

# Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

Readings in the History and Polity of the National  
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

## PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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## INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be awakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

# KARL BARTH

*Prophet of a New Christianity?*

by

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# I

## THE PROBLEMS OF THE MODERN CHURCH

MODERN Protestantism is activity itself. It continues its work in missions, steadily changing its methods to adjust itself to new conditions at home and abroad. It busies itself in the field of social ethics, keeping an attentive eye upon all changes in modern society. It develops various techniques in religious education. The aggressive, adaptive Protestant mind continues the plowing and tilling of all its fields.

But are these activities of the church grounded in a clear impulse and are they directed by a definite vision of a goal? Do the missionary bodies still know for what purpose they are engaged in missions? They say that their policy is one of sharing partnership. Sometimes they admit that they can no longer go among the "heathen" as ambassadors of the truth. Not only the unchristian aspects of Western civilization in general and the criticism that the Orientals raise against it have shattered their confidence in themselves; they admit that their message is undergoing radical changes, and they do not know how to preach a changing gospel. Missionary leaders are often prone to say, "We are religiously perplexed, but we continue to believe in Christ and particularly in his gospel of love." Who

this Christ is and of what kind his love, is, however, not clearly stated.

The social activities of the churches render a similar impression. In ever new waves propaganda movements arise, proclaiming moral codes for social behaviour, defending some sort of morality in international, interracial, industrial and political relationships. Again and again ministers and laymen express deep concern for the problems of the family, of marriage, and of sexual life in general. They show a sincere interest for the difficult conflicts between urban and rural areas. They have even studied the problem of providing city people with milk and advised procedures looking to social justice. But the question where religion comes in is often forgotten.

Why should the church be responsible for all this? Is it an institution of social reform? If so, how must it be compared with other organizations erected for that particular purpose? What is distinctly religious and especially Christian in the remarkable reform-activities of the modern church? The answers to these and similar questions are indistinct. They generally avoid the issue by affirming that the church of Christ certainly ought to be a guide and educator toward true and good living.

And at once social ethics becomes the concern of the pedagogue. It is religious education that must furnish salvation. Consequently all classes and groups of society are being studied with the help of the methods of the modern sciences of psychology and sociology. Most complicated "techniques" of educational approach are being developed. Sunday-schools are being slowly reorganized and transformed, as trained teachers appear on the scene. But where is the confidence in

a distinctive, clearly defined task? Where is that religion that is to be taught? Where is it?

Visit a modern theological seminary! Speak to the teachers! Interview the students! They will confess to be interested in religion, particularly in its historical and contemporary expressions and in its application. The oftener you hear the magic word "religion" the more puzzling it becomes. Very few indeed are able to agree as to its meaning. There is no longer authority about it. Religious thinking is a personal, private affair, and some more or less skillful persons do their thinking in public. Everyone carves out for himself what he deems his religion. No wonder that the missionary impetus is shattered, that the social activity of the church loses more and more of its distinctly churchly character, that religious educators concern themselves more with methods than with the substance that is to be transmitted to the pupils!

But are there no theologians, men who will guard and guide the thought of the church? Are there no preachers who can speak with authority? Yes, there are theologians and there are preachers, but their teachings are not inspired by certainty. The sincerest among them prefer to be "seekers." Happy are those who with the help of creeds furnished by the past can take a firm position and review things from a fixed, objective, seemingly absolute viewpoint! To be sure, they are still numerous, and their attitude, sustained by thousands of certainly sincere people, is impressive. But may one not rightly ask whether their apparent confidence is more inspired by the necessity of self-defense than by certitude of conviction?

What has happened? If this sketch of the modern "Christian mind" is true to the facts, what has oc-



curred to bring it into being? The answer is not far to seek: We are told that we live in a new world, that we belong to a generation that is witnessing fundamental transformations of human life. The industrial period of western civilization has reached its climax. The machine has finally affected every phase of living. If we desire to live sincerely, if our ethics shall correspond to the world as it actually is, we can no longer hold to philosophies of life which are not made for a machine age.

Such ideas furnish the practical, concrete background for the endless discussions of the place of science in modern life. For, so all of us believe, science has produced the myriad technical facilities in private and public life which are characteristic of our era. It has accelerated the tempo of living. It has increased the effectiveness of our actions. It has assured man of a place in the life of the universe of which his ancestors not even dreamed. It has made human life universal. We find ourselves, therefore, compelled to accept practical methods of living which do not always correspond to the beliefs and philosophies which we hold.

Since what we actually do is of a more direct concern to us than what we think, we acquire the modern way of living and postpone the development of a basic, organizing thought until a later, more opportune time. Most of us wait for *the* prophet and for *the* philosopher who can tell us what we ought to think and to believe. That is why we as Christians confess religious perplexity while continuing to believe in Christ.

Many of us are aware of this tentativeness of our beliefs. This is the crisis of religion. For a religion cannot be tentative. When the crisis has reached its climax, its turning point, it will be known whether the

Christian church shall die or live. Some think the crisis is now at its peak. The present dispute over Theism and Humanism seems to prove it. It puts the question to us all: Do you believe in God or do you not? If we deny the question, we should not continue to call ourselves Christian or to consider ourselves members of the church.

It can hardly be doubted that most modern men are aware of this dilemma. The time of decision has come or will come soon. It is in anticipation of this decision and in consciousness of lacking clear direction that the churches and their leaders are so restless.

Not infrequently the issue is darkened. This is due to the fact that life does not stop. Men do not notice the radical nature of the changes that take place around them. Life proceeds. The inheritance of the past lives on. Its institutions are taken for granted. The church continues. People worship as their parents of old. Ministers continue to preach. Rites and customs are only very gradually changed. The decisiveness of a transformation is not felt. But a certain uneasiness is noticeable. There are churches where the scripture is only occasionally referred to and seldom preached about—as in days gone by. Many a church service presents in itself a striking contrast between a “modern” sermon which reviews various aspects of life from a moral and so-called religious viewpoint and an “ancient” liturgy and “old” music. But only few persons feel the contrast. The majority of church-goers feed their souls with the tunes of medieval chants and old Protestant chorals, and their intellects with the critical analyses offered by the more or less cultured minister in his discourse called the sermon. A historical institution may radically change, but the actual process of

change is very gradual, and only after final results have been produced, do the adherents of such an institution become aware of it.

This general historical observation must be kept in mind in dealing with the transformation of the Christian world-view. The fundamental changes which so directly concern us emerged only step by step. That makes our situation only more difficult. Since, in order to live intelligently, we must cultivate our historical connections, we are hardly ever capable of judging our position in an objective way—from without, so to speak. To be sure, a few may make themselves believe that they can disregard the historical links of their intellectual life and construct philosophies on the basis of the present needs and with the help of those norms and laws which the present status of scientific understanding can lend them. And thus many a philosophy of religion is taught and preached. But the historically trained mind will only too easily recognize the connections also in this seemingly realistic, self-confident thought.

American Christianity is still, historically speaking, inarticulate. A history of its thought has not yet been written. Two facts, however, are outstanding. In the first place, American theology has been confined almost exclusively to denominational channels. Up to this day a large quantity of religious literature is put out for the benefit of denominationally limited groups. The thought-patterns of certain ecclesiastical traditions are reproduced or reinterpreted. The movements in the scientific and social-political world are reviewed from more or less fixed standpoints. Only more recently has American theology assumed a universal character. But at the same time it has often lost

its definiteness, for the former relationship with a denominational heritage is replaced by an adjustment to a somewhat vague world of science and philosophy. The theological controversy between Modernism and Fundamentalism must be judged on the basis of the liberation of theological thought from ecclesiastical (denominational) authority. It is also not without significance that the propaganda for church union and interdenominationalism began at about the same time that theologians were breaking the chains of intellectual confinement to their denominational creeds. Modernization of religious thought and interdenominationalism go hand in hand. Only those denominational groups which never depended upon creeds or theological definitions, notably the Congregationalists, have been, throughout their history, liberal in their religious teachings.

The second outstanding phenomenon in the history of American Christianity is its gradual estrangement from Calvinism. It is still generally maintained that Calvinism is to the present day influential in American social life. But it cannot be doubted that the distinctly otherworldly, theocentric *religion* of three hundred years ago has today been replaced by a world-wide, anthropocentric religiousness. When the history of American theology is written, it will reveal an amazing story of the steady humanization of religious beliefs. Humanism is a logical result of tendencies which have long been active in American life. The two factors which have brought about this effect one will then probably discover to be Methodism and the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that these movements, of distinctly European origin, were to reach the peak of their influence on American soil. *Methodism* has

certainly celebrated its greatest triumph in the conquest of the American West. Many of us are too little conscious of the debt that we owe to Methodism for the fashion in which we conduct our church-services: the majority of the Protestant hymns and sermons are Methodist-inspired. But surely the newspapers are aware of the significance of Wesley's church in social life and its reform! The *Enlightenment* has achieved its victories on the American continent in the political and scientific fields. The American constitution itself is a product of the "Age of Reason"; and the political and social ideals of America, which it has determined and which center around "the rights of man" and "democracy," bear the stamp of the eighteenth century which shattered the authorities of the past. Methodism has humanized religion by destroying the otherworldly, predestinarian, theocentric character of Calvinism. The Enlightenment gave to America not only the instrument of nature-control in which the whole world shares, but also the confidence in progress and the optimistic belief in the perfectibility of human life. The criticism of the Bible and of the Christian past constitutes only one phase in the process of the general humanization of religion. Only when the Enlightenment proclaimed the autonomy of man in contrast to any heteronomous authority, could the movements of historical criticism and of free investigation begin. When the Humanists of today profess their sole interest in the furthering of human happiness with complete disregard of any form of traditional authority, when the frankest among them declare the God of the Christian past dead, when they recognize in the God-idea only the symbolization of human ideals and hopes, they are true children of a development which

has long been going on in America—and in the world. For centuries, religious thought has moved away from the idea of an otherworldly God. Religion has gradually become God-less. Whether there can be a religion without God, a godless religion, is the question which constitutes the present crisis of religion. The answer to this question will determine the future of the Christian church. In other words, we must decide whether we are to stay within the channel of the historical development of Christianity since the Enlightenment or whether we can leave it in the conviction that our recent ancestors were obsessed by a serious error in judgment. Whether man is God—that is the question. When we say yes, we have ceased to be Christians in the old sense of the word.

Such is the condition of Christian theology in America. It is not fundamentally different in other countries except that the trends of different pasts, as they affect the present situation, have resulted in varying emphases. It is especially interesting to study conditions in Germany,<sup>2</sup> which since the days of the Reformation, and especially since Schleiermacher, has produced the most influential of the theological systems.

German theology has held a peculiar place in public life. Unlike the usual American practice the theological faculties have always been members of the universities. They have been engaged in their research under full loyalty to the scientific principles of investigation as these are generally observed in the institutions of higher learning. This loyalty and freedom accounts for the advances made by German Protestant theology. Conflicts between the theological faculties and the churches and their authorities have been numerous. For German Protestantism with its Lutheran

and partly Calvinistic background is distinctly confessional. The professors of theology did not always promote the interests of the ecclesiastical group to which they nominally belonged. The majority of them, of course, knew and know well how to combine the academic-theological with the practical-ecclesiastical points of view without doing harm to or hampering either one. It is, however, not without interest to note that Harnack, a man of highest theological importance, never held an ecclesiastical position, because he fell temporarily in disgrace with the ecclesiastical bureaucrats, being accused of endangering the piety of the church by his historical research. The history of theology in Germany has therefore not been without practical complications, but it has derived its distinction from an interrelationship between academic research and practical church life.

Generally speaking, German theology is the most academic of all. It has become extraordinarily learned, both in its critical-historical and constructive-philosophical aspects. For this reason it has always been most sensitive to the changes and movements in the scientific and philosophical fields.

German theologians were strengthened in this attitude, because it was never practically contrary to the actual needs of the church. Although it is wrong to say that until recently the German Protestant Church had no social conscience and that its work was seldom generally social, being more concerned with the care of souls as a pastoral task, the general feeling expressed in such an opinion is true to the facts. The State fulfilled not only the financial but also many of the social duties which in countries where church and state are separated, fall to the church. The German Evangeli-

cal Church has been up to the present time chiefly a preaching church. The development and cultivation of church activities during recent years is remarkable, but the German minister is still primarily a theologian and a preacher. His training in the free, unprejudiced atmosphere of a university is therefore exceedingly adequate for his task. Only recently has the discussion about the relationship between church and university faculties become livelier. There is a certain irony in the fact that while American theological seminaries, usually tied to their churches, seek affiliation with universities, German theologians who for centuries have been active and honored members of the *universitas literarum* should now be discussing the possibility of the foundation of independent institutions of theological training.

All this helps us to understand why since the beginning of the last century distinguished generations of theological scholars have succeeded each other in Germany. As soon as modern critical thought was born, as soon as the modern sciences and philosophies unfolded their power (thanks to the effects of the Enlightenment), theology began its work of adaptation. The science of the Christian religion was in no way to stand behind the other fields of knowledge.

Just as in the case of America, Christian thought of Germany is profoundly affected by the "Illumination." Without awareness of this historical connection it is impossible to understand the German religion and theology of the present day. That the Enlightenment should hold such a place in the public life of our era is not surprising, for it was Germany which adopted its principles to their full extent. That movement which took its start in English Deism, being then trans-



planted into France, thereby becoming a vehicle of anti-religious and atheistic propaganda, was enlarged to a new system of philosophy when it reached Germany. German Idealism is said to have overcome the shortcomings of the Enlightenment, its rationalism and its moralism, but in reality it fulfilled it. To be sure, the philosophical speculations of the German Idealists cannot be fully understood without reference to the Lutheran reformation, but on the whole they are contrary to the spirit of the Christian religion. Modern philosophy as it was inaugurated by Descartes, establishing the autonomy of man as a rational being, reached its height in the thought of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel.

This development had a twofold effect upon the nineteenth century.

The Enlightenment successfully estranged the educated middle classes from orthodox and ecclesiastical Christianity. The effects of this emancipation became particularly evident in the foundation of secondary schools which in their instruction put the emphasis upon a humanistic education on the basis of the study of the ancient classics. The German "Gymnasium" is a product of the Enlightenment. Since the beginning of the last century it has become a stronghold of German Idealism. In accepting its world-view the educated German showed himself to have outlived the necessity of submitting to the religious authority of the church, particularly since in the classical poetry of Lessing, Schiller and Goethe he received the vision of a new, entirely satisfactory conception of life which charged him to pursue the ideal of a free, autonomous "personality" responsible only to the norms of the spirit within. The German middle classes thus became

estranged from the church, and to this day it has not succeeded in winning them back. All these facts cast a significant light upon the current discussions of the relationship between Christianity and Idealism.

Practically speaking the Enlightenment achieved a glorious victory, which was to assume pathetically tragic aspects when, in the middle of the last century, Labor, led by leaders who had received their philosophies from the Idealists, was to follow the educated classes in emancipating itself from the church. But while the "cultured" maintained an attitude of indifference or benevolent neutrality toward organized religion, the people under the banner of socialism became more and more anti-Christian and "atheistic," venting all their class hatred upon the church. Of course, one cannot make the Enlightenment or Idealism responsible for this development, but that they stand in a certain connection with it cannot be doubted.

Meanwhile the church or at least its theological leaders were not blind to the changes that were taking place in the world of thought. It is true, German Protestantism did not realize the significance of the industrial revolution early enough to show direct concern for the new working classes and their problems. Its union with a patriarchal State was of catastrophic significance. However, it adopted the new world-view as outlined by the natural and historical sciences and by a critical philosophy. As a matter of fact, German theology was first in recognizing the new thought when it accepted the principles of Kant's philosophy. His claim that human knowledge can contain only the sensate experiences as they are classified by the *a priori* forms and categories of the mind and his proof that all possibility of a knowledge of the

supernatural must be excluded from the realm of reason, were to become fundamental principles of "modern" theology. Kant's own theological thought was not accepted; it was too moralistic. The God-idea was to him nothing but a postulate which had to be made in order to guarantee the laws of "practical reason." Due to his work, however, autonomous thinking was definitely established in theology, and the distinction between world knowledge and religious knowledge became a common premise of the advanced theologians. This distinction was to be of the most fatal consequences; for German theology derived therefrom the right not to concern itself seriously with the natural sciences. When the error had to be corrected, it was too late.

Furthermore, Kant's claim that the object of knowledge, the *Ding an sich* must remain unapproachable and unknowable and that objects of faith in particular can never become objects of knowledge at all, forced theology to pay attention to the subject of faith. Schleiermacher, by placing religion in the realm of feeling and by defining theology as the description of pious feelings, inaugurated the period of psychologism. The psychological method was followed in all endeavors to understand the religious phenomenon. Ritschl, imbued with Kantian and positivistic philosophical principles, tried to avoid the pit of subjectivism by emphasizing the importance of history for the Christian religion. The Christian God-idea was not guaranteed by personal experience but by the historical Jesus.

Psychologism dissolves all possibility of a proof of absolute religious truth. Religion depends wholly upon personal religious experience and is limited to the experiencing individual. Neither can historicism, logi-

cally thought out, give the assurance of an objective fact or truth, but leads inevitably to a relativism, which can admit the existence of an absolute only in so far as it expresses itself in the limitation of a historical fact.

Under these influences a more complete and thorough analysis of the religious life was made possible, but its objective validity became questionable. The God-idea especially was appreciated as a function within the human mind rather than as a recognition of the reality of the existence of God.

The organized church more or less instinctively felt the danger involved. The new theology seemed to contradict the traditions which were kept alive in its midst. But the spirit of the Enlightenment gradually produced an individualism within the church which could no longer be reconciled with any form of objective or absolute authority. Thus the problem of revelation became paramount. The future of Christianity in its traditional form hinged upon the problem whether its revelation was objective or not. If the premises of modern theology were correct, it could be but a certain phase or attitude of the human mind.

The point of a decision was reached: Either traditional Christianity or modern theology was right. The two could not be reconciled with each other, in spite of the fact that in the use of theological terminology, one was attempting a practical compromise.

Such was the dilemma in German theological thought in consequence of the Enlightenment and the critical Idealism of Kant at the beginning of the twentieth century. Only the end of the Great War revealed its all-important implications. The practical signifi-

cance of a seemingly academic issue was then made apparent.

The full rise of Neo-Protestantism occurred in the period of the development of the German Empire after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. The era of empire-building was a time of general progress and of the unfolding power of self-confidence. The findings of all the sciences, theology included, seemed to coincide with the upward trend of a new historical epoch. The imperial slogan: "I lead you into glorious times," apparently expressed a general sentiment. Warning voices were not heard. Nietzsche, with his gospel of the superman and the revaluation of all values, furnished the world-view of the times. His pathetic attempt to renew the foundations of a breaking civilization, and the underlying pessimism with which his philosophy was imbued were not recognized in their true nature. In reality the period was one of shallow, self-sufficient materialism, in spite of its evident progress in the accumulation of cultural values. Its true nature came to light with the outbreak of the war. The terror of that experience led to a general disillusionment. Cultural optimism was replaced by the shadows of a sceptical pessimism.

The author of the "Decline of the West" voiced the feeling of all. In feverish enthusiasm thousands of hungry souls read the heavily-laden pages of an unusual historical book in order to have the trend of their times analyzed in the light of world history.

The youth movement, which had sprung up as a revolt of young people against the civilization of the big cities and which had developed into a rebellion against the authority of the elders of school, church and home, seemed justified. The glorious progress into

a better world was halted. How terrifying the awakening really was in the midst of post-war conditions, revolutions, famines, foreign oppression, inflations and a general breakdown of the economic order, is a story which is still to be written. For the German adult and for the German youth in particular there was only one attitude to take: Mistrust the world as it is and the power which permeates it—express your own self. The magic of the romanticism of self-expression could furnish the only salvation. Expressionism in literature and art; mysticism and the occult exercises of Theosophy and Anthroposophy in religion; communistic, socialistic, democratic ideologies in politics; abandonment of the old rules of sexual relationship and married life—all these reveal the age of disillusionment, when man returned from the world, which he thought he could conquer, to his own self, seeking hope and relief in the seemingly unbounded dreams of his soul.

Yet this life was not a revival, it did not bring relief. It was rather the expression of despair. It supposedly provided an escape from a destroyed world and from a cultural turmoil. Actually men merely retreated from their wider, secular selves into the secret chambers of the soul and its hidden, partly unspeakable longings. The world they had built was in upheaval and ruin: where else could they go—but to themselves!

This was the last, most pathetic, most tragic phase of a period of civilization which in amazing feats of progress had tried to prove that man was to rule the world and that it was his. At the end—man was alone.

But in solitariness is also the hope for a new beginning. In solitariness is hell and heaven. It furnishes

despair and respite. It is a crisis, and a crisis is a turning point.

And German man began his recovery. The first signs of his convalescence soon became apparent. The painters ceased to fill the art-galleries with the unproportioned, wildly-colored products of a feverish, frantic imagination; the contours of the world as we see it returned and the laws of perspective were no longer violently disobeyed. The subjectivism of their revolutionary art was replaced by what they called a "new objectivism," a "new realism." Soon afterwards the architects inaugurated a new building period by erecting structures of a restrained purposefulness, combining comfort and practical adequacy with simple beauty. The philosophers followed. Phenomenology attempts to overcome the conflicts between objectivism and subjectivism. It aims at a meaningful realism. Nor do other kinds of human endeavor lag far behind. In every field, there is the beginning of a plan of reconstruction, which observe new laws and rules, described in terms like concreteness, objectivism, factualism, *Sachlichkeit*.

Ideologies and Utopias are shattered. One must reckon with the facts of life as they actually are. The fever has not yet stopped. The crisis is not yet passed. There is still sickness, but there is new hope of life. An upward trend has begun.

Naturally, religion was to suffer most, for man is most sensitive in his religious consciousness. The process of recuperation is here therefore slowest—but here too it is going on. A new theology is in the making.

What is this new theology? Is it connected with the name of Karl Barth, whose books are spoken of all over the world? Is it the so-called theology of crisis?

Some answer this question with a violent negative, others with a most enthusiastic affirmative.

In the next chapters this theology will be discussed at length. The results of the discussion will reveal our answer. They will disclose whether Barth is the prophet of a new Christianity or whether we must wait for another.



## VIII

### CONCLUSION

A SUMMARY of the results of our analysis of Barth's theology is superfluous. Its main tendencies have been pointed out in a sincere effort to understand them. In the course of this enterprise, we could not refrain from becoming critical. We have not concealed our sympathy and agreement, and we have not spared words of protest. Whether the judgment here passed on Barth's thinking is just, we cannot say. It must be taken as *one* opinion of a theology which may be considered the most provoking of our day.

In conclusion, we turn once more to the fundamental theme of the dialectical theology. A quotation from a lecture on "The Word of God in Theology from Schleiermacher to Ritschl" may serve as a starting-point. Barth writes:<sup>1</sup>

"In my understanding, the problem of the *word*—*i.e.*, the word of *God* in theology, is the question whether and in how far theology is conscious of its task of directing the Christian sermon to an expression in human words of what is said to man by God himself about God, in contrast to all that man may tell himself about God. . . .

"At two points, it may be decided whether or not the concept of the Word governs a theology, *i.e.*

whether or not it realizes that the Christian sermon is a repetition of what man has been told by God. First, in its understanding of the Christian man of the present: does he, precisely as a Christian man, stand *opposite* to the truth of God, again and again opposite to a truth which must really come to him? Does he face it, every morning afresh, as one who does not know and, therefore, only hears it, as one who does not control it and, therefore, obeys? Is his cognition of it really recognition? Or does he *not* stand opposite of it, does it not need to come to him, because he already knows or has it; because, somehow, he owns it, so that he has but to recall it; because he is master of it? In the first case, he lets God tell him what is necessary. In the second case, he tells himself what is necessary. Theology must choose. That is the *psychological* aspect of the problem. But the judgment may be made also at a second point: in the understanding of the relationship between God's truth and history. Does the truth of God stand opposite to man also in history, as a reality absolutely different from him, absolutely condescending to him, so that he can in no way acquire or safeguard it for himself, and so that he can know it only in so far as it gives itself to him, so that he knows it only by being known in it? Is revelation history because it pleases God to disclose himself in history, and is his divine pleasure a question which man cannot consider answered even for a moment? Or is history revelation, because it pleases man to study history and to find God in it? Has man access to the truth of God through history . . . in such a way that he interprets history in the light of what is or has become truth to him? In the first case, he lets truth be told

to him; in the second place, he tells it to himself, *via* history. Here too, theology has to choose. And this is the *historical* aspect of the problem. . . .

"The theology of the first half of the Nineteenth Century instructed the Christian preacher that man is in a position to seek, find and possess the truth of God in his own Christian consciousness, or in history, so that he, the preacher, might say not what had been told to him, but what he might, could, and should tell of himself. That is what was called the word of God, at that time."

These sentences clearly describe the chief concern of Barth. He is opposed to any sort of theology which holds God to be given in inner or historical experience. He objects to modern theology in so far as it is dominated by Psychologism and Historism. God is transcendent. He is not a fact of personal experience or of history. He is a reality radically different from that which we find *a priori* or *a posteriori* in and through our consciousness. He is unknown except as he reveals himself. He is the subject and not the object of revelation. Man cannot control him but he controls man. God is God, not man.

In the background of this theology is the conviction that if man absolutizes anything that he might claim to have, he deceives himself, for his life is constantly challenged by the danger of meaninglessness. Any form of human self-sufficiency is exposed to the curse of illusoriness. It becomes especially dangerous in the field of religion. For if God—in whom the question of the meaning of life is answered, because he is that which makes all reality real and truth true, because he is reality full of truth and truth full of reality—should really be naught but an element of human life, if his

being should be a possession, or a quality, or a content of human consciousness, he too would be as questionable and uncertain as the life of man. A theology, therefore, which explains the divine revelation on the basis of psychological or historical analyses is incapable of asserting the reality of God, without the certainty of which man cannot meaningfully live.

From the viewpoint of the history of modern theology, it is significant that the work of Ludwig Feuerbach has made a profound impression on Barth. In all his writings, he alludes to the writings of this philosopher, and in his book on *Theology and the Church*, he devotes a whole chapter<sup>2</sup> to him. This man is, in many ways, a forerunner of what we now call religious humanism. He considered the idea of God and all religious concepts products of the imagination of man, reflections of human desires into a transcendent realm. He asked the question whether the nature of God is anything else than the nature of man, objectified in such a manner that it appears as an "opposite" of man, and whether theology, therefore, should not frankly be regarded as anthropology. In consequence he desired to change men from "friends of God to friends of men, from believers to thinkers, from worshippers to workers, from candidates for the 'Yonder' to students of the 'Here,' from Christians, who according to their own confession are partly animals and partly angels, to men, whole men."<sup>3</sup> According to Barth these views constitute very legitimate questions for modern theology. He believes that from its own premises one can do no other than finally agree with Feuerbach when he asserts that modern theology is tending toward the apotheosis of man. He is of course sure that the theologians do not mean it so, but he is certain that only that

can be the end of their road. It is highly interesting to note that certain American preachers have frankly professed opinions which are essentially the same as Feuerbach's.

In the mind of Barth, the underlying conviction on which this sort of thinking is based is that "man is the measure of all things and that he is the essence, origin and goal of all values." And "if one cannot laugh Feuerbach out of countenance when he proposes such a view, one cannot attack him critically,"<sup>4</sup> Barth believes. Only ignorance of death and ignorance of evil can be the basis of such a philosophy. A person who knows that he must die and that he is evil will wisely refrain from identifying himself in any way with God.

Humanism is not profound enough to be credited with the name of a religious philosophy which is oriented to a knowledge of man as he really is. The fact of death must at least compel a man to ask himself the question, *why* live—and just this question the Humanists avoid. For that reason, they are liable to produce a state of mind which must be characterized as human self-sufficiency, which is not in need of the real God. Barth fears that the dependence of modern theology upon psychological and historical "experiences" and upon the beliefs resulting from them does not permit a sure defense against the humanization of God which Feuerbach and the Humanists propagate. Hence he struggles for a theology which will be based on the faith in the ultra-human, real God.

But where is this God? That he is, must simply be believed. The "existence" of the real God is an axiom, a *principium*,<sup>5</sup> to which one cannot ascend, but from which one can only come. We have attempted to show that this conviction is part of a religious philosophy

of life described by the word "crisis," which is the background of Barth's entire thinking. The infinite contradictions in the existence of man are dissolved only in a transcending synthesis toward which he constantly moves in a life of repentance and of an ever renewed spirit of unselfishness, criticizing himself in the presence of the eternal perfection and in anticipation of the Kingdom of God to come.

We believe that this philosophy of life is true and profound. In its presentation lies the strength of Barth. It must, therefore, be regretted that he has as yet not developed it fully.

His real interest is more concretely theological. He understands himself as a member of the Christian church, and wishes to be an ecclesiastical thinker. Hence he is not satisfied with the recovery of the meaning of the religious idea of revelation as it underlies this philosophy of life, but he strives to restore also a definitely Christian concept of the revelation. He thinks on the basis of the Christian belief that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. It is in reference to this specific theology that we must object to Barthianism, for it becomes finally a restoration of Christian traditionalism. God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ—this is the claim of the Bible and this claim must be obediently recognized. That God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ is the theme of the authoritative theologies of the Church universal and this theme must be recognized. The sacrament of baptism must even serve as a guarantee of the truth and trustworthiness of the belief of the church. In consequence, Barth is led to renew the dogmatic theology of the past; and one cannot avoid the accusation that he ultimately presents himself as a devotee of a modern scholasticism. This tendency

of his thought, which grows in definiteness as the years pass, must deprive him of the privilege of leadership in the present dilemma of Christian theology. In the first place, the church which could exercise such teaching authority as Barth presupposes, does not really exist. He himself once exclaimed: "A very essential condition of the misery of contemporary theology is the fact that we theologians have no church behind us, which has the courage to tell us clearly: In so far as we have the right to speak, such and such is dogma *in concretissimo*." <sup>6</sup> There is no longer such a church—except in the case of Catholicism. How can one then construct a theology which presupposes such ecclesiastical authority? And furthermore: The theory that the claim of the prophets and apostles of the Bible *must* be recognized as true, is arbitrary. Why not also the testimony of other prophets and founders of religion?

It was not without reason that modern theology has developed as it has. *The world and man's world-consciousness have changed*. The sciences, *including* the science of religion, are young. We *must* acknowledge that the authorities lodged in Bible and Church were supernatural! And they have fallen under the assault of a tremendous increase of knowledge and criticism. The absoluteness and the truth of the Christian religion, as it is based upon the belief in God's exclusive revelation in Jesus Christ, can no longer be asserted in the old ways, not even in modernized old ways. One cannot combat the methods of modern theology, its Psychologism and Historism, by attempting a recovery of the old authorities against which it rightly and necessarily rebelled.

Barth's criticism of liberal theology, however, can hardly be refuted. The premises of that theology, in-

deed, seem hardly strong enough to defend the belief in God against the religious agnosticism which is called Humanism. Barth's rediscovery of the transcendence of God and of the eschatological nature of the religious life are expressions of a truly profound and genuine view of life. The theologians will have to accept the correction which is derived from the recognition of the "Biblical attitude" and of the "infinite, qualitative difference between time and eternity." They will also have to take the significance of the religious "crisis" into consideration. But another than Barth will have to come, to apply these principles to modern theology. We cannot go back behind Troeltsch, Harnack, Ritschl and Schleiermacher. We can go only beyond them.

Barth is not *the* prophet of the new Christianity. He is the "preacher in the wilderness." His voice rings in our ears, and we will not forget his message, but we must wait for another. Perhaps this is what he would wish us to do.

God is God, not man—repent ye! This is his admonition to us. If we accept it, we must endeavor to live in an attitude of mind the light of which shines through all the stormy and cloudy passages of Barth's dialectics and which Luther beautifully described in the following words: "*Dass also dies Leben nicht ist eine Frumkeit, sondern ein Frommwerden, nicht eine Gesundheit, sondern ein Gesundwerden, nicht ein Wesen, sondern ein Werden, nicht eine Ruhe, sondern eine Übung; wir sind's noch nicht, wir werden's aber. Es ist noch nicht getan und geschehen, es ist aber in Gang und Schwang. Es ist nicht das Ende, es ist aber der Weg; es glühet und glinzet noch nicht alles, es fügt sich aber alles.*"

## APPENDIX

## A LIST OF BARTH'S PUBLICATIONS

*Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit.* Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche (Z. Th. K.), 1909, pp. 317-21.

*Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott.* Z. Th. K., 1914, pp. 21-32; 65-95.

*Der Römerbrief.* First edition (R. 1). Bern: G. A. Bläschlin, 1919. Second edition (R.), München: Kaiser, 1922. Fifth ed., 1926.

*Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie.* (W. G.), Gesammelte Vorträge, Vol. I. München: Kaiser, 1922; second ed. 1925. Engl. translation by Douglas Horton: *The Word of God and the Word of Man.* Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928.

*Die Auferstehung der Toten* (A.). München: Kaiser, 1924; second ed. 1926.

*Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf.* Vol. I: *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes.* Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik. München: Kaiser, 1927.

*Erklärung des Philipperbriefes.* München: Kaiser, 1928.

*Die Theologie und die Kirche.* Gesammelte Vorträge, Vol. II. (Th. K.). München: Kaiser, 1928.

*Vom Christlichen Leben.* München: Kaiser, 1923. Engl. translation by J. Strathearn McNab: *The Christian Life.* London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930.

*Zur Lehre vom Heiligen Geist.* München: Kaiser, 1930.

There are two collections of sermons by K. Barth and E. Thurneysen: *Komm Schöpfer Geist* (second ed., München: Kaiser, 1924) and *Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben* (second ed., 1928).

Barth is a regular contributor to the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Z. Z.), edited by Georg Merz in München (Kaiser). His most recent articles have appeared in this *Zeitschrift*.