

Then came the climactic battle. On Friday after midnight, four trucks filled with soldiers armed with rifles and machine guns thundered into the village. They were met by local Communists, according to a prearranged plan. Loyal peasants who had been on the alert rushed to the church and rang the bell. Men and women gathered from every side and surrounded the pastor's home, but the soldiers overpowered them and began to make arrests. The two pastors escaped to the woods. But truckloads of intractable Uniat peasants were taken to Cluj jails. Thus the accomplices of the Red Orthodox patriarch took over the village Uniat church.

Many villages were not as persistent as Lapusul Romanesc. Many pastors were less firm than Oniga Atanasie. A few even became Communist agents. But everywhere the extirpation of the Rumanian Uniat Church was accomplished.

The relative merits of the Rumanian Uniat and Rumanian Orthodox churches need not be discussed here. Political factors accompanying the formation of the Uniat Church centuries ago are not vital parts of the picture. The point is that the Communist regime extirpated an independent church that for centuries had served humble peasants in the face of great odds.

The wave of coercion that marked the end of 1948 continues with augmented fury. Church publications have long been controlled, as well as organizations of the clergy. Now the Communists have decreed that the government shall exercise direct supervision over church funds, church activities, even church art. It appears, for instance, that pictures of the saints on church walls are to wear Marxian beards rather than beards of classic cut. From all discernible indications, it would seem that the last pretense of freedom has vanished.

Red Patriarch Justinian has plunged more deeply into politics by ordering every clergyman to stay out of politics—specifically, to refrain from all criticism and confine himself exclusively to praise of the "People's Republic." His beatitude performed an extra service by calling upon priests in distant Greece to support the Communist rebellion.

To make the Rumanian system conform more completely with the Soviet system, a network of Communist soviets with almost unlimited powers is being installed throughout the land from the smallest village up. They can control speech and press, seize property, run schools, manage churches. Totalitarian despots are no respecters of churches. They debase or exterminate them.

How My Mind Changed, 1938-1948

(Concluded from last week)

By Karl Barth

IV

EARLY in 1948 I was free to accept an invitation from the Reformed Church in Hungary, where I had good friends from times past. The political upheaval in their land and its inclusion in the Eastern bloc had put them into a difficult position, and they wanted to hear my opinion as to how they ought to deal with the new Communist regime. My real task to be sure consisted of making addresses and statements on the things that are always and everywhere to be said about the nature and task of the church. But in the course of discussions my Hungarian friends and I came to agree that their situation and their specific problem were not to be dealt with simply according to the example of the relation of the west European churches to the National Socialist state, but had to be judged independently from the point of view of the gospel and in the light of Hungary's own past. It seemed to us that a protest against the obvious danger and hurt to the church implicit in the Communist system was not exactly the first and most urgent duty. I understood and agreed with the view presented to me there, that the church might now be expected to undertake, as a fruit of faith and repentance, a serious campaign to evangelize the strayed and bewildered Hungarian people.

My stay in Hungary was altogether peaceful and happy. But my stand on the Hungarian problem proved highly offensive in my homeland and perhaps elsewhere too.

Oddly enough, it was just in the weeks before and after the Amsterdam conference that my attitude became the occasion for a plethora of newspaper attacks, in which the reproach that I had failed to recognize the totalitarian threat to the world in its new guise was soon outdistanced by the stronger reproach that I had now "clearly and unmistakably been converted to Russian communism and bolshevism." I can only laugh at that. But in any case I am of the opinion that communism can be warded off only by a "better justice" on the part of the Western world, not by the all too cheap denials in which the fear of the West is now expressing itself. And in any case I maintain that the positive way taken by the Hungarian Reformed people is preferable to the glory they might win as standard-bearer for the so-called "Christian West." Nor can I confess allegiance to this "Christian West"; rather I think that the locus of Christianity is to be sought above today's conflict between East and West. We shall see who was right in the long run. And if worst comes to worst, I shall be contented to be proved wrong in having refused, this once, to raise a call for immediate battle!

V

The other trip abroad that I undertook in 1948 was necessitated by my participation in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam. Formerly I took no part, or only a small part, in the "ecumenical movement," indeed had all kinds of criticisms to make of it,

since all "movements" as such have always been and still are somewhat suspect in my eyes. But in this case I must confess, using the words in their ordinary sense, "My mind has changed."

It came about quite simply. One day I was asked to cooperate in the theological field, and then a share of the responsibility for the success of the Amsterdam conference was conspicuously put upon me, and with closer acquaintance I could not but find this cooperation and co-responsibility not only interesting but important. From this point of view especially I now recall Amsterdam gladly. It was necessary and rewarding for once to put one's own work into parentheses, so to speak, and to sit down at one table with the representatives of completely different churches in a binding and exacting conference, as at Amsterdam—to sit down not with the purpose of formulating a new dogma or making compromises, but with the modest yet firm purpose of reaching through discussion a clear understanding of the things about which Christendom is united and the things about which it is divided. That is what happened at Amsterdam—at any rate so far as I could observe from my place in Section I—and I am deeply thankful that I could be there and work with the others.

To be sure, I did not succeed in convincing the Commission for Women's Work in the Church that the Apostle Paul, besides saying that "in Christ there is neither male nor female," said several other things on the relation between men and women that are also worthy of attention, though I tried to defend this viewpoint in the friendliest possible manner. And it seems too that my position on the problem of the non-participation of the Roman Church in the World Council did not win a universally sympathetic response. For my part I did not lose a bit of my old distaste for the ancient ecumenical style that, especially at first, threatened to blanket the whole proceedings. Further, it seems to me that some day it may be necessary to air again the differences between American and our Continental ways of Christian thinking and speaking—differences that might be more important, and more fraught with danger, than the differences between the churches.

VI

But so many other things at Amsterdam were simply encouraging—the presence and cooperation of the "young" churches and indeed of youth in general; the oneness of spirit in which this assembly, in spite of openly admitted differences of all sorts (something of a contrast to certain other world assemblies), took counsel and finally ended; the honest effort on almost all sides to place Christianity above the East-West conflict; the fine tone of the "Message"; and, besides, the many fruitful or at least instructive encounters with individuals and groups, which could be possible only at such a gathering. So I am glad that I did not harden myself against this new experience, but kept myself open to it.

I am not suited to be a real churchman, much less a church leader, and no one will try to make me one. But so far as I am able I shall gladly hold myself in readiness for the free status of a so-called "ecumenical consultant" which was accorded me at Amsterdam.

Shortly after Amsterdam I found myself again, for the first time in ten years, among the French theologians, with whom I always feel especially at home. I saw Port Royal, visited Napoleon's tomb, and once more viewed the world from the Eiffel tower. *On revient toujours a ses premiers amours*—or at least *souvent*.*

VII

Nonetheless I am glad to be in my proper place again, in my study in Basle. For the "movement" that I must carry out here is more important to me than anything else. In these ten years, in connection with my lectures at the University of Basle, I have been able to complete and publish four further volumes of my *Church Dogmatics*, namely, in 1940, *The Doctrine of God* (Vol. II, Part 1); in 1942, *The Doctrine of Predestination* (Vol. II, Part 2); in 1945, *The Doctrine of Creation* (Vol. III, Part 1); and in 1948, *Anthropology* (Vol. III, Part 2). Since American readers are interested in figures, I shall reveal that these volumes have respectively 782, 898, 488 and 800 large pages.

In none of these fields could I simply go along with an accepted church doctrine and theological tradition; I had to think through and develop everything anew, from a center which I considered the right one—namely, the Old and New Testament witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. So year after year I found myself confronting new and most exciting questions, and involved in problems to solve and connect which I had to travel a long road.

Today I myself am astonished that it was possible for me to carry on this work, which demands so much concentration, through all the vicissitudes of these years. And I have reason to be thankful that it could be so. Here, in pursuing this path of knowledge, I experienced the most important of the "changes" that have taken place in me in these years. And that is why, for the future, I consider myself more obligated to continue in this direction than in any other. Immense fields of Christian faith lie fallow before me. I do not flatter myself that I shall be able to produce something unsurpassable here either. But I do not think it conceit to say that it seems right and important not only for me, but also for my contemporaries in church and world, that somewhere in the midst of all the relativity that too is done which I am here attempting; and it seems right and important that on this account I should leave conferences and sermons and lecture tours—not altogether but still in the main and wherever I can be spared—to others, who are better talented and equipped for this kind of thing and to whom I can perhaps indirectly be of help through my work. At the same time I am not unaware that in America and elsewhere the very thought of such voluminous works—and written in German at that!—is a little frightening.

I close with a favorite word of my second son, who is now in Borneo introducing native pastors to theology: "Everyone does what he can." In the past ten years I have done what I could, and I hope to continue so in the future.

*"One always returns to one's first love"—or at least "often."