

Book Review

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Barth on Barth

HOW I CHANGED MY MIND. By Karl Barth. John Knox, \$3.00.

† AVAILABLE here for those who don't want to bother to look them up are Barth's three "How My Mind Has Changed" articles for The Christian Century, which form a personal autobiography from 1928 to 1958. They are introduced and followed by biographical sketches (bordering on the obsequiousness which Barth finds so distasteful) of his earlier and later life.

One point in the first article is especially worth comment. The major event of the 1930s — the coming to power of National Socialism — is defined by Barth as indeed "a gigantic revelation of human lying and brutality." But he saw it primarily as an event within the German church, which "found itself in the greatest danger [let Barth finish the sentence in his own way, please] concerning its doctrine and order. It threatened to become involved in a new heresy." Or, as he put it again, "The church-theological conflict contained within itself the political conflict." This ordering of the problem is worth thinking about if one wants to understand Barth and his theological program.

The issue posed (and in the context of the pluralistic character of the experiential routage of thought and language today it has become acute) is this: If theology is not written from the context of a faith that is all-encompassing and therefore not tentative — not able to see matters from any other angle of vision — in what sense of the word can there be *theology*? Barth's answer, so evident in the way in which he speaks of Hit-

ler's rise, so consistent with his understanding of the uncompromising qualitative difference between faith and unbelief, is: In no sense. It would seem to follow that anyone who wishes to speak of the history of the '30s in another way must admit that he is only in some highly qualified sense able to do *theology*.

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