# LETTING PAUL SPEAK FOR HIMSELF

KARL BARTH: *The Epistle to the Philippians.* Translated by J. W. Leitch. 128pp. S.C.M. Press. 13s. 6d.

This is resuscitation. The German version of this commentary, representing lectures given in 1926-27, was first published in 1928 but is only now available in Dr. Leitch's translation. Its small bulk is an act of grace from the author of the *Dogmatik*—but then, the *Dogmatik* was just beginning to be thought of in 1927, the year which saw the first sketch, later abandoned for the series of volumes still current and beginning in 1932.

Both for its date and for its contents this commentary invites comparison with the great work on Romans (1918 and 1921) and its " younger brother " of 1956. The intention is the same: to let Paul speak for himself; and the dynamism is the same—set down by Barth to finding the epistle " waiting " for him in both works on Romans, and summed up in the avowal that he is " still seeking " in the present volume.

The commentary, designed for non-theologians but not to the exclusion of the professionals, was not intended to contribute to the dispute on " pneumatic exegesis " which had been occasioned by its author's earlier activity; how far it succeeds must be left for the experts to judge. But there is much in it which seems familiar. There is a richness of Reformation quotations and some characteristic usages of the term " Word ". From the number of generally interesting passages we select three of some consequence.

In 1. 21 ff. he finds he cannot equate " departing and being with Christ " with 2 Cor. 5.8. In Philippians " it is rather a more concrete and special case of the significance of dying as . . . expansion of Paul's life which is *Christ himself.* . . . The usual interpretation . . . would introduce a note that is certainly welcome at the usual funeral service but is essentially foreign here ". But despite the juxtaposition of the phrase under discussion with language about identity with Christ some may wonder if we do not have here an instance of that " illegitimate totality transfer " (or something closely akin to it) so rightly called in question in Professor James Barr's recent volume, *The Semantics of Biblical Language.*

Verses 1-11 of chapter two are sweetly and pertinently introduced. First something *personal* . . . then the heart of the Pauline *ethic* . . . seemingly so little, but in fact everything, is demanded. . . . And then—where is the boundary here between " ethics " and " dogmatics " ? . . .—then the great comparison between this mind that climbs down in order to direct itself to the one end and " minding that which is minded *in Christ Jesus* ".

The passage is not to be taken to speak of Christ's equality with God but of what, acting as God's equal, Christ does and means. Being sure of his equality, Christ is careless of it and " puts himself in a position where only he himself knows himself in the way that the Father knows him ". We see a man who went the length of death, barring of his own volition a door that only *the* God, the Father could open again, to exalt him as Kurios—a different thing· (though the reason for this is not here stated) from " the form of God ".

Finally, in 3. 20 ff., our heavenly citizenship is Paul's way of speaking of the judicial order to which we can appeal: it is " only another expression " for δικαιοσύνη ἐκ θεοῦ—that which protects us now as we await deliverance in the Christ of a God who is no abstraction, or object, or opposite number, but a God really and immediately present to man the σῶμα.

This is an existentialist commentary, but also very much a dogmatician's commentary. The cap is often enough doffed to the exegete; but in the great issues the assumptions of faith are the starting point; what we are given is exposition rather than exegesis—and glimmers of the familiar Barthian expositions to boot.