

SHALL WE FOLLOW
KARL BARTH?

BY
SIDNEY SPENCER, B.A.

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PART I. AN OUTLINE OF THE BARTHIAN THEOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTORY

AN English Church leader has stated in *The British Weekly* that Karl Barth has saved the Protestant Churches of the Continent from Unitarianism. The statement is perhaps sufficiently accurate to serve as an index both of the character and of the extent of Barth's influence. It must not be taken to imply that Continental Protestantism has come, in general, to accept a thoroughgoing Barthian position. An American writer, W. M. Horton, declared in 1938 that in the Confessional Church in Germany "there are comparatively few full-fledged Barthians"—though he added that "Barth has provided the most aggressive leadership and most consistent theological defence of the movement". It is, at any rate, clear that Barth's influence is an intensely vital force. It is equally clear that from a Liberal Christian point of view it is quite definitely reactionary. It is all the more necessary that Liberal Christians should have some acquaintance with the things he stands for. It is the purpose of this essay to indicate the main features of his teaching on some of the fundamental issues of theology, and to offer a criticism and an alternative.

It may be well first of all to mention the chief external facts of his career. Barth was born at Basel in 1886. His father was a pastor of the Reformed Church, and he decided in early life to follow in his footsteps. With this end in view he studied both in Switzerland and in Germany (at Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg). The chief influence in his early years was that of the Liberal theologian Herrmann. For twelve years (1909-21) he was a pastor in Switzerland, and it was in the latter part of this period—during the First World War and after—that the direction of his thought was changed. He came into prominence first through his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans in 1919. Two years later this went into a second edition, in which it was radically revised. In the same year Barth began his career as theological professor. He held successively three chairs in Germany, but in 1933 he was dismissed from his post at Bonn on political grounds. He was then appointed to the chair at Basel which he has held ever since.

Among Barth's works available in English the chief, apart from the commentary on Romans, are *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (a miscellaneous collection of papers and addresses of a fairly popular and un-theological sort), *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (the first part of a treatise on *Church Dogmatics*—which is highly

and even drily theological), and the Gifford Lectures of 1938, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*. In addition, there are several shorter works, such as *The Resurrection of the Dead* (a commentary on 1 Cor. 15), *Credo, God in Action*, and a contribution to a symposium on *Revelation* edited by Baillie and Martin.

There is one difficulty in dealing adequately and accurately with Barth's theology which it is necessary to bear in mind; and that is the very decided changes which have taken place in his thinking in certain respects, since he came to the fore as the leader of a distinctive movement. (As regards his position in that respect it is good to know that Barth displays both humility and humour. "It is a real question", he once said, "whether there is as much joy in heaven as there is on earth over the growth of the Barthian school.") His teaching has been described as "theology on the wing". He not merely subjected his commentary on Romans to a drastic revision in its second edition: he has since rejected even the second edition as an authoritative source of his theology.

In spite of the modifications which have come about in his teaching there is no haziness in Barth's thinking; there is no ambiguity about the things he has come to stand for—and the things he has come to stand against. It is necessary

always to remember this: Barth is not merely a theologian, he is a prophet. He brings into his theology the prophetic spirit of the great Reformers. We may describe him as a modern Calvin, both because he revives the main lines of Calvin's teaching and because, at the same time, he renews Calvin's force and fire and passion for God. As a Quaker critic has said, he has "waked a multitude of complacent souls to new life". He is a man of intense conviction, and above all of intense conviction of the reality of God. It is primarily because he feels that much of the theological thinking of modern times fails to do justice to this supreme fact that he believes that it has gone seriously astray.

Barth and Protestant "Modernism"

The clue to the understanding of Barth lies in the fact that his teaching is a reaction against certain tendencies of modern religious thought. In fact, it is a reaction against the whole trend of religious thought which is known as "Liberal" or "Modernist"—and which, as the writer in *The British Weekly* previously referred to points out, is, in fact, a "drift towards Unitarianism". Barth speaks of the Modernist section of the Church as a "false synagogue". It is true that he is not a Fundamentalist. He does not advocate

a mere return to traditional Protestant orthodoxy, with its stress on Biblical literalism and infallibility. His teaching has been strongly criticised by American Fundamentalists; it is not acceptable to the more conservative Lutherans of Germany. Yet he is opposed to the whole stream of Protestant Modernism, which has its source in the work of Schleiermacher. In Schleiermacher's teaching there were two chief notes: the emphasis on feeling as the distinctive element in the religious life ("the essence of religion", he said, "consists in a feeling of absolute dependence on God"), and the emphasis on divine immanence—he conceived God as the absolute unity underlying the multiplicity of phenomena. The two tendencies converge in a "mystical" approach to religion. Schleiermacher, it has been said, "revealed religion in its mystic inwardness as immediate awareness of God". Barth is utterly antipathetic to all mysticism, and his theology is a protest against the tendencies favourable to it which are found in Schleiermacher and the movement of thought which goes back to him.

"The Barthian theology", says W. S. Urquhart in his recent study, *Humanism and Christianity*, "is best understood by contrasting it with all immanent teaching." It is well to observe at this point that we do not have to share Barth's view to recognise that there is a certain ground for

his reaction. The "immanental" mode of thought (particularly, perhaps, so far as it derives from Schleiermacher rather than from the great Christian mystics) carries with it certain dangers. If it is pushed to an extreme, it leads to the Humanism and subjectivism which has no sense of the supremacy and the unfathomable depths of the divine Reality, because it denies transcendence. Barth speaks as though this were the inevitable outcome of Modernist thinking. "Modernist thought", he says, "hears man answer without any one having called him. It hears man talk to himself." That is a serious distortion of anything in the nature of mysticism. Yet it is true of the non-theistic Humanism to which Modernism sometimes leads. Then again, Modernism, with its doctrine of the divinity of man, leads sometimes to an easy-going optimism and complacency, a superficial conception of human progress, a readiness to identify itself with the trends of modern secular civilisation, a failure to recognise the deep spiritual crisis of the modern world. The "German Christianity" which made terms with Nazism was far more "liberal" in its theological outlook than the Confessional Church. Its attitude is symptomatic of a far wider failure. The strength of the Barthian reaction lies in its protest against these things.

2. BARTH AND THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

Barth's emphasis on the divine transcendence is the fundamental feature of his theology. He feels it necessary to insist, as against any conception of the continuity or inner unity of man with God, on the immense distance, the gulf, totally unbridgeable by man, which lies between them. The divine transcendence, as Barth conceives it, has two main aspects.

(a) God, being the infinite, eternal, ultimate Reality above and beyond the universe, is beyond the reach of human thought save by way of analogy or symbolism. "Men are not competent", he says in *The Epistle to the Romans*, "even if they are gifted with tongues of fire, to speak of God otherwise than in a parable" (p. 333). That is the aspect of transcendence which Barth specially stressed in his earlier phase. He was fond then of quoting Kierkegaard's phrase, "the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity". In that sense he spoke of God, as Otto did, as "wholly other" than ourselves. Actually he is entirely in line there with Schleiermacher—and in line with the whole mystical tradition (so long as "otherness" does not imply an ultimate separation). It was in this connection that Barth was apt to use the phrase, "Dialectical Theology". "Dialectic" is, of

course, an antithetical method of reasoning, which sets one mode of thought over against another; and it is only by antithesis and paradox, Barth suggests, that we are capable of dealing at all in our thought with the relation between God and man. "The relation from our side", says McConnachie, "must always be a dialogue, a conflict. We cannot state it in clear unambiguous language, for we know only in part" (*The Significance of Karl Barth*, pp. 79 f.).

(b) In his later teaching Barth's emphasis has changed. His thinking has become more Biblical, more traditional, less philosophical in its character. He is concerned far more with Luther and Calvin, and far less with Plato or with Kierkegaard or Dostoievsky. What he chiefly has in mind now is the divine sovereignty. It has been said that the dominant thought of Calvin is "the infinite and transcendent sovereignty of God". Precisely the same thing is true of the later Barth. It is well to observe that in this thought of the divine sovereignty, taken by itself, there is nothing specifically Christian. The specifically Christian vision is of a God who in the essence of His being is love. It is only in that context that the sovereignty of God finds its true significance. The sovereignty of God is the ultimate sovereignty of love. Barth acknowledges that love is "the highest law and the ultimate reality", rooted in

the inmost mystery of the divine nature. In his account of the Trinity (in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*) he identifies the Holy Spirit, which unifies the Father and the Son, with the principle of love. Yet he fails in the details of his theology to follow out this clue. His dominant idea is the Will and Power rather than the Love of God.

The Barthian theology is known not only as "Dialectical Theology", but as the "Theology of Crisis". The fundamental thought which the phrase implies is that man is being confronted at every moment of his existence by the transcendent God who stands over against him, and so is placed in a condition of perpetual crisis. He has to decide continually for God or for himself. So far as he decides for himself and ignores the divine Reality, trying to solve his problems by his own powers, he is involved in "crisis" in the further sense of "judgment". The divine judgment falls constantly upon us, in our personal and our collective life, so far as we adopt a merely self-reliant and anthropocentric attitude.

Although the keynote of Barth's teaching is the divine transcendence, he does not in theory deny immanence. In his book, *Credo*, he explicitly affirms it, in a restricted sense. Immanence as he conceives it is an aspect of the creatorship of God. He defines it as God's "free, omnipotent presence and lordship in the world that He has created"

(p. 34). He appears to mean nothing more than God's co-existence with the world, His presence to it, His power over it. So far as human beings are concerned, he strongly rejects the notion of any continuity between human and divine activity, or any divine element in the soul. "There is no continuity", he says, "between the activity of God and our activity. There are no blood-vessels through which the Life of God overflows into our life" (*The Christian Life*, p. 38). That denial provides the clue to his doctrine of man, his conception of revelation and incarnation, and his eschatology.

3. BARTH AND THE NATURE OF MAN

Barth has returned to Calvin, not only in his doctrine of God, but equally, and by the same process, in his conception of man. McConnachie has said that "Barth has brought back the doctrine of Total Depravity", and that it constitutes for him the corner-stone of Christian theology" (*op. cit.*, p. 276). "Total Depravity" must not be taken to imply complete moral corruption, but total loss of the light or spark of God in the soul. The Barthian doctrine is the complete antithesis of the Quaker concept of the Inner Light. It is not easy to know what Barth makes of the Johannine phrase, "the Light that lighteth

every man". "Man", he says in his *Gifford Lectures*, "has now become a tarnished mirror, in which the glory of God can no longer be reflected" (p. 50). The reference there is not merely to the actual evils which do in fact alienate man from the divine, but to the very inmost springs of his life. "To be man means now", he adds, "to be an enemy of God." Barth goes farther in this respect than traditional Catholic theology. He quarrels with Augustine, because, with all his emphasis on human sinfulness and corruption, the latter still maintains that the Life of God is the inmost life of the soul. A French theologian has contended that even Calvin himself never went so far as Barth in cutting the bond between God and man or denying to man any "little spark" of natural light by which God may be known.

It seems strange, in view of what he says, that Barth, like Calvin, still believes that man may be redeemed by the grace of God. If man may be redeemed (and Barth lays constant stress upon the fact—he utterly rejects the charge of pessimism which is brought against him by liberal theologians), he surely has within him a capacity for God to which divine grace can appeal. Barth, paradoxically, denies the fact. He admits that there was in human nature an original "point of contact" with God, "the image of God" in

man. This "point of contact", this "image of God", may be restored through Christ. But it may be restored only through faith; and faith is itself the work of divine grace, conceived as a purely external and supernatural power. The "point of contact" with God, the "image of God" in man, was totally lost, it was "annihilated" at the Fall.

On this point Emil Brunner, whose teaching in many ways is closely akin to Barth's, parts company with him. Brunner raised the question explicitly in a pamphlet, *Nature and Grace*, to which Barth replied in a furious attack upon Brunner's view. (The pamphlet and the reply are now available in an English translation.) Yet it is evident that Barth himself at one time adopted a different attitude. "Even fallen man", he says in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, "is the bearer of the divine spark" (p. 310). In *The Epistle to the Romans* he describes the doctrine of Original Sin as a "falsification of Paul's teaching". What he understands by the Fall in this commentary is not any historical event which has taken place in time as we know it—in our world. Rather he conceives the whole of human life—in fact, the whole of life as it exists in our world, with its continuous predatory struggle—as the outcome of a pre-mundane Fall. "We must think of sin as the pre-supposition

which underlies every human event and conditions every human status. Sin is the characteristic mark of human nature as such; it is not a lapse or series of lapses in man's life; it points to the Fall which lies behind time" (pp. 173, 168). "Adam (in his fallen state)", he says again, "is the ego of the man of this world" (p. 181). Barth appears here to accept the mystical tradition expressed by William Blake in his *Prophetic Books*, and revived recently by Canon Peter Green in his little book, *The Pre-Mundane Fall*—which postulates the original union of all souls with God in the world of the spirit. The very existence of mankind as we know it, in our separation from one another and from God, is a Fall from this primal unity. (From this point of view—though Barth does not himself make the observation—creation itself is identical with the Fall.)

This mode of thought does not appear to be compatible with his later teaching. It implies an inner continuity of man with God (however forgotten and denied in practice) which is utterly alien to his present radical dualism. In *The Word of God and the Word of Man* he says, "the unredeemed mind of man, split off from the mind of the Creator, denies its origin, denies itself": yet "we cannot quite forget the soul's provenance; we cannot quite forget its unity with God in the beginning" (pp. 54 f.). If in our separation and

sinfulness we deny ourselves—our own essential being; if we cannot be wholly blind to our original unity with God, our nature cannot be altogether devoid of a divine and transcendent element; the image of God cannot be utterly obliterated within us.

4. BARTH AND REVELATION

In the earlier Barth there was a strain of Platonic mysticism which is entirely foreign to his later outlook. His supreme emphasis in the last twenty years has been on revelation. "He is before all else", says an American writer in the preface to *Credo*, "a Doctor of the Holy Scriptures. He has brought the Church back to the Word of God." He has said himself that his theology is an effort "to think through the category of revelation".

What exactly does Barth understand by "revelation" and the "Word of God"? Here again he takes us back to Calvin, but with an important difference. Calvinism taught originally that the Bible itself in every part of it is directly the "Word of God"; the authors of the Biblical writings were the amanuenses of God; revelation is embodied in the Scriptures. Barth does not adopt this view; he is not a Fundamentalist. He accepts the results of modern critical study.

He recognises that revelation is not a process of mechanical dictation, that on the human side it is a spiritual experience. He distinguishes three modes of revelation. God speaks, he tells us, (a) directly to the prophets and apostles; (b) indirectly in the written records of that process in the Scriptures, which are essentially an "attestation" of the divine event; (c) more indirectly still through the work of Christian preachers who expound the Scriptures.

In his book, *God in Action*, Barth draws a singular analogy. He compares God's action in revealing Himself to men with a military offensive. "On the battlefield", he says, "it has happened that the enemy has gone into action with overwhelming superiority. . . . This event is God's revelation to men." God is the enemy; the troops He attacks are the prophets and apostles. These troops send a report of the attack to reinforcements immediately behind the front line: the report is the Holy Scripture, the reinforcements are the Church. "The moment of the call, and thus of decision, resolution, command and obedience, is the moment in which we stand. We are called to hasten to the place where the prophets and apostles are making their stand, . . . face to face with the coming God" (pp. 4-7).

The parable is a strange one, yet it makes clear the essential nature of Barth's conception. Revela-

tion, as he conceives it, is not something emerging from the depths of the soul: it is an expression of "the free and sovereign activity of God towards man". The meeting of God with man which takes place in revelation is, as Barth says himself, a miracle (*ibid.*, p. 11). It rests essentially, not on any capacity inherent in our deeper nature for the apprehension of God, but purely and simply on the initiative of a sovereign and wholly transcendent God.

Revelation is thus in one aspect a historical event: it has the character which Barth sums up as "Einmaligkeit"—it takes place once for all. "Whoever says revelation says one singular revelation which has happened once and for all, irrevocably and unrepeatedly." It occurs in its truth and fulness only in the person of Christ. So far as it came to the Hebrew prophets, it came, not as an experience in any way self-sufficing, but as an anticipation, preceding and preparing the way for the "Fulness of the times", which was accomplished in Christ. The Scriptures are the Word of God so far as they can be regarded as "the attestation and explanation of Christ through the prophets and apostles" (*The Knowledge and the Service of God*, p. 177). "To say revelation is to say, 'The Word became flesh'." We can know "absolutely nothing" about God from any other source. Anything that we may imagine

we know in any other way is merely "the idol of our own heart".

It is evident that Barth draws an absolute line of demarcation between Christianity and all other religions. He takes us back to the old classification of religions which declares that there are two sorts of religion, "true" and "false": Christianity is true, all the rest are false. He refuses to admit the validity of any recognition of common qualities in Christianity and other religions. "The God of Mohammed", he says, "is an idol like all other idols, and it is an optical illusion to characterise Christianity along with Islam as a 'monotheistic' religion" (*The Knowledge and the Service of God*, p. 21). From his point of view it is not worth while even to discuss whether there is revelation in other religions, because if there is, it can only be "in a perverted, invalid and loose sense of the concept" (*Revelation*, p. 45). The fundamental ground of distinction between Christianity and all other religions is this: that religion generally represents the attempt of man to find God—an attempt which by the nature of the case is bound to be vain—whereas Christianity springs from the divine initiative, whereby God reveals Himself to man. Barth seeks to reinstate as absolute the traditional division—which has been rejected in our time by liberal orthodoxy—between "natural"

and "revealed" religion. He does not deny that there is an indirect revelation of God in Nature and history and the human conscience. But he does deny that we have the power to apprehend this revelation until our minds are enlightened by the grace of God in Christ.

Revelation as Barth conceives it has significance for us primarily as a historical event. God has spoken to the prophets and apostles; He has become incarnate, and thereby made Himself known, in Christ. But it has another and equally essential aspect: it becomes revelation in the full sense only when man accepts it. The Word of God is not simply an act historically accomplished once for all. It is part of the mystery of the Word that it is an act continually renewed. The Bible becomes the Word of God for us when some portion of it lays hold upon us. And that is not simply a subjective process. "What was spoken by the prophets and apostles is spoken directly to ourselves", by a unique divine act (Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 293). Similarly, with the Word of God in Christ. The Word must be renewed in us by direct divine interposition to open the door of our hearts, before it can become a saving power. Man has no power of himself to make an act of saving faith. The personal apprehension of revelation "takes place only through revelation, or rather the apprehension

is itself revelation, is the pouring out of the Holy Ghost" (*Revelation*, pp. 60 f.). The miracle whereby God reveals Himself to prophets and apostles and in the person of Christ is renewed whenever men turn in faith to accept the Word of God.

Revelation is for Barth the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which he regards as the distinctive feature of the Christian conception of God. Barth maintains that, although the Trinitarian conception is not fully worked out in the Scriptures, it is involved in their teaching. The doctrine of the Trinity is arrived at, in other words, by an analysis of the Scriptural concept of revelation. The process has of necessity three aspects. God Himself is at once "Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness"; "God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation, identical also with its effect"—its impartation to man. (See *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 339 ff.) Or alternatively we have God as Revealer, Reconciler and Redeemer. Barth finds an anticipation of the Christian doctrine in the Old Testament, where the "angel", or again the "spirit", of Yahweh is identical with him, and yet at the same time distinguished from him. God expresses His lordship in His "freedom to become other than Himself, and yet to remain as He was". What the developed conception teaches is that this power

of self-differentiation is rooted in the inmost nature of God, who exists eternally in the three "modes" of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Barth is careful to say that these three "modes" are not to be understood as spiritual subjects. For that reason he avoids the use of the term "person" as applied to them. Yet it is hard to see, if Father and Son are simply "modes of existence of the one divine Subject or Lord", what justification there can be for Barth's own conception of the Spirit as the love which binds them in one.

5. BARTH AND THE INCARNATION

Revelation as Barth understands it involves Incarnation; the Word of God is revealed in its fulness in Jesus Christ. He expresses plainly and emphatically his conception of the unique and absolutely miraculous character of the Incarnation. He rejects quite definitely the thought, which is the keynote of Modernist Christology, of continuity between the person of Jesus and the spiritual development of mankind. Jesus stands entirely apart, because in him "the Creator became creature". God, who in His own being is utterly separate from the life of man, has taken to Himself human nature in him.

The thoroughgoing supernaturalism of Barth's outlook is expressed in the emphasis which he lays

on the miracles of the Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb. These are the supreme tokens of the revelation of God in Christ. They "betoken the existence of Jesus Christ as the human existence which is identical with God Himself", and which therefore differs from every other life in the mode both of its entering and of its leaving the world (*Revelation*, pp. 65 f.). Apart from this general consideration, Barth attaches a peculiar importance to the Virgin Birth. He suggests, in a piece of singular and apparently original theorising, that by escaping male paternity Jesus avoided the inheritance of sinful tendencies, because the specifically sinful element lies in the sovereignty of human will and power as such which characterises the male.

In his doctrine of the person of Christ Barth's very anxiety to avoid anything of the nature of Unitarianism has led him to adopt a view which has been described as a revival of Apollinarian heresy. In other words, while he emphatically declares that in Christ God became man, he fails (or, at least, in the first edition of his *Church Dogmatics* he failed) to recognise the full humanity of Christ. He drew a distinction between the "personality" of Jesus, which was completely human, and the "person" or ego of Jesus, in which dwelt the Logos. It is curious, in the light of this, that his conception of the Atonement

involves a complete identification of God, in Christ, with human nature. "God", he says, "steps into the place of sinful man", and "espouses our lost condition". He bears our sin and its punishment, and because He bears it, it is no longer ours, and so forgiveness becomes a possibility (*Revelation*, p. 56).

In his developed teaching Barth stakes everything upon the Incarnation, conceived as a wholly miraculous event. On the basis of his radical dualism that is, of course, a necessary view. In the earlier phase represented by his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans he seems to imply a notably different interpretation, resting not on an ultimate dualism, but on an ultimate identity of nature between Christ, who is God incarnate, and ourselves. It is true that he tells us that "God sends Christ, from the realm of the eternal, unfallen, unknown world of the Beginning and the End", so that "he is very God and very Man". But that, as he implies, is the ultimate nature of us all; and it is the significance of Christ that he is "the document by which the original, lost-but-recoverable union of God and man is guarded". Christ comes, that is to say, to show us what we truly are, to prepare the way for our redemption, "to proclaim the new creation, where Creator and creature are not two but one" (p. 277).

6. BARTH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Barth's teaching in both its earlier and its later phases is essentially eschatological. "A Christianity", he says, "which is not altogether and utterly eschatological has altogether and utterly nothing to do with Jesus Christ." In his interpretation of eschatology he differs radically from those Modernist thinkers who seek to reinterpret the early Christian hope of the Kingdom of God in terms of an earthly Utopia to be achieved by human effort—by educational and political activity and moral improvement. It is true that he is not a Christadelphian or a Jehovah's Witness. For him social reform and moral progress have their place. But it is a humble place. Such things cannot bring about even an approximation to the Kingdom of God.

Barth's view is based in part upon his conception of the sinfulness of man as a thing rooted in his very being in the present fallen world. Even when man is justified by faith in Christ, his life remains under the sway of sin. Barth accepts the teaching of Luther and Calvin, which was rejected as heretical by the Catholic Church, concerning the inevitable sinfulness of all human action. Redemption for Barth is a promise, and not a fulfilment. "Man's will", he says, "is and remains unfree; his conduct will be evil, and his

achievement not only incomplete, but perverted" (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 109).

The Barthian eschatology may be fantastic in some of its phases, yet it has an essential richness and depth of meaning. " ' Eschatological ' ", he says, " means ' related to the eschaton ' "—the last thing. But the eschaton—the Kingdom of God—as he sees, is not simply " the last thing " in point of time: in its essence it is the ultimate thing in point of reality. It is not simply a world to come: it is a world present now in the eternal order. The hope of the Kingdom of God is the hope of the emergence in time of that eternal order—the breaking in upon our world of time and space of transcendent reality.

In his earlier and less orthodox stage of thought Barth was apt to apply the beliefs of the early Church in a symbolical fashion. He calls the expectation of the Parousia (the Second Coming of Christ) in a literal sense the expectation of " a crude theatrical spectacle ". To await the Parousia is " to think the thought of eternity " as a " timeless, over-shadowing present ", and to live our life in the light of the vision. In one passage (in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*) he identifies the Resurrection of Christ with the Parousia: both are symbols of the new world which is to come (p. 90). Elsewhere he says, " What is narrated in enigmatical manner in the

gospels about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is at bottom really nothing else than the appearance and cognition of the Kingdom of God" (*The Christian Life*, p. 54). In the ultimate goal which these things prefigure the union of man with God will be restored. Creaturehood itself will be "annulled".

In his later works that particular thought—the mystical conception of the annulling of creatureliness—has no place; yet he still speaks of participation in the life of God and the bridging through Christ of the gulf which divides us from Him. Astonishing as it may seem, though it is entirely consistent with his fundamental dualism, he has come now to accept a literal belief in the Second Coming of Christ. Christ "has come, and will likewise come again in direct bodily presence"; "on a second and comprehensive Easter Day the exaltation of the Lord will be repeated" (*Credo*, pp. 116, 122). The one hope of salvation for the world lies in the miraculous power of God, which alone can deliver us from the reign of sin and death. In his final vision Barth has, happily, departed far from Calvin, for he still cherishes the hope—admittedly as a hope, and not a positive conviction—of the ultimate redemption of all men.

PART II. A CRITICISM OF BARTH AND AN ALTERNATIVE

IN the preceding section of this essay the end in view has been mainly expository. An attempt has been made to set forth the leading features of the Barthian theology. Naturally, however, we cannot leave the matter there: we must go on to ask, What are its points of strength and of weakness? What contribution has Barth made to Christian thinking? How far does the religious outlook which he presents meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of our time?

I. DOES GOD INTERVENE

It is clear from the foregoing review of his work that in its developed form Barth's theology is governed by a single line of emphasis. As has already been pointed out, it represents a reaction against the emphasis on divine immanence which is characteristic of Modernist or Liberal religion. Although Barth admits that God is "not only transcendent, but also immanent", he repudiates the significance which has been attached to this truth in modern times. There appears to be no room in his outlook for that "sense of something far more deeply interfused" of which the poets

sing. Man, in particular, is so wholly alienated from God that nothing of the divine remains in his nature. If he is to be brought to the knowledge of God, it can only be by a miracle: God must act upon him from without. And so we have the thought of revelation, incarnation, salvation, redemption as resting in each case on a wholly miraculous process. The divine Power breaks in upon the natural order to make Himself known to prophets and apostles, to become incarnate in Jesus, to bring men to repentance, to establish His Kingdom in the world. Barth seeks, in fact, to rehabilitate the notion of God—rejected by Modernist thinking—as One who, in order to accomplish His purpose of good to men, must intervene at certain chosen points in human experience. And so he returns to a literal belief, not only in the Virgin Birth and the physical Resurrection of Christ, but even in his second Advent. The Kingdom can come, the world can be redeemed (just as God can reveal Himself and become incarnate), only by what has been described as “an act of vertical lightning intervention”.

Does God really act in this way? That is the essential issue with which Barth confronts us. Is He so essentially external to the world and to the life of man that revelation, incarnation, redemption must, if they are real facts at all, be conceived as

miraculous events? Barth is concerned to re-affirm the objectivity, the majesty, the sovereignty of God. He seeks to restore the sense of human need, human dependence, human sinfulness, as against all those tendencies in life and thought which minister to our pride and self-sufficiency. We may grant the value and necessity of the work that he has done in this direction, and yet deny the validity of the outlook with which he presents us.

It is the claim of Barth that he sets aside the influence of philosophy or human wisdom, and brings us back to the way of thinking characteristic of the Bible. Yet at the same time he rejects the Fundamentalist and traditional Protestant conception of Biblical infallibility. The Bible is not for him the Word of God: it is rather a witness to the Word, which (as he conceives it) is identical with God Himself. On his own showing, therefore, we cannot accept without critical examination the modes of thought employed by the Biblical writers. Now, there is no doubt that a prominent place is held in the Scriptures by the notion of God as One who from time to time intervenes alike in the order of Nature and in human experience. God sends the Flood as a punishment for human sin, He delivers Israel from Egypt by a miracle, He reveals Himself to Moses externally, He brings about the miraculous birth of Jesus, He raises his body from the tomb, at the Last Day He

will cause the dead to rise, and will create a new heaven and a new earth. Our forefathers accepted these things quite literally without any difficulty, because they accepted the presuppositions which underlie them. But in modern times there has come about an immense and far-reaching change of thought, thanks to the growth of physical science. It is the aim of science to understand the events of Nature by studying them in their mutual connections. When an unusual phenomenon happens, like the appearance of a comet or the occurrence of an earthquake, we do not attribute it to the intervention of God, as men were accustomed to do. We do not suggest that earthquakes and storms are sent to punish people for their sins: we seek to discover the place they hold in the economy of Nature. Men still pray for rain or for fine weather, but they have no great belief in the efficacy of such prayers. They no longer share the passionate assurance of former times that their petitions will be granted. There is a sense of unreality about them, because they do not fit in with the generally accepted framework of thought. They do not harmonise with the assumption of an orderly universe which underlies the work of science—and which alone makes it possible for us to understand and to control the forces of Nature.

Scientific study inevitably reacts upon our con-

obliterated at the Fall, and which can only be restored by a miracle. Barth rightly sees that if the absoluteness of the separation between man and God is broken down, the rigid dualism for which he stands is undermined, and new possibilities of thought emerge. It is interesting, in the light of the stress which he lays on Biblical teaching, to observe that for Hebrew psychology the separation was in fact by no means absolute. Hebrew psychology, says Vernon Bartlet, did not treat man "as a self-contained and closed nature in himself, apart from God, but as open and plastic on his higher side to the divine nature or Spirit" (*Christianity in History*, p. 223). This comes remarkably close to the conception which Barth so strongly rejects when he declares that "there are no blood-vessels through which the Life of God overflows into our life".

What are the grounds on which Barth arrives at his revival of the doctrine of Total Depravity? What is it that leads him to assume that the light that is in us has become so completely darkened that we are incapable of finding God, save as God miraculously reveals Himself? No doubt experience has played its part in leading him to this conclusion. His teaching is in one aspect a revolt against the superficial optimism of much liberal theology, which fails to do justice to the fact of sin and assumes that man is steadily moving

upwards to a higher level. Liberalism of this type was itself a reflection of the confident Victorian belief in human progress, produced by the triumphs of material civilisation and reinforced by the march of social and political reform. This complacent belief in progress received a shattering blow in the First World War. Barth was quick to realise the fact, and to recognise the need of a reorientation of religious thinking. He sought to re-discover the reality symbolised by the Biblical myth of the Fall. He saw the truth which had been proclaimed a century before by William Blake when he declared that the essential fact beneath the evils of the world was the "un-annihilated self".

At this stage in his thought Barth had not yet arrived at the belief, which is essential to his later outlook, that man is wholly alienated from God. There was still, he said, in our nature a spark of the divine. What is it that led him to abandon this belief? It can scarcely be maintained that his present position is the outcome simply of further reflection on the facts of experience. Certainly experience points to the truth in the doctrine of "original sin". It shows that there is, rooted in our nature as finite and separated selves, a tendency to the assertion of our separateness. "In sin", says Rabindranath Tagore, "man takes part with the finite against the Infinite that is in him. It is

the defeat of his soul by his self" (*Sadhana*, p. 38). From that point of view sin is no accident : it is the outcome of the duality of our being—of the division in our nature as souls made for union with God, yet arising in a world of life ruled in large measure by blindness and conflict. "The darkness has blinded our eyes." The illusion of separateness characteristic of the animal species—producing, as Bergson says, "the innumerable discords and conflicts of Nature"—rises to a peculiar intensity in man through the growth of self-consciousness. For his own ends man becomes deliberately and consciously cruel, deliberately and consciously egoistic, in a way that no animal can be. In other words, he falls into sin.

The reality and power of evil as a factor in human experience is the positive basis of Barth's conception. Yet if man's alienation from God, his denial of the love which binds him to his fellow man, is a tragic and constant element in life, there is nothing in experience which can justify Barth's assertion that "to be man means now to be an enemy of God". There is, indeed, very much in experience that leads us to deny such a statement. Apart altogether from Christian influence, there is at work in human life a principle of self-forgetting love which is everywhere and in every soul at war with the love of self. "Socrates drink-

ing the hemlock, Jesus on the Rood", are emblems of the Good which, whether it be victorious or whether it be seemingly vanquished, is a persistent reality in the life of man. Even the evil deeds that men do are often clothed in the garb of good. And if men grope for goodness, if their souls are the arena of warring tendencies, they cannot be wholly darkened to the Light of God. "Nothing is or can be good in us", says William Law, "but the Life of God manifested in us. . . . Not a spark of goodness, not a breath of piety, can be in any creature, either in heaven or on earth, but by that divine Spirit which is a breath of God, breathed from Himself into the creature." Law was writing as an exponent of the mystical tradition which, recognising to the full the reality and power of evil, recognising, therefore, the extent of men's blindness and sin, saw also the potentiality of good that resides within us, and in that potentiality of good perceived the token of the divine Life and Light in the soul.

We have to choose between Barth and the mystics. Barth has returned to Calvin. It is in the interests of a Calvinist theology that he has been led to deny his own earlier insight. In doing that he has been brought to deny the faith of Jesus. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus to justify the idea of Total Depravity. He saw how far men were, in fact, alienated from the

love of God ; but he saw, too, the kinship that bound them to Him, and he sought to kindle in their hearts the flame of that divine and universal love by which we may rise to the realisation of our sonship.

3. HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF ?

In Barth's developed teaching the doctrine of revelation holds the central place. It is his quarrel with Modernism that it is unduly subjective—it emphasises human experience rather than the revealing activity of God. He seeks to bring us back to the Bible, not as in itself the revealed Word of God, but rather as the token of the Word. God is for him not simply a great First Cause “ at the back of beyond ” : He is a living Power who makes Himself known to man. God speaks : that is, for Barth, the primary fact.

Now there can be no doubt that in his emphasis on this fact Barth is recalling us to the fundamental reality of Christian teaching and experience. Christianity comes to us essentially as a revelation of the will and nature of God. It is the claim of the Church that in the work of prophets and apostles, and supremely in the life and death of Jesus, God has spoken to men. What, however, is distinctive in Barth's interpretation of revelation is its narrowly restricted scope and its miraculous

character. In both these aspects his teaching is a very definite challenge to the outlook of Liberal Christianity.

It is Barth's contention, not only that God is revealed in Christ, but that He is solely so revealed. Even the revelation which came to the prophets was purely preparatory—it had no validity taken by itself. Apart from the Word made flesh in Christ we have no knowledge of God at all. It is true that Barth admits that a revelation is given to man indirectly in Nature, in history and in the human heart and conscience ; but man, he declares, is so alienated from the Life of God that he has no power of himself to perceive the fact. Revelation, that is to say, becomes effective only when it assumes the distinctive character which we see in Christ—only when God breaks into the natural order to make Himself known. Even that revelation, moreover, has no final efficacy until it is reinforced by the direct act of God upon the individual soul.

In his doctrine of revelation Barth is concerned to show that God is One who really speaks, who really acts, who really makes Himself known to men. He is concerned to vindicate “ the free and sovereign activity of God ”. But in doing that he reduces man to a puppet, with no real freedom or initiative of his own, and therefore with no genuine responsibility. As Berdyaev remarks,

Barth "discovers in the created world only sin and powerlessness. . . . His world and his humanity are godless" (*The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, p. 39). And so he gives us a God who can only reveal Himself to us by a miracle—from without.

Barth writes with intense conviction. It is evident that he feels, as the prophets felt of old, that he is entrusted with a word of God to men. But it is evident also that his understanding of the message is coloured by the most serious limitations of insight and sympathy. Man, he says, has no power to apprehend the revelation of God which is given to us in the created world. Yet the fact remains that again and again men who have known nothing of Christianity or have been indifferent to the teaching of the Church have perceived that revelation. Religion, indeed, begins with the sense of a divine mystery in the world. The objects and forces of the world speak to men of a Life and Power within them which is yet deeper and greater than themselves. In that dim perception of divinity within, and yet beyond, their immediate environment we have the first glimmerings in men of the religious consciousness, the spirit of wonder and worship which (as it dawns more brightly upon them) becomes the vision and love of God. "Religion", Evelyn Underhill said, "is either an illusion or a revelation"

(*Man and the Supernatural*, p. 2). Religion, as she saw, is in itself at every stage a divine revelation. The sense of awe in face of the mystery of the world, in which religion is rooted, is itself a token of the divine Reality in which we live and move and have our being. God, who in some measure reveals Himself in Nature, unveils His presence also in the impulse which leads men to seek Him—in the insight whereby His presence is discerned.

Religion generally, as Barth regards it, is something entirely different from Christianity, because non-Christian religion represents man's quest of God, while Christianity bears witness to God's quest of man. Yet in truth man's search for God is itself a proof of God's search for man. If man is a God-seeking animal, it is because of the "somewhat of God" in the human soul which moves us to the quest. It is only on the basis of a dualism which sets God utterly apart from man, which admits of no continuity between them, no Light of God in the soul, that it is possible to draw an absolute line of separation, in the way that Barth does, between the Godward movement of man and the manward movement of God. But such a dualism is entirely incompatible with the deeper thought and experience of men. Man has sought God in all ages; and equally, by the same token, God has ever been seeking man. "It is

Thy will in us that willeth ; it is Thy desire in us that desireth."

For all his deep passion for God, Barth is leading men back to an extraordinarily narrow and limited view. So far as his influence prevails, it restores the arrogant "theological Imperialism" of the Christian Church, and does away with the growth of a larger spirit of sympathy and understanding towards non-Christian faiths, which the increase of knowledge has tended to promote. But that renewal of dogmatic claims, that diminution of insight and tolerance, marks the tragic failure of Barth and his followers to meet the real needs of our time. It is true that there has arisen in some quarters a superficial view, which assumes that all religions are equally good and equally true—that all stand on the same level of ethical and spiritual value. The serious study of religion affords no real basis for that assumption. On the other hand, the study of religion does naturally lead us to recognise the very real measure of identity which underlies the diversity of the great historic faiths—the common affirmation of an unseen universe in the vision of which man finds his highest good.

Barth maintains that revelation occurs only on the Hebrew-Christian line of development. The prophets and apostles as the organs of revelation are, for him, placed in a category which is entirely

unique; it is to them alone that God has spoken. It is hard to understand how any one who has studied the record of religious experience can uphold that view. It is the claim of the mystics of all religions that they have shared the experience of revelation. "The mystics with one voice", says T. H. Hughes, "proclaim that the knowledge they get is not what they discover for themselves. It is the impact of truth and of God on their spirit when they are receptive. . . . It is God's self-revelation to them" (*The Philosophic Basis of Mysticism*, p. 125). As Hughes points out, the difference in the expression of mysticism, in Hinduism, for example, or Islam or Christianity, springs from the varying forms of belief in which the mystic has been reared, not in the intrinsic quality of the experience. Always for the mystic there is the sense of revelation—the breaking in upon the human consciousness of divine Reality, beyond the soul, yet dwelling in its inmost depths. And always there is the same essential attitude on the mystic's part—the same devotion, the same surrender, the same utter giving of the self that it may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Barth maintains that revelation is a miracle—an event due solely to the "free and sovereign activity of God". Emil Brunner, following the same line of thought, contends that the prophets, to whom revelation came, "are not saints, not

mystics who by their own inner life find their way to God. The men of God in the Bible are chosen for no other reason than God's will" (*The Theology of Crisis*, p. 104). Yet if we compare the experience of the prophets as they relate it with what we know of the inner life of the saints, whether Christian or non-Christian, what must surely strike us is the remarkable measure of similarity which the records present. Brunner suggests that God chose men as the vehicles of revelation in an arbitrary fashion—without regard to their inner quality, their moral capacity, the stage of spiritual growth which they had attained. That is a wholly unwarranted assumption. If the divine message came to Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, rather than to Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, there was nothing accidental in the fact. Amos, it is clear, was a man endowed with spiritual sensitiveness, a man whose higher nature was awake, a man open and receptive to the deeper influences which play upon us. So it was with all the prophets. In their experience, it is true, there was an element of constraint: they felt themselves to be instruments seized and used by God. It seemed to them as though they were passive tools in His hands. "The Lord took me from following the flock." But this appearance of passivity is a distinguishing feature of the mystical life. It is involved in a measure in the experience

of illumination, which is given to the soul, not attained by the soul—though it is given when the soul is ready to receive it. The same thing is true, not only of the mystic's sense of God: it is true also of the new life to which his experience leads. "In the inner way", said Molinos, "it is the Lord who operates." As William James observes, "The mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power."

The resemblance between the experience of the prophets and that of the mystics becomes especially evident when we consider the means by which it was conveyed. Like many of the mystics, the prophets were men of a peculiar psychical endowment. They were liable to fall into a state of ecstasy or trance; they saw visions and heard voices which brought them messages from the Unseen. "The hand of Yahweh was upon me", said Ezekiel—that is to say, according to the regular implication of the phrase, he was in a state of ecstasy or trance—"and the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. . . . I heard a voice of One that spoke." When the prophets speak of visions and voices they are speaking directly in terms of their own experience and not in some vague metaphorical fashion. Again and again the mystics have had experiences of precisely the same character. St. Teresa tells us that

messages or "locutions", which she regarded as divine commands, sometimes came to her in a seemingly external way, so that they could be "heard by the ears like a real voice"; at other times they came inwardly. The content of them was wholly unexpected. They frequently ran counter to her personal judgment, they interfered with her plans, they warned her of coming events. She placed implicit reliance upon them, and she never had cause to regret her trust.

The experience of St. Teresa typifies that of many other mystics. Perhaps the most illuminating account of the inner voice is that of Nicholas of Basel, who belonged to the medieval society, the Friends of God. "I heard a voice", says Nicholas, "which came not from myself, but yet it came as one who spoke within me; but it was not my thoughts that it spoke." It is not of any real importance whether the words heard by saints and prophets were heard outwardly or not. Inner experience has a strange way of assuming an apparently outer form, so that what really happens in the soul seems to happen, partially, at least, out there in space. The main fact is that something significant does express itself in this way. What is that "something" ?

Barth declares that revelation is a miracle. God, as his language implies, is to be conceived as directly interposing in the prophets' experience to

make His presence known and to express His will. There is, however, an alternative view. It is clear from a whole volume of experience that men are able to draw from time to time upon a realm of being extending far beyond the limits of their personal consciousness. "It was revealed to me", said Madame Guyon, "that I had in me treasures of knowledge and understanding which I did not know that I possessed." In poets and artists, as well as in mystics and prophets, intuitions arise which well up from a deeper level of consciousness, and convey a knowledge and wisdom greater than that of which they are normally aware—a knowledge and wisdom which come upon them, in consequence, with a sense of compelling authority. The highest poetry, says A. E., "was conceived upon the Mount of Transfiguration, and there is revelation in it, and the mingling of heaven and earth". The inner being of man, as mystical experience implies, is not something separate and self-contained; the spirit of man is one and continuous with the Life of God. In the words of John Tauler, "The Eternal Word is unutterably nigh to us inwardly, in the very principle of our being. . . . And it is ever speaking in man, but he hears it not by reason of the sore deafness which has come upon him." The prophets and mystics are men who do in some measure hear the Eternal Word. It is not that by a

world, in a way that no other man has done, because he was God in human form. But what kind of a God is it who can choose so to reveal His presence ? What kind of a God is it who can make Himself known to men in such arbitrary assertions of His power ? “The greatest miracle”, said a Sufi, “is the substitution of a good quality for a bad one”. And it is there, in the victory of good over evil, in the transforming power of love, that we have the real manifestation of God in human life. In the thought of Jesus, says T. W. Manson, “the sovereignty of God is manifested in human life . . . by the realisation in those who accept its rule of a strange power to overcome evil with good” (*The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 170). It is in the life and work of Jesus supremely that this power is expressed.

It is the witness of the Christian Church that in Jesus the Word became flesh. In the human and historical life of Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem it sees the eternal Life of God manifesting itself. In the life and death of Jesus, it declares, God spoke to men. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by a Son.” But what was it, we must ask, that made Jesus the “Son of God” ? Barth is concerned to re-assert the historic witness of the Church. Yet in doing that he seeks to take us back to the

dualism which separates man from God fundamentally. If that separation is admitted, it follows that God can only reveal Himself in human life, can only become incarnate, by a supreme miracle. And so we have once again the problem—stated by the creeds of the Church, but never really solved by them—of the two natures, divine and human, combined in the person of Christ. The difficulties of this mode of thought are revealed clearly in the work of Barth, in the distinction which he attempts to draw between the “personality” of Jesus and his “person” or “ego”, the seat of the Logos.

It is only on the basis of the immanental view which Barth rejects that it is possible to appreciate the real significance of the life and personality of Jesus. If God dwells in all men, as the inmost Life and Light of the soul, it becomes possible for us to see how in Jesus supremely the divine Love was revealed. If God everlastingly gives Himself to men in the measure of their self-giving, of their identification with His universal Love, then we see the divine sonship of Jesus, his union with the Father, as the revelation of the potentiality that is everywhere dormant in the human soul. “Christ’s divine sonship”, says Miall Edwards, “was an achievement of his moral personality, a voluntary opening up of his life to God” (in *The Lord of Life*, p. 228). It is in his courage, in his

compassion, in the spirit which led him to seek and to save the lost, in the height and depth of the love which took him to the Cross, that we see the revelation of God.

Here, again, the essential clue to understanding lies in the experience of the mystics. Jesus was himself the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. He shared in supreme measure the enlightenment and inspiration typical of the prophets. In his initial experience on the banks of Jordan the prophetic illumination was renewed. He saw the heavens opened, he heard the divine Voice speaking to his soul, he felt the presence and power of the Spirit. The story is the record of a profound experience; it is a symbol of the union with God which he attained, in the light and strength of which he lived and worked. It is characteristic of the mystics at their best that they not only receive an inner illumination, they are not only caught up into the knowledge of God as an immediate fact of consciousness: they live in the power of the vision. In the life of union, said Gerlac Petersen, the soul "worketh all its works in God, or rather God doth work His own works in it". It is such an experience of union with God that we see in its fullness in Jesus. That is the secret of his power; that is the meaning of his divinity. In the love of Christ we see the Heart of God unveiled, because his human nature was made

one with the divine. In him we see the miracle everywhere manifest in a measure in the saints and lovers of God—the miracle of the divine Love penetrating and transfiguring a human soul, lifting him up in the midst of his mortality to share and to reveal the eternal Glory.

5. CAN WE BRING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

Barthian theology is, in one essential aspect, a reaction against the Utopian hopes so widely characteristic of modern life. In the religion—and especially the liberal religion—of our time we hear much of the “Kingdom of God”. The phrase has come largely to symbolise the hope of a freer and a fairer world which has for many Christians become the goal of aspiration and endeavour. “To be a Christian”, Albert Schweitzer says, “means to be possessed and dominated by a hope of the Kingdom of God, and a will to work for it.”

For Barth the hope of the Kingdom of God, as Liberal Christians are apt to conceive it, is altogether illusory. It is vain for man, incurably egocentric as he is, to believe that, by any process of moral or social betterment which he can initiate, the world can ever be radically transformed. The only hope for man, Barth maintains, lies not in himself, but in the power of God, who in His

own good time will intervene to bring His Kingdom, and to change the nature of our being in its present lost and fallen state. When God chooses to exercise His sovereign Will to redeem us, Christ will come again, and the whole sinful order of the world and of human existence will be changed. Barth was once asked at a conference in Switzerland "how the Kingdom of God comes on earth, whether by preaching or by social activity". His reply was this, "The Kingdom of God comes through God Himself, who makes all things new. And it is perhaps of lesser importance to debate whether we should preach or devote ourselves to social work than to comprehend and carry on this prayer in our hearts: *Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done*" (*God in Action*, p. 128).

In these words we have the clue to both the weakness and the strength of the Barthian position. It is impossible for us to return—as Barth would have us do—to the belief of the early Church that the Kingdom of God will come by a great supernatural transformation. That belief is indeed entirely in line with the mode of thought—the emphasis on miracle and divine intervention—which characterises the Barthian theology. It is incompatible, not only with modern knowledge, but with the deeper insights of religious faith. Yet underlying the Barthian reaction there is an essential truth. The Kingdom of God as men

are apt to conceive it to-day is a new and regenerated society, a new order of human life, "the universal community of mankind"—to be attained by a series of political, social, economic, educational changes. It is, in effect, the "Kingdom of Man"; it stands pre-eminently for the sense of human power and human possibility. Modern idealists, while they may speak of the "Kingdom of God", too often leave God out of the picture. They ignore, in other words, the fundamental element in the vision of Jesus and the early Church. For Jesus and the early Church, as Barth recognises, the Kingdom of God in its essential reality is not confined to the earth. It is the manifestation on earth of a divine and transcendent order. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"; "I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God". It is that thought of the Kingdom as a transcendent reality—an eternal realm of being beyond all limitations of time and space—which Barth has re-discovered.

Barth has departed widely in his neo-Calvinism from the traditional Calvinist doctrine which limits the scope of redemption so narrowly. He cherishes the hope of the ultimate salvation of all souls. That hope is surely an essential feature of the outlook of a rational Christianity. It is a grave weakness of liberal religion that it tends to

identify the Kingdom of God with an earthly community, and so to dismiss as secondary and inessential the hope of personal immortality and personal redemption. We cannot so limit the scope of the divine Purpose. If the Kingdom of God is indeed the ultimate ideal, the *summum bonum*, it can only be conceived as "a universe of souls bound together by love"—a fellowship transcending the barriers of time and space, in which all souls shall at last be united in the Love of God.

It is our task as members of an earthly community to seek to the utmost possible extent to realise the Kingdom of God here and now. Wherever love prevails, the Kingdom in some measure exists in our midst. And it is the one hope for the future of the world that love shall prevail increasingly. Barth is right when he stresses the fact that it is *God's* Kingdom that we must seek; it is the Power of God alone which can save us. The failure of our civilisation hitherto is the failure of a life which ignores the things of the spirit, which finds its centre in material things, which has lost the vision of the Unseen and Eternal. It is vain to fix our hopes for the future on any human effort which disregards the reality of spiritual forces. But it is equally vain to look for any miraculous intervention from above. Not so does God achieve

His purposes. What we require above all things is an alternative to the outworn supernaturalism to which Barth would have us return and the secular Humanism of our own day. That alternative lies in the mystical vision, which Barth rejects, of the Light and Life of God as the deepest life of our souls, "nearer to us than we are to ourselves", ever flowing out through the life and work of dedicated spirits. "So is the Kingdom of God", said Jesus, "as if a man should cast seed in the earth." Jesus was himself the greatest of sowers: he sowed the seed of divine and redemptive love. So far as that seed comes to harvest, so far as the spirit of man grows out of darkness, narrowness, separateness, into union with the divine and universal Love, the Kingdom of God will come in living power among us to rule and transform our life.

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