

SEPTEMBER 1954  
KARL BARTH'S CHURCH DOGMATICS. An introductory report by Otto  
Weber. Lutterworth Press. 16s.

AGAINST THE STREAM. By Karl Barth. S.C.M. Press. 16s.

To attempt to evaluate or to criticize the theology of Karl Barth seems an almost hopeless task. Any judgment on a particular statement of his or on a particular section of his system is likely to prompt the rejoinder: "But have you read the full statement of that point in the Church Dogmatics?" And if the answer is "No", then there seems no way of progressing any further. "I certainly do not require anyone to speak well or ill of me," Barth writes, "nor do I really insist that a man must read me at all. But if anyone wishes to speak about me, he should at least have read me. . . . Moreover (if he is a serious person and not a journalist, and therefore not a theologian who thumbs through a book) he should have read me

98

completely." And the Church Dogmatics already stands at 5,956 pages in the German edition!

In the light of this formidable requirement one can only assume that the reading of Otto Weber's volume is to be regarded as a preliminary canter before undertaking the real journey. The publishers indeed describe it as the "Baedeker through Barth". I wish I could report that the outline map had filled me with a consuming desire to traverse the vast continent of the Church Dogmatics at all costs. Instead I fear that it has had precisely the opposite effect. Only in two or three places does the summary spring to life for me and awaken real interest. In the main it is a faithful and painstaking condensation of the general argument with a generous sprinkling of actual quotations from the text itself. Certainly it gives a good idea of the way in which the successive themes are treated and a clear indication of the places in the original where particular doctrines are to be found. But when 250 pages have to do service for 6,000 the compression is bound to be severe. In parts, indeed, the narrative is scarcely intelligible unless one is trained in the idiom of the original.

It is estimated that Barth has completed roughly one-half of his vast enterprise. The volumes covered by Weber's summary may be said to deal with the doctrines of God and of Man, though in a highly distinctive way. Sections on "The Triune God" precede the full treatment of God's Reality, his Gracious Election and his Work of Creation: the section on Man is followed by a long treatment of Freedom in its various relations. One of the best things in the book is Barth's own foreword, which is full of humour and liveliness. But I salute with great admiration the devoted labours both of Otto Weber, the German creator of the outline, and of Arthur Cochrane, the Canadian translator, who is now teaching in the U.S.A.

*Against the Stream* is a collection of some of Barth's post-war writings with a delightful portrait of the author as frontispiece. The main theme is that of the responsibility of the Christian community in the midst of political change. A large section is devoted to a Hungarian journey made by Barth in 1948, there is an article on the problem of the situation of the Church between East and West published in 1949, and there is an extended treatment of the Christian Doctrine of Revelation based on a course of lectures given in 1947. To me one of the finest things in the book is a paper on "The Christian Message and the New Humanism" read to a gathering of intellectuals representing many points of view. When Barth speaks directly to a particular problem or reports on some existing situation he is always impressive. But so often he speaks in what appear to be abstractions or negations and one is left wondering what the positive meaning of all that is said really amounts to.

In a spirited introduction Mr Gregor Smith, the Editor of the collection, defends Barth against the charge of producing a theology which is theoretical and incapable of being applied to concrete situations. He claims that this theology, far from being "like his own Swiss Alps, grand, impressive—but cold—and in their highest reaches at least—uninhabitable", is rather capable of "being transformed

Apart from an outline history of Old Testament introduction and a statement of his views on inspiration and the Canon, Dr Young's book is concerned not with the Old Testament as a whole but with its individual books. He believes that our Lord's use of the Old Testament guarantees its inerrancy and verbal inspiration. Other views are rejected even though Dr Young seeks to discuss them fairly and as fully as space permits. It is rather irritating to find such terms as "negative" and "destructive criticism" frequently used of positions held by most modern Christian scholars. Nor is it fair to describe the "History of Tradition" school as "basically a form of scepticism" (p. 197).

In opposing other views than his own he scores a number of points, but his arguments are frequently forced. He fails, for example, to offer a convincing explanation (p. 179) why Saul does not know David's father in 1 Sam. 17. Sometimes he fails adequately to present other opinions such as that which sees stylistic reasons against holding that Isaiah is a unity (p. 206). If space is short it would have been better not to devote over forty pages to a history of Pentateuchal criticism but to discuss more fully the problems which give rise to a diversity of opinion.

Despite his refusal to admit the legitimacy of pseudonymity in ancient literature—a view which (p. 31) causes him to do less than justice to Professor Pfeiffer—he apparently regards Ecclesiastes as pseudonymous. It is also strange that a scholar who treats New Testament statements as determinative should refuse to follow Matt. 27. 9 f. in attributing Zech. 11. 12 f. to Jeremiah.

Dr Young's book is not a great contribution to Old Testament studies. But for all its failings it does provide a well-written and readable presentation of the ultra-conservative position by a learned and able scholar.

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into the most apt power, whether that power is expressed in prophetic or pastoral or political form". It may be so. Certainly his words are eagerly welcomed in many parts of the world. Even those who differ from him have learned much from him. But whether his *Dogmatics* will ultimately commend itself to the Church as definitive *Church Dogmatics* is another question.

LIVERPOOL.

F. W. DILLISTONE.