

## REVIEWS

### *The Peril of Sophistication*

*Against the Stream*, by Karl Barth; Philosophical Library, New York City; 1954; 252 pp.; \$3.75.

This volume contains the occasional essays and writings of Barth between the years 1946-52. In addition it embodies in one chapter his little study entitled "Church and State" which appeared in the German as "Christusgemeinde und Bürgergemeinde." This chapter is perhaps the most valuable in the book. Most of the themes deal with the relevance of the Christian faith to the pressing international issues of our day, and seek to explain why Barth, the inspirer of Christian resistance to Nazism, should be the most outstanding Christian neutralist of our day. In an exchange of letters with Barth, Emil Brunner puts the issue very well in the statement, "I simply cannot understand why you, of all people, who condemned so severely even the semblance of collaboration of the church with Hitler, should now be making yourself the spokesman of those who condemn, not merely outward, but inward spiritual resistance, and why you should deride as 'nervousness' what is really revulsion from a truly diabolical system of injustice and tyranny." Karl Barth's answer is to make a distinction between the "nihilism" and "militarism" of the Nazi movement and the evil of communism which is "distant" from Christians and "can be easily discerned." He cannot "see why it should be the duty of the Church to give theological backing to what every Christian can read in the daily papers and what is admirably expressed by Mr. Truman and the Pope." One fails to catch the relevance of this remark. Barth seems to suggest that the Church must stand against evils to which Christians might be tempted but meanwhile it does not have to bother about evils which are no temptation to Christians.

Meanwhile, Barth acts as a kind of pope to the church in Hungary. Part of the volume is devoted to his speeches on the occasion of his pontifical journey there. On that

journey he assures his followers that "the state in reality moves between the two poles, of a pure ordinance of God and as a diabolical perversion"; but that these two limits do not really exist in history. *Ergo* we do not have to worry too much about what seems to us to be a diabolical perversion. As for the incorporation of Hungary into the eastern bloc, Barth declares complacently that Christians are "trying to see the judgment of God in all this. For the moment, they are determined to endure without grumbling and resentment, and in any case they intend to make it the basis from which they look out into the future." There are many indications that Barth shares his friend Hromadka's "wave of the future" theory.

In spite of Barth's constant insistence that the Christian must not look at political reality in terms of "systems" but only in terms of "concrete reality," it is obvious that in addition to his theological transcendentalism, which insists on viewing this troubled globe from a religious airplane which effaces all distinctions between good and evil (a reversion to his pre-Nazi position), he is also informed by devotion to "systems," particularly the Marxist notion that a "capitalist" nation must be bad, that, therefore, American "money worship" must be condemned, and our "hypocrisy" must be balanced against Russian cruelty.

In short these essays reveal political naiveté, posing in the guise of theological sophistication, together with a consequent incapacity to make any prudent or sensible political and moral judgments. The whole performance prompts revulsion against every pretension to derive detailed political judgments from ultimate theological propositions. When a man lacks ordinary common sense in reacting against evil, no theological sophistication will help him. He may even, as Barth, think that the distinction of moment for Christians is that the Nazis tried to corrupt Christianity while communism only tries to kill it.

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