was said in earlier volumes. For disciples who like to swear by the Master's doctrine this is rather inconvenient and it could easily happen to them to be

found invoking the Master in defence of positions which he himself had long ago abandoned. In Barth, however, this is a sign of spiritual vitality and ample freedom.

Here are the main points of doctrine common to both of us:

(1) As Christian anthropology the doctrine of man must take as its point of departure the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. (This is of course the case in every other Christian doctrine.)

(2) The main theme of this doctrine is that which deals with the image of God, knowable for us only in Jesus Christ and of the relation between this image and real man, i.e. man as he actually exists.

(3) Likeness to God is the nature of man as God's creature in relation to which sin stands in a contradiction which is incomprehensible but on no account inherent in that nature.

(4) In spite of sin creaturely being, the God-created nature of man, is not simply extinguished or annihilated, but concealed and obscured or—as I would prefer to say—perverted. This creaturely being appears in the constituent elements of human nature.

(5) Being in the image of God is to be understood as *analogia relationis*. (This expression derives from Barth, the concept however is already to be found as the basic idea of my own book *Man in Revolt*.)

(6) This human nature "surviving" in spite of sin is a *continuum* which is not to be denied or belittled as much as possible with a view to the greater glory of restoring grace.

(7) The I-Thou relationship which gives the formula for humanity is to be conceived as existence in the Word of God, Creator and Giver and likewise Lord of Life.

This is a very incomplete inventory of our points of agreement, but it may be taken to contain the most important elements. But as Barth in the course of his detailed interpretation of these theses finds occasion to put some questions to me so I in turn have some questions for him.

III

I. I fail to understand how Barth can be in doubt as to whether what I say about man as God's creature may not perhaps have the meaning of a mere potentiality and therefore

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a neutrality as well. Surely the very title of my book *Man in Revolt*, i.e. man existing in a state of contradiction to his created being, says quite clearly the contrary. To my mind the position is the reverse for I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that "real man" which is the leading idea of the Barthian anthropology may mean something that is irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of sin. This concept of "real man" is the particular crux of the reader attempting an interpretation.

One supposes one has grasped what is meant; real man is identical with the God-created, creaturely nature of man. So it is said that Jesus, as man according to the will of God, is "real man". "Real" here seems thus not to have its usual meaning but rather what we would express by the word "true man". So a little further on it is said that the sinner—and according to our usage that would be real man—is man who has "missed his reality" (p. 112). One can "let slip one's reality" (p. 225). One can "become beside oneself or one's reality" (p. 244). As sin is not creative it is merely a calling into question of real man, of "man's determination" (p. 246). Then elsewhere stress is laid on the fact that we are concerned with the "realistic portrait of real man", with the portrait of "man accepted of Christ, whom God is for, since the man Jesus is for him" (p. 317). But surely it is the sinner that God is "for", for the man we actually are as sinners. In this case real man cannot be man of God's good creation. In a later context, indeed, there crops up the concept of "real, natural man" (p. 337). Such statements are scattered here and there. At one moment real man is man who fulfils the purpose of God in creation. At another moment real man is man as he in fact exists, i.e. sinful man who as such does indeed not answer yes to God's determination.

I can best understand this curious concept of real man with the help of the comparison of "phenomena of human nature" as they appear to science, ethical idealism and to the existentialism of a man like Jaspers, which however, as Barth rightly says, do not penetrate the mystery of man. This part (pp. 82-157) is one of the clearest and most original of the whole work. It shows that Barth has seriously accepted all that is implied in discussion with current thought (what I used to call *eristics*) and has carried it out with care and astonishing breadth of mind. He does justice to them all—science, idealism, the exis-

tentialism of Jaspers. They all see something of man, in fact, "phenomena of human nature", but not man himself, real man. For they do not penetrate to the real mystery of man which indeed can only be known from revelation. Here perhaps is expressed the primary meaning of this otherwise ambiguous concept of "real man".

2. For anyone who could not share the hitherto negative attitude of Barth to all humanism one of the most surprising and welcome things in the book is surely the way in which the I-Thou relationships between God and man and between man and man are related to one another. Naturally I too rejoice at this assent to one of the leading ideas of my own anthropology. Between these two I-Thou relationships there exists, says Barth, an analogy, that is an *analogia relationis*. Very good. But when Barth goes on to stress repeatedly the fact that man has his *being* in this relationship, that it is an ontological determination that we are here concerned with, the conclusion, which Prenter too indicates in his review (op. cit., p. 221) becomes inevitable, that such being the case the *analogia relationis* becomes an *analogia entis*. Of course this does not mean the neo-platonic *analogia entis* which since Bonaventura has made its home in Roman Catholic theology, which I have always joined with Barth in refuting, but a different one. For all that the *analogia relationis* is indeed an *analogia entis*, just because it refers to man's *being*, is, as Barth himself says, an ontological determination. The arguments which Barth produces (p. 262) against this consequence are not sound. For an *analogia entis* too—even in the Roman Catholic sense—always has as its primary presupposition that God's being and man's being are unlike, as *esse a se* and *esse a deo* are unlike. It is an analogy between things basically different, namely between divine independent, and creaturely dependent, being.

3. The pleasant surprise provided by Barth's doctrine of humanity is as great. That human nature, humanity, consists in togetherness, that every anthropology that takes the solitary ego as its point of departure is fundamentally inhuman, these are all insights that came first from Ferdinand Ebner, secondly from Martin Buber and which Friederich Gogarten and myself as well have made familiar to theology. (Reasons why Feuerbach can hardly be seriously considered in this respect are set

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forth by me in *Revelation and Reason*, p. 244.) Now that this doctrine of the essential togetherness of man has been taken up by Barth it will doubtless acquire greater cogency, and all the more so since he produces new aspects of it from the Bible. Starting from this point Barth arrives at a new positive valuation of the concept of human nature and this is the point at which as a matter of course will set in the resistance of those Lutherans who cannot break away from the negative formulations of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

As a matter of fact statements are made in this context which appear questionable even to me and to others who apart from that are only too pleased with Barth's new humanism. Certainly "the relation to God is a . . . necessary and constant determination of his nature", and "there can be no question of a concept of man in which the concept of God is not co-positated" (p. 84). The nature of man must be conceived as a nature "that stands fundamentally in some kind of relation (!) to God" (p. 83). For this reason, "the determination of man as God's creature is unambiguously and exclusively his determination to positive partnership" in the covenant of God and in no wise a neutral freedom of choice. When Barth asks me if this is my meaning too I can with good reason answer yes. But when he goes on to say that the fact that man participates in the grace of God is something primary that nothing subsequent (i.e. no sin) can alter (p. 238), although he has broken the covenant man cannot thereby annul it (p. 243), he can indeed sin but only within the covenant, and man remains even as sinner partaker of the grace of God—these are formulations that I cannot pass by without asking serious counter-questions. It is certainly legitimate to make such statements—not however from one's knowledge of creation but solely and alone from knowledge of reconciliation. What is to be said in the first place according to Scripture is surely just this: Sinful man has as such no longer any part in the covenant of grace; he is no longer within the covenant; he has fallen away from the covenant and only through the redeeming word and work of Christ, which is a different thing from the work of creation can he be "restored" again to participation in the covenant.

Is not this what has happened between 1934 and 1948, that then Barth in his preoccupation with saving grace ignored the

grace of creation, whilst now he seems to be inclined to identify saving grace and the grace of creation, to let the former be merged in the latter?

4. Closely allied to this is the doctrine of freedom and its relation to sin. Whilst the Reformers took over all the distinctions of Augustine which state that of God-created man we can predicate, *posse non peccare* but of perfect, redeemed man alone, *non posse peccare*, Barth boldly decrees that real man, i.e. God-created man possesses not only the *posse non peccare* but also the *non posse peccare* (p. 235). He cannot sin. Sin is, as we are repeatedly told, an "ontological impossibility". These words mean not only that sin is an incomprehensible monstrosity—as in fact it is—but that it is something that cannot happen. If it is an ontological impossibility then it cannot ever have been, cannot now be and never will be possible for sin to happen. That is the meaning of the concept of ontological impossibility and that is what Augustine says about the state of fully redeemed man. Even Barth, however, has to recognise that sin does happen, that it is the actual condition of us all. How is this "*power to break the covenant*", this "*power to become beside one's reality*" to be related to the *impossibility* of doing so? Are we to suppose that for Barth the solution lies in the idea that sin is not a reality at all but mere nothingness, a kind of non-being? Often in this volume and even more so in the latest—the seventh volume—we are reminded of this conception. But even so there remains the contradiction that at one time sin is called an ontological impossibility—it cannot happen, and on the other hand it has to be conceded that we are sinners, that the Fall could happen, that this incomprehensible monstrosity does happen.

Perhaps there is involved in this an ambiguous use of the word "determination" which enables us to pass over the existing contradiction as if it was not there. Of course, even when he sins, the sinner cannot lose his determination which is part of his created being. But then determination is something that stands in contradiction to reality. This is actually the thesis of my book and one for which I apparently incur Barth's disapproval. In Barth too one can read such statements as these: "Man determined by God for life with God" (p. 242); "Man understood in the light of that for which he was created" (p. 243). But opposed to all this are all these other statements

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which obviously mean a great deal to Barth, such as that real man really does the will of God, really hearkens to His Word, really gives thanks to God and loves his neighbour (p. 208 ff.). Further this very man as part of creation is that *continuum* which cannot be annulled even by sin. Here I must declare the bankruptcy of my power to understand. Either "real man" means man whom Jesus Christ delivers, man that is who is not doing the will of God, or else this "real man" is not the man we in fact are.

5. This new way of envisaging man from the standpoint of creation leads to a further surprise. Barth now recognises a quality of humanity (*humanum*) that can be apprehended even by non-Christians, at least by the "wiser among the wise of this world" (p. 335). "It is possible that what we called the mystery of humanity might be realised and apprehended in some degree of perfection or imperfection even in quarters where there can be no question of direct perception and apprehension of Jesus Christ" (p. 332). In this matter of humanity we are concerned with "an object that has also been the object of secular wisdom, that is of a wisdom that is not grounded in Christian insights and principles" (p. 334). "One may also without any qualms rejoice to find oneself in a measure of agreement with the wise of this world" (p. 334). The Christian conception of humanity is "confirmed" by the Greek one (p. 342). Indeed "science and the Bible may together reach the same result" (p. 346). We find in fact a doctrine of the order of creation—in the shape of "a life that receives its character from this (human) nature". To know this "you do not need a special gift of the Holy Spirit to possess which one must be a Christian" (p. 332). This is not a matter of isolated statements but one of the really astounding new main theses of the great chapter on basic forms of humanity. Since this is to be taken seriously as a new line of thought, rising organically out of the new Barthian anthropology, let me take the liberty of asking a few questions on this subject:

(a) If there is this common ground between the knowledge of human nature among the wiser of the wise of this world and the Christian understanding of man, does there not arise from that the possibility of mutual discussion that previously seemed hopeless? Indeed has Barth himself not opened this discussion

in a felicitous way in that critical examination of the conception of man in science, idealism and existential philosophy? Is not this "common ground" just what I in my own terminology—which I will gladly surrender—called the "point of contact"?

(b) Granted then that amid all sinful corruption there remains that *continuum* deriving from God's work of creation and that even natural man may have some apprehension of this creaturely nature of his—although he does not recognise the Creator—does there not then exist a sphere within which Christian and non-Christian have something not only to hold but also to defend in common?

(c) Granted that natural man, at least the wiser among the wise of this world, can perceive something of man's God-created nature, ought there not to be such a thing as "natural law" as implied in the order of creation? Its foundation and ultimate meaning would of course be apprehended only by Christians, but its content by non-Christians also.

Barth has advanced here to a conception of human nature which was recognised by the Reformers also as a realm of knowledge shared with secular wisdom. It was this that obliged them to accept the conception of natural law as implied in such common insight, i.e. as meaning the protection of the humanity man has in virtue of his creation. There open up before us here perspectives giving us a prospect of overcoming opposing viewpoints in questions of the greatest actual moment, which are being discussed far beyond the bounds of theology. Of course these matters of common human interest are for us Christians an insight rooted and grounded in Christology. I have repeatedly emphasised the point that we Christians can only recognise a doctrine of the order of creation and a natural law when their foundation is laid in Christology. We can assent to Barth when he says that this apprehension of a quality of humanity (*humanum*) common to Christians and non-Christians needs to be safeguarded by Christology (p. 334). At the same time that would not prevent us from deriving from this knowledge some practical postulates which, in virtue of their practical content and not by the rational grounds given for them, could be recognised by non-Christians as well: e.g. postulates of international law which must of course be valid for non-Christian nations also.

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(c) Our final question relates to what Barth no doubt regards as the cardinal point of his doctrine of man—its foundation in Christology. Since I too am resolved to recognise only an anthropology with a Christological foundation the more precise form of the question should be this: Is the way Barth sets about the Christological foundation and development of his anthropology the right way to do it? There is complete agreement between us on the point that the Word of God, that is Jesus Christ as the perfect Word of God, is the *ratio cognoscendi* of the creaturely nature of man. Difference of opinion begins only where Barth asks if for me Jesus Christ is only the *ratio cognoscendi* and not as for him the *ratio essendi*, the ground of the creaturely being of man. Let me first confess my incapacity to understand what is meant by saying that every man—including also such as lived a thousand years before Christ—has his being in the history of Jesus. "The history of human existence follows on the history of the man Jesus" (p. 194). I can only understand this by substituting for what is said another thought that appears also in Barth: that man is created in the pretemporal *Logos*, the eternal Word and purpose of God which was revealed and became historical reality in Jesus. The matter should then be expressed thus: that the creaturely nature of man has its ground and origin in an eternal pretemporal Word that in Jesus Christ became historical revelation. Without this regress to the pretemporal creative Word, these propositions quoted are meaningless to me. With the help of the regress, however, they become comprehensible and, to my mind, correct. I understand them in the light of the main thesis of Barth's doctrine of creation, which is in substance also mine, that God's covenant is the inner ground of creation (cf. my *Dogmatics*, II, 5). From this standpoint one can understand that "real man"—I would rather say "true man"—is Jesus Christ the fulfilment of God's purpose in creation.

This however does not seem to exhaust Barth's meaning which includes something different as well. It is this, that every man as such partakes in the grace of Jesus Christ, not, as you might suppose, through faith, but in virtue of his creation, by being born man. As man he is "a member in the Body of the Head" (p. 174). Not the believer, not whosoever is born again through faith by a second Word and work of God, the Atone-

ment—no! independently of faith every person is a member in the Body of the Head. This is simply to say that the work of creation and the work of redemption, the covenant of creation and the covenant of grace are identical. Only so does it become possible to venture the proposition that everyone in virtue of his creation participates in the covenant God has made with us in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. That would mean in addition that everyone, including the godless man, the unbeliever and the unrepentant sinner, just because he is a human being, has a part in God's redemptive purpose, is indeed within this covenant and cannot fall from it, not even through sin. Because these two things are revealed in Jesus Christ—the divine purpose in creation and the saving will of God for the redemption of sinners—the Christological doctrine of creation is so conceived as to imply that just as every man is called into being through the creative purpose of God so he is as irrevocably made thereby a participant in God's atonement and redemption.

Admittedly it is for me still an open question whether Barth really means this. For, as we have already pointed out, expressions about sharing *in* the covenant alternate with those about determination *to* the covenant. But we have likewise seen that Barth makes a point of refusing to distinguish between determination and its actual fulfilment, and indeed reproaches me for making this distinction. "Real man" according to this view is not simply man into whose life the call of God has come, but man actually responding to it in obedience. Is this perhaps the reason why sin is called the ontological impossibility, something, that is to say, not only contrary to man's determination but in fact impossible? "In sin man apprehends something that is made impossible for him and against which he is protected" (p. 176), protected indeed by the fact that all the time he has participated, not only in the creating Word of Jesus, but also in His redeeming Word of Salvation.

According to my understanding of the New Testament something totally different is there said to us. It is that everyone as the creature of God is only to be understood in the light of the creating Word of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, i.e. through Jesus Christ as *ratio cognoscendi*. Through sin, however, participation in the covenant of God has been lost and become forfeit and can only be *restored* through the second Word of God, the

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Word of Atonement *in so far as a man believes*. The identification of creating Word and atoning Word makes every man—believer and unbeliever alike—members of the Body of Christ—an expression which in the New Testament is unambiguously reserved for the Church, the communion of the faithful. In such a case to be sure Christ would be the “real ground” of the creaturely existence of every man and sin would indeed be a non-existent which could make no difference to participation in the covenant. Restoring grace then which according to the New Testament is given only to the believer is the same as the grace of creation and therefore belongs to every creature.

I would not venture to set this forth as Barth’s doctrine or even as an aspect of it were it not that the wording of so many passages tends in this direction and that many things, otherwise incomprehensible, become in this way clear at once. Above all this argument resumes a line of thought from the doctrine of election (*Church Dogmatics*, II, 2) to the effect that in Christ all men, believers or unbelievers, are elected and *cannot* be lost. This doctrine that even at that stage occasioned some misgivings is now developed to a point which makes us look at it even more askance. In brief, because every man in virtue of his creation is in Christ, everyone has therefore a share in the redemption whether he believes or not, everyone is “a member in the Body of the Head”. Because the grace of creation and of redemption are identical the doctrine of the state is to be derived from the doctrine of the Church (Christian community and civil community) and one can also provide a basis for (secular) law from the standpoint of the justification of the sinner (justification and law).

Such then seems to be the hidden unity of Barthian thought. And yet I do not venture to say: This is what Barth means; I can only ask: Is this really what he means? I cannot rightly believe that this is how he wishes it to be understood. For then the work of Atonement would no longer be a work, the call to repentance would become superfluous and the decision of faith cease to be a decision.

Karl Barth will therefore understand that to his question whether by God-created man I mean “real man”, whether Jesus Christ is not merely the epistemological principle but also the constitutive principle of human existence, I cannot answer

with a plain and simple yes. If what is meant is the identification of the grace of creation with the grace of redemption, in other words that in virtue of one's creation one is also a redeemed man—I could only answer no.

But before I for my part say no, I would like to see clearly what Barth means. There is so much in this book to which I can only assent from the bottom of my heart, so much that I have hailed with an "at last!", that I fear nothing more than to destroy by a fresh misunderstanding the unity so laboriously achieved. For all the questions which the reading of this book raises urgently for me—and for many another besides, take not a jot away from our gratitude for the fulness of insights which are offered here, some wholly new, others with new power and profundity. Whatever may be said about this volume, there is one thing no one can leave unsaid: It is of all Barth's works his most human.

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