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Prolegomena According to Karl Barth

A Study in His Ideas Regarding Theology and Dogmatics

By ROBERT D. PREUS

IN a former article I pointed out by way of introduction that Karl Barth by his taking cognizance of both exegesis and church history ranks rightfully above most of his contemporaries as a dogmatician of stature. In the present article I shall try to examine Barth's opinion on the subjects of theology and dogmatics more specifically. We shall find that Barth takes a position on the matter of prolegomena very close to that of the 16th- and 17th-century Lutheran and Reformed teachers, that his position is in the main both Scriptural and sane. Here, although we shall perhaps discern nothing very outstanding in what he says and advocates, we shall find him to diverge very radically from most of his contemporaries. It will be up to us, after studying his views on prolegomena and dogmatics, to judge whether he himself has followed his own principles successfully.

1. THEOLOGY AS SCIENCE

Barth offers the usual definition of theology as a function of the church which consists in *sermo de divinitate*, with the addition of this important emphasis, that theology, language about God, is confession. Here at the very outset he shows that he is getting back to the issue of the older classical Lutheran and Reformed dogmaticians. He sees here the great responsibility of the church before God in speaking about God. And he is quick to point out

that the church owes her sufficiency here as in all things to God's grace (I, 1, 1ff.).^{1a} Theology can obtain in the church only by virtue of God's promise to the church. "Christian language has its source in Him" (I, 1, 3). All this may seem so self-evident to us as to be mere cant. But it is a most necessary emphasis to be maintained in our age in the face of many evolutionary theories concerning the origin and development of theology, in the face of modern ideas concerning comparative religion, etc. Whether Barth can be considered a universalist is not quite clear. With his doctrine of justification and sanctification which embraces mankind as a whole he verges perilously close to an *apokatastasis*. But one thing is crystal clear in his theology: he denies that there is any true and saving knowledge of God apart from the revelation in Christ. Likewise Barth denies all natural theology—and of course we must disagree with him in this. However, this denial means that he will definitely adhere to the principle of the older Protestant theologians that, as they used to put it, God is the *principium essendi* of theology, or as we might put it, God is the Author of theology, all theology has its only source in Him. Hence we see Barth finding little difference between Paul and

^{1a} The reference here and elsewhere in this article is to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936—)

John and Peter, for there is really no theology of John or Paul or Peter but only the theology of God.

Barth makes much of theology being faithful to its own principles, and not employing principles which are foreign to it, such as principles of philosophy. Actually, he says (I, 1, 5), there has never been such a phenomenon as *philosophia Christiana*. If it was *philosophia* it was not *Christiana*, and if it was *Christiana* it was not *philosophia*. There can be no epistemological basis, then, for theology. The question, How do I know? cannot be answered from outside the circle of theology itself. Thus any effort to assign theology a place in a system of sciences is quite impossible. This, however, does not mean that theology is not scientific in its operations. In this latter sense it can be called a science, in that (1) like all sciences it is a human effort after a definite object of knowledge, (2) like other sciences it follows a definite, consistent path of knowledge, and (3) it is accountable to itself. But it cannot allow itself to be taught by other sciences in either what or how to speak. "It has not to justify itself before them [other sciences], least of all by submitting to the claims of any concept of science, whether its general validity is accidental or not" (I, 1, 7). So the question is settled: theology is not a science in the accepted sense of the word. And Barth repeats himself over and over again on this particular point—one might say too much, for he takes theology out of the realm of the cosmos entirely (again suggesting shades of docetism).^{1b} For God came into this

cosmos and became true man in this cosmos, and every *opus ad extra* of which theology may speak is directed to our cosmos, and thus has something authoritative to say to all other areas of knowledge. That Barth tends to cut off theology from other areas of knowledge will of course safeguard theology by isolating it; but at a cost, for then what happens to theology as a *habitus practicus*? At just this point Barth has often been criticized, that he is up in the clouds—one may call this transcendentalism or existentialism or whatever one will. Perhaps this all goes back to Barth's vehement denial of natural revelation, to his denial of any relationship between the realms of nature and of grace, and to his fear and conviction that man gains control over everything within the realm of nature. Here we might quote a review of Vol. I, 2 in the *Times Literary Supplement* of May 23, 1958.

It is past high time that a much more vigorous protest was made against the endlessly repeated assertion by Barth and other Bible theologians that any truth discoverable by man is something of which man remains master and ministers to human pride. Such truth can, of course, be put to sinful uses; but no man in his senses tampers with it *as truth* if he is persuaded that it is true.

Barth, then, in one sense, affirms that theology is a science; in another sense, denies it. That it is a human inquiry after truth qualifies it as a science. But if it is

as fundamentally necessary. [The emphasis is mine. By inserting the term "systematic" Barth is avoiding the issue. But the apodosis is a *non sequitur*. And surely *for us* theology is necessary.] That is exactly what it cannot do. It absolutely [sic!] cannot regard itself as a member of an ordered cosmos, but only a stopgap in an unordered one."

^{1b} I, 1, 9: "To put itself in a *systematic* relationship with the other sciences, theology would have to regard its own special existence

asked to work under the same roof and in systematic conjunction with the other sciences, then it will not qualify. Concerning the first point Barth says that theology — and here he is speaking only of the church's language about God — must not be raised ontologically above the other sciences. What he means by "ontologically" in this connection I do not understand, but when he says that this is insinuated when theology is called *doctrina* and *sapientia*, we shall surely have to part ways with him. These are precisely the Scripture terms for theology (1 Cor. 2:6; 1 Tim. 4:6; Rom. 6:7; 2 Tim. 3:16). Again we have the intimation that theology is only a quest, only an approximation, like other sciences.

We must be grateful to Barth for his reluctance to call theology a science. Here he distinguishes himself as wishing to be in the stream of orthodox Christian theology. And here he is opposed to the Lundensian school (as represented particularly by Aulén and Nygren), which holds that theology is a science with the same detached, objective method as any other and "concerned simply with investigating and clarifying a certain area of research."²

2. DOGMATICS AS INQUIRY

Theology consists in making assertions, says Barth (I, 1, 13). As Luther said, "Take away assertions, and you have done away with Christianity."³ And theology is concerned with divine, certain knowledge. Again as Luther said, "The Holy Spirit is no skeptic, neither does He write doubts

or mere opinions in our hearts, but assertions which are more certain and stable than life itself and all experience."⁴

Yet in spite of all this, dogmatics is inquiry. For there is no such thing as "truths of revelation," propositions sealed "once for all by divine authority in wording and meaning," for revelation has its truth in the free decision of God. Thus the truth of revelation is the freely acting God Himself. And hence creeds and dogmatic statements can guide us in our dogmatic work, but can never replace that work by virtue of their authority. Moreover, Barth says, "In dogmatics it can never be a question of the mere combination, repetition, and the summarizing of Biblical doctrine" (I, 1, 16). And then he correctly cites Melancthon as understanding dogmatics in this simple sense. In fact, not Melancthon only but all the old Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics understood this as its simple task. It might be well to quote Melancthon's words which Barth perhaps has in mind. They are at the very beginning of his *Loci praecipui theologici* of 1559.

It is beneficial to have clear declarations (*testimonia*) set forth as on a tablet concerning each of the articles of Christian doctrine, arranged in good order, in order that when we consider these things and tie them together, certain definite thoughts come to our view by which troubled people may be instructed, elevated, strengthened, and comforted.⁵

We would concur with this simple purpose of dogmatics, that it is in the end mere recital. If Barth feels that this would prevent dogmatics from being timely, Melancthon and the older theology would

² G. Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 5. For Nygren see G. Wingren, *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 11 ff.

³ WA 18, 603.

⁴ WA 18, 605.

⁵ *Corpus Reformatorum* 21, 601.

answer definitely that Scripture does speak to every age. Actually, as Barth goes on in his second volume to outline the task of dogmatics, he seems to be following Melancthon, at least in theory. In fact, this is Barth's strength, that he insists upon making the task of dogmatics so simple.

3. DOGMATICS AS AN ACT OF FAITH

In speaking of dogmatics as an act of faith Karl Barth deserves to be heard today, especially as an antidote to the scientific theologizing (if there is such a thing) of the Lundensian theologians. He maintains that dogmatics need not be the work of a special theological science. Dogmatics is rather a calling given the church, and is impossible outside the church. He quotes Calvin, "All true knowledge of God is born of obedience."⁶ But faith, the prerequisite of dogmatics, cannot be maintained at will. And so dogmatics depends upon God. In other words Barth is maintaining strongly the old theological insight that there is no unregenerate theology and hence no unregenerate dogmatics. We must get behind Schleiermacher, pietism, and rationalism to the doctrine of a theological *habitus*, "in virtue of which the theologian is what he is by the grace of God" (I, 1, 21). Listen to one of his more poignant statements concerning this vital matter.

Faith, rebirth, conversion, "existential" thinking (i. e., thinking that proceeds on the basis of existential perplexity) is indeed the indispensable requisite for dogmatic work; not so far as the intention is to include an experience and attitude to which I adjust myself, which I put into train, a "Yes, I'll go!" on the theologian's

part, so that his theology would have to be throughout a personal cry, a narrative of his own biographical situation: but so far as thereby is meant the grace of divine predestination, the free gift of the Word and of the Holy Spirit, the act of calling him into the Church which ever and anon the theologian must encounter from the acting God, in order that he may be what he is called and does, what answers to his name. (I, 1, 22)

This surely sounds like one who has been touched by what Luther means by *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. Listen to Barth, again,

Without exception the act of faith (i. e., its basis in divine predestination, the free act of God on man and his work) is the condition which renders dogmatic work possible, by which also it is called in question in deadly earnest. (I, 1, 23)

This statement which is so necessary today reminds us of a word of Hyperius, who wrote what is probably the first Protestant work on the subject of studying theology. He says,

You will find that no one will seriously make his way into the Sacred Writings unless God first of all sets his heart ablaze with the earnest desire of knowing Christian teachings.⁷

Hyperius, too, insists that the arrogant mind cannot theologize. Dogmatics is a calling, a calling for which three things are required: (1) that all foreign and vain thoughts be cast out when we approach the Word of God; (2) involvement (notice the existential element we saw in Barth): simple knowledge of theology is not enough. *Scientia inflat, charitas aedi-*

⁷ A. Hyperius, *De theologo, seu de ratione studii theologici, Libri IIII* (Basileae: per Ioannem Operinum, 1556), p. 25.

⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, 6, 2.

ficat; (3) prayer to God for light and help. I mention Hyperius to illustrate that Barth's emphasis here is far from new but that he is found to be in the tradition of every pious and true theologian; for Hyperius' emphasis was carried on until the age of rationalism. Thus we see that Barth insists that theology is not merely language about God but, as Hollaz put it, language to God; and this is true of dogmatics.

4. THE TASK OF PROLEGOMENA

Barth, who writes 1,300 pages on the subject of prolegomena (including his discussion of the Word), admits that the subject of prolegomena is not necessary. Prolegomena might be proved and shown by the very practice of them, as was done in early Protestant dogmatics. This has also been attempted by modern theologians, e. g., Schlatter.

Barth also speaks against the quite modern contention that prolegomena are necessary today (although not in past times) because of the attacks made upon Christianity and the self-assurance of modern man. Barth asserts, first, that there is really no difference between our time and any other on this matter. Theology has always been faced with rejection and negation (I, 2, 29). Second, to say that prolegomena are more necessary today is to undermine dogmatics itself, for in dogmatics the language of the church is measured by her own essence; revelation cannot be proved from the outside. The question, Is revelation possible? is illegitimate for dogmatics. Third, dogmatics loses by asking questions which have not been asked before simply to be up to date. Here Barth should make some enemies. He is saying that apologetics and polemics of faith against un-

belief is always something really unintended, that is, it is not our doing; it takes place only when God sides with the witness of the truth. He goes so far as to say that polemics and apologetics take unbelief seriously but faith not quite seriously, and in this cease to be faith. These are strong words which much of Lutheranism can take to heart today.

Getting back again to the original question, Are prolegomena necessary? Barth states that there is this much necessity: the church must set forth true faith as opposed to heresy. In this prolegomena are authoritative, not argumentative. I am not sure what Barth means by this, except that in his own prolegomena he really does little else than establish the place of Scripture in the church.

Barth asks a second question regarding prolegomena. Are they possible? Can we know the path which is to be trod in knowing dogmatics? He begins this discussion by pointing to the three paths which have been taken. 1. *The Enlightenment*. Schleiermacher started with the existence of the church and of faith. But this, says Barth cleverly, is not prolegomena, but dogmatics. Such subjectivism is followed by Heidegger and Bultmann. 2. *Rome*. Rome says that the task of prolegomena is to find that Scripture, tradition, and the living teaching of the church are the principles of theological knowledge. Barth says that this, too, is in the realm of dogmatic propositions. 3. *The Evangelical (or Barthian) position* begins with the "event" of faith, not with an existential ontology or a Romish *es gibt*. This position which concentrates on the subject *de Scriptura*, or the Word of God, as the criterion of dogmatics (because it has

spoken to us) — this position Barth identifies with the “Old-Protestant theology.” (I, 1, 47)

5. CHURCH PROCLAMATION AS THE MATERIAL OF DOGMATICS

When Barth speaks of church proclamation as the material of dogmatics he lapses again into his *Schwaermerei* and is therefore unsatisfactory. His thesis in itself is correct, but when he says that this proclamation is God's own Word only “when and where God pleases,” we are again left up in the air. We can only hope that our proclamation becomes God's Word and therefore effective dogmatics (I, 2, 79 ff., 156). This would imply, I suppose, that when proclamation becomes the Word of God, dogmatics becomes the Word of God. This seems to avoid the “static” concept of pure doctrine, something which we would insist belongs in the discussion at this very point. But pure doctrine is not the task of dogmatics to Barth, but the “problem” of dogmatics. And to him pure doctrine is not something objective, not a body or teaching or tradition (cf. the Pastoral Epistles), but again an “event,” as we shall see later (I, 2, 769). We may recall that he made it the task of prolegomena to set forth *faith* (not pure doctrine) against heresy. (I, 1, 33 ff.)

Regarding church proclamation as the material of dogmatics Barth insists on two points. First, it is fundamental for our work. Everything depends on it. “The church ought to withdraw from all other responsibilities,” he says (I, 1, 81). On the other hand the church is never infallible in its proclamation. We must call this proclamation into question at times. Barth says, “The church can neither abso-

lutely question her proclamation or absolutely put it right” (I, 1, 84). And it is true, we never know it all in matters of dogmatics. But we get the feeling here that Barth is limiting dogmatics somehow, as though we could never be certain of the material of our dogmatics. Concerning his own work in dogmatics Barth said somewhere, “To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

6. PURE DOCTRINE AS THE PROBLEM OF DOGMATICS

It is not until the last pages of his second volume that Barth comes to grips with the subject of pure doctrine. He recognizes that all preaching is faced with the question of correctness. What, then, is pure doctrine? It is not the same as what God does when He speaks His Word (I, 2, 762). No, “pure doctrine as the fulfillment of the promise given to church proclamation *is an event*” (I, 2, 768). It is a gift not only given to the church but also received by it, involved in the obedience of faith. In this sense pure doctrine is “a task, a piece of work which faces us.” It is not in “any sense to be thought of as a solution already existing somewhere or other, which can be taken over as such.” “A simple appropriation of this kind cannot possibly be the business of dogmatics when it is understood as the attempt of the church to achieve purity of doctrine.” *Thus we see that pure doctrine is only an ideal, and doctrine is to be taken only in the active sense.* Doctrine is only the “work itself,” never a result. One must be aware of this basic equivocation when he hears Barth speaking of pure doctrine. To Barth pure doctrine is a mere function.

As pure doctrine in the Barthian sense, dogmatics is the necessary preparation for preaching. It occupies a middle place between exegesis and practical theology. By serving preaching in this way dogmatics guards against allowing any alien philosophy to impose itself upon the Biblical Word. Thus it acts as a constant corrective and guardian. And dogmatics also keeps the church from asking the wrong questions.

7. DOGMATICS AS ETHICS

Under this heading Barth discusses the problem whether ethics belongs within dogmatics or whether it is a separate discipline. Barth is very insistent that ethics must not have an independent existence apart from dogmatics. Where ethics has been able to secure independence, it has absorbed dogmatics into itself and transformed dogmatics into an ethical system. And "since independent ethical systems are always in the last resort determined by general anthropology, this inevitably means that dogmatics itself and theology as a whole simply becomes applied anthropology. Its standard ceases to be the Word of God" (I, 2, 783). Barth traces the origin of this evil development to the 17th-century Lutheran theologian George Calixtus, who in 1634 put out his *Epitome theologiae moralis*. This tack is followed by Pietism and the Enlightenment until we find the full-blown system of Kant, which makes religion and God subservient to ethics. But if we will only go back to Luther and Calvin we shall see that their ethics "is to be sought and found in their dogmatics and not elsewhere."

We shall want to listen to Barth very carefully on this point. He insists that ethics substitutes the subject man for the

subject God, and hence the church which operates with an independent ethics commits a *metabasis eis allo genos*. More than that, it has "subjected itself to an utterly alien sovereignty." It is Barth's Christocentricity and monergism which cause him to speak this way.

8. THE TASK OF DOGMATICS

The task of dogmatics is to make the teaching of the church definite and uniform. Dogmatics is not in itself Biblical exegesis. "It is the examination, criticism, and correction of the proclamation to which the teaching church addresses itself on the basis of Holy Scripture, not merely by reproducing it and explaining it, but also by applying it and thus in some measure producing it" (I, 2, 821). Here we see that Barth really is quite close to Melancthon's simple definition of the task of dogmatics, except that he adds the qualification — which Melancthon himself would have granted — that dogmatics be *zeitgemaess*.

The task of dogmatics to Barth has its formal and material side. The formal task is to listen constantly to the Word of God. The material task is to speak, to unfold the content of the Word of God. The one work must not be done without the other. The dogmatic norm for such activity is the Bible. The church must see that its formulae and demonstrations have a Biblical character. This, says Barth, is a necessary "basic mode of thinking." Although we are conditioned by our own situation — this cannot be denied — nevertheless we must orientate ourselves in the Bible. Of course, any man will approach the Bible with a "philosophy" of some kind or other, and to the extent that this controls his con-

ception and judgment he "becomes a witness whose credibility is obscured" (I, 2, 818). Barth says:

It is impossible to remove from dogmatic thinking and speaking this subjective element, just as it is impossible to remove from it its human character. But it is certainly possible—and this possibility gives meaning to the demand for the biblical attitude—to have an awareness of this state of affairs, and as a result of this awareness to recognize and make room for a specific ranking within dogmatic thought and speech. (Ibid.)

What we must guard against is that these elements become independent presuppositions. Our only presupposition is that God has spoken in a certain and definite way. Here Barth is speaking against Bultmann, who begins his reading of the Bible with the philosophico-anthropological presuppositions of Heidegger. And we would certainly feel quite sympathetic with Barth.

But we must remember what Barth means when he says that God "has acted and spoken in a certain definite way." We must recall that God's speaking is only in Christ, according to Barth. Scripture, theology, human language, as such, can never be God's revelation, God speaking. God speaks only in a free act, and words are only the occasion (if it pleases God) of this act. Here, along with the Jesuit Malevez, who has written a splendid book on Bultmann, we shall have to say that Barth is deficient.⁸ He passes over too lightly this significant fact that God in coming to man and speaking to him as he is

in his state of corruption, condescends (*συγκατάβασις* is the word coined by Chrysostom) to disclose himself to man's noetic capacity, to man's way of knowing and thinking. To fallen man God reveals mysteries the full explanation of which we can never probe, but still mysteries which are clothed in our *genus loquendi*. From beginning to end our understanding of theology is God's work in us. This Barth maintains against Bultmann. There is no pat existential way of thinking which makes theology accessible, Barth says. In other words, Barth insists that we learn to read Scripture by reading Scripture; Scripture is its own interpreter. That there is a content of natural knowledge of God which is necessary as a point of contact for God's revelation (as Brunner and Rome teach) Barth would, as we know, deny. We shall not wish to make so much of this "content" of the natural knowledge of God as the Thomists and many neo-orthodox Protestants do, for we believe in total depravity, and whatever the content of this knowledge it cannot serve as a criterion for receiving God's revelation. But in this we shall agree with the Thomists and with Malevez, I am sure, that the Word of God comes to us in the form of our conceptual thought, so that even an unregenerate man may have a *notitia literae* in reference both to Scripture and to Christian theology. Although we cannot go along with Barth entirely, as I have outlined, I am sure we shall be thankful to him as being a welcome antidote against Emil Brunner, John Baillie, and Reinhold Niebuhr, who teach that there is a saving knowledge of God apart from Christ.

Summing up, then, the first task of dogmatics is to listen to the Bible and gauge

⁸ L. Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1958), pp. 192 ff.

its formulation by it. The second task is to listen to the fathers, to what the church of the past has said. On this point Barth adopts a very sane approach, which would correspond closely to our Lutheran position. He is, of course, somewhat bothered by the concern of confessional Lutherans toward their symbols, and he feels that the rigidity which would keep Christians apart on the basis of standing confessions is unfortunate (I, 2, 838), although he wants to be the last one to make light of doctrinal differences (I, 2, 126, 133, 135). The third task of dogmatics is to listen to the church today.

9. DOGMATIC METHOD

Dogmatic method deals with procedure, procedure in unfolding the content of the Word of God. All that is necessary here is that the "content of the Word of God itself must command, and dogmatics and church proclamation must obey" (I, 2, 856). There is no necessary external method. The only absolute requirement is to transmit the Word of God. Freedom in dogmatic method is something which Barth, like Pieper, holds very precious. Theology is not a system in the sense of being a structure of principles and their consequences, founded on the presupposition of a basic view of things, and perhaps made consistent with various outside helps. Barth criticizes Luthardt, Kaftan, Seeberg, and others for their attempts to relegate Christianity to certain basic principles. Thus we find that he far prefers the earlier local method of the Lutheran and Reformed dogmaticians to the later method which is built on *articuli fundamentales* and *articuli non fundamentales*, etc. This latter method (of Quenstedt, Hollaz, et al.)

is not wrong in itself but will usually lead to rationalizing and false emphases. So far we would probably agree with Barth. However, when he goes on to say that what is fundamental in one generation may not be in the next and that only in our own existential situation may we know what is fundamental and cannot declare it in advance, we would say no (I, 2, 865). Barth becomes decidedly anticredal at this point.

I now quote a fine statement of Barth on the reason why he rejects the so-called analytic method of the 17th century, for this will tend to explain what Barth wishes to do in his own dogmatics:

From a historical point of view, it may be said, therefore, that we have to dismiss the so-called "analytic" method which made its entry into Protestant theology at the beginning of the 17th century, and finally received expression in the doctrine of fundamental articles. We must return to the method of the *loci*, the method of Melancthon and also of Calvin, which was wrongly set aside as unscholarly by the more progressive contemporaries of J. Gerhard and A. Polanus. For this is the only truly scholarly method in dogmatics. The *loci* of the older orthodoxy were in fact basic dogmatic tenets which did not pretend any higher syntheses than arise out of the Word of God, or to be rooted and held together in any higher system than that of the Word of God. (I, 2, 870)

Since this is Barth's conviction we find that in his own dogmatics, although he feels, for instance, that the atonement is a most important doctrine, he will not subsume all theology under the doctrine of the atonement, or any other doctrine, as *the* fundamental truth. What Barth

comes up with is a method which in theory seems not only commendable but desirable. Since theology cannot be integrated into any system, a doctrine (say, of God as Creator) must be handled independently alongside the next doctrine (God as Redeemer). Thus Barth comes up with four *loci* which will constitute his whole dogmatics: God, Creation, Atonement, Redemption (eschatology), with the Word of God as the basis of knowledge of all four.

We must now ask the obvious final question: Has Barth succeeded in constructing a dogmatics which adequately serves what to him is the purpose of dogmatics? To him the purpose of dogmatics is to serve the Word of God in a didactic capacity. Actually this is quite similar to the older Protestant dogmatics with its simple *loci communes* method and its simple purpose, namely, to teach, to present in summary form and in logical order the articles of faith so that one could comprehend, appreciate, and judge the doctrine of the church. Accordingly dogmatics had merely to gather together the passages concerning various articles and learn what they said (Melancthon). Really little prolegomena were necessary except to state that Scripture was the *principium cognoscendi* of theology and to elaborate perhaps on the relation of theology to logic and philosophy. To notice paradoxes or solve lacunae was held down by the local method, whereby if one article did not correspond to another, the matter was simply left at that. Scripture was considered to be the formal principle of theology, and justification or the work of Christ the material principle. Barth often insists that

method is arbitrary, but by his spiral approach, his aversion to thetical presentation and theological distinctions, his Christological approach — which makes him want to speak about everything at once — and his dialectical language he has made it exceedingly difficult for himself to achieve his purpose. This will surely be the judgment of any impartial reader. There must be a middle ground between no dogmatics and Barth's dogmatics. Barth has become easier reading in later years, but he has become no less verbose. I close with a harsh criticism of an unsympathetic reader of Barth (*The Times Literary Supplement* [London], May 23, 1959):

Anglo-Saxon theologians do not resent large works [Barth had suggested this], though they have constant difficulty in persuading students to read them. But they attach little importance to merely dogmatic declamations and require reasonable grounds to be given for them; they also dislike endless repetition, not least when there is little in it but an apparent assumption that the mere linking of abstract notions yields knowledge of realities; and when they have to read sentences several times to apprehend their meaning (if any) they conclude that their author has not bestowed upon their construction the care and critical thought which alone is worthy of the subject or of their attention; when a voluminous writer cannot make himself clear to readers familiar with his subject, they infer that his own mind is not clear, and require that he should clear it before expecting them to read millions of his words with care.

Such criticism is needlessly severe, but it must be said that Barth has brought much of it upon himself.