

Editor's Introduction

Karl Barth was closely implicated in the conflict between Church and State in Germany from the beginning. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933 he was professor in Bonn, and was, therefore, and had been for twelve years, as he points out (on p. 25) a member of the Church in Germany. So long as he remained there, he took a leading part in rallying and equipping the Church for resistance. But in 1935 he was deported to his native land and perforce could only continue from the outside. That he did so continue, however, this book bears witness.

How are we to describe this collection of essays? As an account of the conflict, it is very slight, although it has a certain historical value in having been written by a leading participant of the calibre of Barth. Again, as documents for what I suppose we must now call "Barth-study", the pieces are undoubtedly of

great importance in illustrating the political implications of his theology. It was for neither of these two reasons that we chose it as one of the first two numbers in the series of *Ecumenical Studies in History*, but rather because it speaks both directly and indirectly to the ecumenical situation today – not least in Great Britain and the United States of America.

First (ultimately this is the less important of the two), its direct relevance. One of the major issues in the earlier part of the struggle was the attempt by the State, acting through the German-Christians, to unify the Church in Germany. There were those who welcomed this as a step in the right ecumenical direction. The four hundred year old bitter struggle between Lutherans and Calvinists might be ended at a stroke. But there were also not lacking dyed in the wool conservatives – Luther right or wrong! Calvin right or wrong! – who would have none of this. The Confessing Church was put in the awkward position of desiring Church unity but seeming to be enemies of unity.

Nevertheless, peace at any price was resisted. Barth's answer is based on honesty towards the other side and towards one's own conscience. "No compromise!" he says here, as he also said to the Church of Scotland during the Conversations with the Church of England. Those who are ready for re-union at any price should ponder the fact that it is precisely this intransigence (the famous Barthian intransigence that everyone apparently hated so much in the twenties and then suddenly admired as the doughtiness of a "bonny fighter" in the thirties) that could not only bridge the gap between Lutherans and Reformed in the German Confessing Church, but could also establish a genuine *rapprochement* with Rome.

We come to the indirect relevance of this book to our own situation. "No compromise!" is only the negative counterpart of confession to Jesus Christ. To confess to Christ means not

to confess to others than Christ. And since He is the objective unity of the Church, who makes both one, confession to Him is the subjective unity of the Church. Those who confess to Him are already one. Their one-ness is so much the more genuine and real in proportion as they confess to Him and not to “another”.

Now, the heart of the German Church struggle lay in the confessing of Jesus Christ. This is the contribution, the decisive contribution, that Barth was enabled to supply from his understanding of the Gospel. Long before 1933 and quite independently of political considerations, he had learned that man's way consists in following God's way – concretely, in becoming aware and confessing that “Jesus Christ, as witnessed by the Scripture, is the one Word of God which we hear and obey and in which we trust in life and death” (Declaration of Barmen). When the time came, all he had to do was to apply this central truth to the new situation. Witness to Jesus Christ alone meant, under the Third Reich, the denial of the Neo-German paganism and of the German-Christian heresy. Certainly, we are in a totally different situation, yet as we read this book, we find our own situation remarkably mirrored in it. It may be that our way forward is also to be found in it, the way of confession to Jesus Christ alone. He is the objective unity of the Church; confession to Him is the Church's subjective unity.

All the footnotes are editorial. The Editor has not thought it necessary or desirable to supply notes to allusions which might wound reputations.

Our thanks are due to Pastor von Rabenau of the German Lutheran Church in Cambridge for elucidating two stubborn bits of translation.

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