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A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE IDEA OF REVELATION
IN THE THEOLOGY OF
JOHN CALVIN AND KARL BARTH

By

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INTRODUCTION

A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE IDEA OF REVELATION
IN THE THEOLOGY OF
JOHN CALVIN AND KARL BARTH

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject

1. The Subject Introduced

One of the great needs today in religion is for a fresh examination of the idea of revelation. This is true because revelation is the foundation upon which religion rests. Not only is such an examination necessary in the interest of Christian theology but also to give a basis for man's thought on the final problems of life and the universe.

The history of human thought continually confronts us with questions regarding divine revelation. There is an innumerable variety of viewpoints in this matter some of which seriously and fundamentally contradict each other. When we think of the revelation of God in the world, basic differences emerge over the character and content of this revelation. In addition, we find there is a controversy over the manner in which divine revelation has come

to us. Many have pleaded for a more general revelation and have set themselves against the orthodox view of special revelation which has seemed to them too narrow and limited. Others such as Karl Barth have gone to the other extreme and have rejected the possibility of a natural theology altogether.

In Christian theology divine revelation has generally been considered as consisting of two distinct stages. First, there is the more general revelation of God which is common to all men. It is permanent and universal. God reveals himself to man by means of nature, history, and man's moral consciousness. Second, there is a more specific revelation made in the history of different people, but more particularly in the history of the people of Israel, leading up to God's supreme revelation or self-disclosure to men in Jesus Christ.

The significance of theological thought in the area of revelation cannot be over-stated. For it is a cornerstone upon which much of Christian theology rests.

2. The Subject Stated and Justified

John Calvin and Karl Barth have each had a tremendous influence upon the thinking of the Christian world. They each represent a great period of theological thought. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine their views of revelation in order to determine the contribution made by each man to a Christian understanding of this

subject. By means of a comparative evaluation of the idea of revelation in the theology of these two men, it is the further aim of this thesis to bring into focus the relevant issues involved in the contemporary discussion of revelation. It is hoped that this study will provide a sound basis for an adequate understanding of revelation in modern theology.

3. The Subject Delimited

It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to present a fully comprehensive examination of the thought of John Calvin and Karl Barth on revelation, nor is it desirable to do so. Instead the organizing principles of thought will be considered as they relate to the subject at hand. In limiting our discussion to the main movements of theological expression, it is hoped that the most significant issues will be illuminated.

B. The Sources for the Study

The idea of revelation in Calvin's theology is drawn largely from "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," his own masterly and comprehensive presentation of thought. In addition, some of Calvin's commentaries on the various books of the Bible have been used, for these often contain insights which are helpful in interpreting his thought. Secondary sources have also proved to be valuable.

The writings of Karl Barth directly or indirectly relating to revelation are more numerous and these have been used quite extensively along with secondary sources. A number of recent periodicals have proved very helpful in making the discussion of contemporary significance.

C. The Method of Procedure

It is proposed first to examine the idea of revelation separately as it is found in the theology of John Calvin and Karl Barth. In order that the purpose of giving a clear interpretation of their views may be served, the text of the thesis will be confined largely to the positive statement of their positions. After the important issues have been determined, a comparison of their views will be made to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each position. A discussion of the relevance of their ideas of revelation to contemporary theological thought will be confined to the closing section.

CHAPTER I

THE IDEA OF REVELATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

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THE IDEA OF REVELATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

A. Introduction

John Calvin is recognized today as the creator of that aggressive type of Protestantism which played a large part in the shaping of modern Western civilization. In addition to his distinctive contribution to theology, he gathered Protestant doctrines into a comprehensive system and also originated an ethical emphasis which has greatly influenced the life of the New World as well as the Old.

For some time it was believed that the Calvinistic system of theology had little to offer to our modern society which is engaged in an era of creedal reconstruction. It was felt that the day of the dominance of Calvinism was ended and that it was a discredited system. However, in recent decades a renewed interest in Calvin has become evident. Calvinism has emerged from obscurity and is once again experiencing a period of recognition and influence. A growing number of thinkers are turning again to the Reformation period and particularly to Calvin for help and guidance in the solution of contemporary problems.

It is not surprising that they should do so, for

most of the problems with which Calvin dealt are living issues in the world of today. In theology such problems as the nature of God, his revelation and relationship with men, the place and purpose of the Church and the sacraments have caused significant debate. Calvin made a determined effort to solve these and other problems and even though his solutions may have to be rejected, they at least serve as a starting point for new thinking.

The study of Calvin at the present time is something more than a mere reading of history. The revival of interest in Calvinistic theology suggests that it may have elements of vitality to contribute to a new era of reconstruction. Many theologians believe that Calvinism has much to offer to the theological world. Hunter forcefully declares his belief in the future of Calvinism. He says: "Calvinism no future! Why, it has laid the foundation of the future. It has cast the moulds into which the future is being poured."¹

Calvin's entire theological system is built upon his doctrine of God. It will be profitable therefore to consider his idea of revelation. For such a study will lead to an understanding of many of the main tenets of his thought and will enable us to determine

1. A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*, London, James Clarke and Company, 1950, p. 304.

its relevance to modern theological thinking.

B. Calvin's Idea of God

Calvin placed the thought of God at the center of all his thinking. His theological system was wholly theocentric. His life was possessed by an overwhelming devotion to the gracious God who carries out his eternal purposes with unerring wisdom and omnipotent power. As Hunter expresses it:

Calvin himself was, if not a God-intoxicated, at least a God-possessed man. His whole mind, heart and life were vitalized, governed and suffused by his thought of God. Of no man could it be more truly said that he set God ever before him.¹

1. The Transcendence of God

Calvin believed that God was so far removed and beyond the thought of men that it was impossible for man to come to a knowledge of God through human speculation. God is incomprehensible because he transcends man in every respect, "the Divine nature is infinitely exalted above the comprehension of our understanding."² If God should lay himself open to the scrutiny of anyone who cared to investigate his person it would mean that he would be surrendering his sovereignty to the will of his creatures. But Calvin declares that the eternal God could never do this for he always is the sovereign

1. Ibid., p. 49.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, trans. by James Anderson, III, Edinburgh, Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1845, p. 794.

Lord of men. Instead God retains the knowledge of himself as a mystery, a secret known only by himself.

This introduces the idea of 'Deus absconditus' which holds a significant place in Calvin's theology. The idea of the hiddenness of God plays a necessary part in Calvin's doctrine of revelation. For it is only as God remains hidden from the speculation of human minds that he can be truly God. Calvin says:

For how can the infinite essence of God be defined by the narrow capacity of the human mind, which could never yet certainly determine the nature of the body of the sun, though it is the object of our daily contemplation? How can the human mind, by its own efforts, penetrate into an examination of the essence of God, when it is quite ignorant of its own? Wherefore let us freely leave to God the knowledge of Himself.¹

Because of the transcendent nature of God it is utterly impossible to gain knowledge of him through human reason, for "what God is in Himself and what He is in relation to us, human reason makes not the slightest approach."²

2. The Need for Revelation

Even apart from any idea of sin, God is incomprehensible in his transcendence and hiddenness and therefore is unknown to man unless he makes himself known to him. Apart from the self-revelation of God, no knowledge of God is possible to man at all. Thus for

1. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge, 2 vols., London, James Clarke and Company, 1953, I. xiii. 21.

2. *Ibid.*, II. ii. 18.

Calvin, revelation and not speculation was the method by which men were to come to a knowledge of God. He states:

We are to seek God, not with audacious inquisitiveness by attempting to search into his essence, which is rather to be adored than curiously investigated; but by contemplating him in his revelation of himself.¹

Revelation must precede a knowledge of God. In the first words of the "Institutes" Calvin writes "wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."² The significant point is that he does not go on to consider knowledge, but revelation in the chapters that follow. Throughout the whole of the "Institutes" Calvin deals with the knowledge of God only in the light of revelation. It is important therefore that his conception of the nature of revelation be considered next.

C. Calvin's Idea of Natural Theology

In recent years many theologians have become greatly interested in natural theology, if for no other reason than to attack it. Karl Barth, as will be pointed out, completely rejects a natural theology in keeping with his idea of the transcendent God. There are indications that the concept of revelation as encounter,

1. Ibid., I. v. 9.

2. Ibid., I. i. 1.

which is characteristic of Barth's theology and has been dominant in much Protestant thinking during the last forty years, may be losing its grip. Theologians may be returning to a more positive attitude toward natural theology. In the debate which has been carried on during the last four decades, Calvin's authority has probably been appealed to more than that of anyone else, both by the friends and foes of natural theology. It is well then that we look at Calvin's idea of natural theology.

The term 'natural theology' is not being used in distinction from general revelation. It refers to any knowledge of God which man may possess independently of special revelation, regardless of how he comes by it. Calvin believed that all men possess an innate knowledge of God and that this knowledge is quickened and developed by the rich manifestations of God in nature and providence.

1. The Innate Knowledge of God in Man

Calvin held the reality of an inner source of the knowledge of God in man. There is an 'inner sense of divinity' by which all men gain some knowledge of deity. He declares:

That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself,

to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endowed all men with some idea of his Godhead.¹

He goes on to say, "all men of sound judgement will therefore hold that a sense of deity is indelibly engraven on the human heart."² All men know there is a God, who has made them and to whom they are responsible. Even the savage possesses this innate knowledge of God for "there is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God."³ What Calvin then is saying in the "Institutes" is that there exists an inherent, universal, and indelible 'sensus divinitatis' by which God is known to all men. Parker defines the 'sensus divinitatis' as used by Calvin in the following manner:

It is a more or less conscious feeling or idea that apart from the world of men there is Another; a feeling or idea that naturally is believed intellectually, and is disbelieved only in defiance of nature, and that naturally finds expression in worship.⁴

We may conclude from the previous discussion that in Calvin's thought man gains knowledge of God, not from his own speculation but from the innate knowledge with which he has been endowed by God. But in addition to the ineradicable revelation of himself which he has imprinted on human nature, God has added an equally

1. Ibid., I. iii. 1.

2. Ibid., I. iv. 4.

3. Ibid., I. iii. 1.

4. T.H.L. Parker, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, London, Oliver and Boyd, 1952, p. 8.

clear and abundant external revelation of himself.

2. The Knowledge of God Derived from the External World

Another means through which God has revealed himself to men is the 'opera Dei', by which Calvin means all the creative and providential activity of God. Calvin is very emphatic as to the clearness, universality and credibility of this natural revelation of God.

a. The Revelation of God in Creation

Calvin possessed a profound appreciation for the beauty of the world in which he lived and held that through the creative activity of God man could learn of the Creator. Some men have believed that Calvin was an enemy of beauty but nothing could be further from the truth. Parker contends against this view when he says:

The conception that has grown up of Calvin as an enemy to all beauty, and a somewhat liverish pilgrim averting his eyes from the loveliness of the world through which he must unhappily pass, has only been able to exist where there has been ignorance of his writings.¹

In his "Commentary on Genesis" Calvin speaks with amazing vividness of the created world in which God reveals himself. He writes:

We see the world with our eyes, we tread the earth with our feet, we touch innumerable kinds of God's works with our hands, we smell the sweet and pleasant fragrance of herbs and flowers, we enjoy boundless benefits; but in those very things of which we attain some

1. Ibid., p. 14.

knowledge dwells such an immensity of divine power, goodness, and wisdom as absorbs all our senses.¹

This hardly sounds like a man who hates earthly beauty and who despises the handiwork of God.

For Calvin the beauty and wonders of the earth and the majesty of the heavens testify to the power and wisdom of God. He declares:

There is certainly nothing so obscure or contemptible, even in the smallest corners of the earth, that some marks of the power and wisdom of God may not be seen in them ... When a man, from beholding and contemplating the heavens, has been brought to acknowledge God, he will learn also to reflect upon and to admire his wisdom and power as displayed on the face of the earth, not only in general, but even in the smallest plants.²

According to Calvin the revelation of God which is given in his creation reveals him with such clarity that no man can escape from being confronted with the image of God. He declares that "in the splendor of the heavens there is presented to our view a lively image of God."³

The creation of the world was God's first appearance "in visible apparel,"⁴ the expanded heavens are his "royal Pavilion,"⁵ the symmetry of the universe

1. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, trans. by John King, I, Edinburgh, Printed for Calvin Translation Society, 1845, p. 6.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I. p. 194.

3. Ibid.

4. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. v. 1.

5. Ibid.

serves us as a "mirror in which we may contemplate the otherwise invisible God, "¹ and the world represents "a theatre erected for displaying the glory of God."²

If we were to compare Calvin to the typical naturalist at this point we would discover this great distinction. For Calvin the creative works of God have no meaning in themselves apart from the Creator. When he admires the beauty of the creation it is the 'opera Dei' that he admires. He refuses to accord a self-sufficiency to the universe, and will not be satisfied with the creation unless it speaks to him of its Author. He says:

To be so preoccupied with the investigation of the secrets of nature, as to never turn one's eyes to its Author, is a most perverted study; and to enjoy everything in nature without acknowledging the Author of the benefit is the basest ingratitude.³

Thus, we find that Calvin never separates the creation from the Creator.

b. The Revelation of God in Providence

The expression 'opera Dei' refers not only to the creative activity of God, but also to his continual providence. For he is not only the Creator but the Preserver of all things, and in his continual ruling of all events both great and small he shows himself

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., I. v. 5.

3. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, I, p. 7.

as God the Creator. Calvin states, "without proceeding to his Providence, we cannot understand the full force of what is meant by God being the Creator."¹

Calvin's concept of God is active, not static. He presents him as one who does not sit in idleness but governs the heaven and the earth by his providence.

He says:

Let the reader remember that the providence we mean is not one by which the Deity, sitting idly in heaven, looks on what is taking place in the world, but one by which he, as it were, holds the helm, and overrules all events.²

All events are the works of God equally with the creation, and being the works of God, they are God's revelation of himself as the Creator.

Thus, in Calvin's teaching we learn that besides giving to man an innate knowledge of himself, God also reveals himself as the Creator in his works of creation and providence. Perhaps the finest summary of the effect of this revelation upon man is found in this declaration:

He has been pleased not only to deposit in our minds that seed of religion of which we have already spoken, but so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him.³

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. xvi. 1.

2. Ibid., I. xvi. 4.

3. Ibid., I. v. 1.

3. The Knowledge of God in Conscience

Conscience is not introduced in the "Institutes" along with the 'sensus divinitatis' and the revelation in the external world as a form of the knowledge of God and yet it is clearly so recognized by Calvin. Conscience, says Calvin "is an internal witness and monitor of the duties we owe to God."¹ The norm of duty apprehended in conscience is identified by Calvin with the will of God. Calvin writes:

As often then as the secret compunctions of conscience invite us to reflect upon our sins, let us remember that God himself is speaking.²

Therefore according to Calvin conscience gives us knowledge of the will of God.

The divine will known in conscience provides a third form of the natural knowledge of God alongside the 'sensus divinitatis' and the revelation in the external world. It would appear at this point that Calvin was an outstanding exponent of natural theology. But such is not the case as will be shown in the following examination of Calvin's idea of the noetic effects of sin.

D. Calvin's Idea of the Noetic Effects of Sin

1. Ibid., II. viii. 1.

2. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, I, p. 205.

It would appear from the previous discussion that Calvin had developed in his thinking a very adequate system of natural theology. He was fully convinced that in the light of the wonderful internal and external revelation God had made of himself, man in his normal state could not fail to know God. Considered objectively the general revelation of God was adequate and effective. However, Calvin next moves into an entirely different dimension in his thought by presenting a series of negations by which he destroys or nearly destroys the natural theology he has previously set forth with such conviction.

In spite of the revelation which God has given to men, the knowledge thus gained is to no avail. For Calvin declares:

In vain for us, therefore, does Creation exhibit so many bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author. Though they beam upon us from every quarter, they are altogether insufficient of themselves to lead us into the right path. Some sparks, undoubtedly, they do throw out; but they are quenched before they can give forth a brighter effulgence.¹

What then is the reason for the failure of general revelation to produce an adequate knowledge of God in the hearts and minds of men? The answer is found in the corruption of the human heart due to sin.

1. The Corruption of the 'Imago Dei'

Man in his created state of purity was capable of

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. v. 14.

the knowledge of God. He did not need a special illumination of the mind because he bore the 'imago Dei' so that he was capable of hearing the Divine voice, and of seeing the Divine image. As Calvin states:

In the beginning, the image of God was conspicuous in the light of the mind, the rectitude of the heart, and the soundness of all the parts of our nature.¹

But because of sin, the image of God has been so corrupted that God can no longer be perceived through general revelation. It is only possible to know God through a special redemptive illumination of the soul by the Word and the Spirit. Even though Calvin says "that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed,"² this does not mean that man has any righteousness within himself, for he continually denies it. Man in his sinful state is wholly unable to seek after the good. He says:

Reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes between good and evil, by which he understands and judges, being a natural talent, could not be totally destroyed, but is partly debilitated, partly vitiated, so that it exhibits nothing but deformity and ruin So the will, also, being inseparable from the nature of man, is not annihilated; but it is fettered by depraved and inordinate desires, so that it cannot aspire after anything that is good.³

Although the 'imago Dei' is not totally destroyed it is so corrupted by sin that it cannot penetrate to the mystery of the knowledge of God.

1. Ibid., I. xv. 4.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., II. ii. 12.

2. The Futility of Natural Theology

Calvin speaks of the futility of natural theology. Because of sin general revelation is to no avail.

He declares:

While experience testifies that the seeds of religion are sown by God in every heart, we scarcely find one man in a hundred who cherishes what he has received, and not one in whom they grow to maturity, much less bear fruit in due season. Some perhaps grow vain in their own superstitions, while others revolt from God with intentional wickedness; but all degenerate from the true knowledge of him. The fact is, that no genuine piety remains in the world.¹

It was intended that man might be brought to a knowledge of God through natural theology. However, it has lead only to superstition and blindness. The sum of it all is "that men, who are taught only by nature, have no certain, sound or distinct knowledge, but are confined to confused principles; so that they worship an unknown God."²

3. The Function of Natural Theology

What then is the function of natural theology for man? Does it not have purpose and value? To these questions Calvin would answer 'yes', there is purpose and value in God's revelation of himself in nature although it is negative in character. The chief function actually performed by the knowledge of God derived from natural theology is to render man inexcusable before

1. Ibid., I. iv. 1.

2. Ibid., I. v. 12.

God. He declares:

Whatever deficiency of natural ability prevents us from attaining the pure and clear knowledge of God, yet since that deficiency arises from our own fault, we are left without any excuse.¹

It is not the inadequacy of the general revelation of God which accounts for man's inability to know him. For Calvin always maintained the effectiveness and sufficiency of that revelation. Man could know God if he were not blinded by sin. He reasons:

Let this difference be remembered, that the manifestation of God, by which he makes his glory known in his creation, is, with regard, to the light itself, sufficiency clear; but that on account of our blindness, it is not found to be sufficient. We are not, however, so blind that we can plead our ignorance as an excuse for our perversity.²

In even stronger language Calvin asserts that "the end of the law of nature, therefore, is that man may be rendered inexcusable."³

4. The Need for a Special Revelation

Man was created in a state of harmony with God. But when he sinned, that harmony was shattered and he fell out of communion with God, a perplexed and fearful traveler in this world. He saw that the universe had some meaning, but he lacked the insight to inter-

1. Ibid., I. v. 15.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, trans. by John Owen, Edinburgh, Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1849, p. 24.

3. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, II, ii. 22.

pret its meaning. He was unable to approach God or to gain any clear understanding of God unless God acted in his behalf. He desperately needed assistance for as Calvin said "the human mind, through its weakness, was altogether unable to come to God if not aided."¹ Man's need was twofold:

A clearer and fuller revelation of God must be brought to men than that which is afforded by nature. And the darkened minds of men must be illuminated for its reception. In other words, what is needed, is a special supernatural revelation on the one hand, and a special supernatural illumination on the other.²

Calvin next turns his attention to this twofold supernatural work of God.

E. Calvin's Idea of Special Revelation

In Calvin's view, man is unable to gain an adequate knowledge of God through general revelation. For although God clearly shows himself daily to every man, because of his blindness, he cannot see or understand the true God. There was therefore need for a supernatural revelation, through which God might illumine the darkened minds of men concerning himself.

Calvin declares that in the Scriptures God has made this special revelation to man:

-
1. Ibid., I. vi. 4.
 2. B.B. Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, New York, Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 47.

Though the light which presents itself to all eyes, both in heaven and on earth, is more than sufficient to deprive the ingratitude of men of every excuse yet we need another and better assistance, properly to direct us to the Creator of the world. Therefore, He hath not unnecessarily added the light of his Word, to make himself known unto salvation, and hath honored with this privilege those whom He intended to unite in a more close and familiar connection with himself.¹

He thus directs us to the Holy Scriptures as the source of our true knowledge of God. Without Scripture our search for God would be in vain and the god whom we worshipped would not be the true God, but the product of our own imagination. In the Scriptures God bears "sufficient witness to himself"² and he "does not manifest himself to men otherwise than through his Word."³

Therefore, if we are to know and worship God, we must learn of him through a study of the Scriptures.

Calvin declares:

This, then, must be considered as a fixed principle, that, in order to enjoy the light of true religion, we ought to begin with teaching from heaven; and that no man can have the least taste of pure and wholesome teaching save him who will be a disciple of Scripture.⁴

The 'oracula Dei' (as Calvin liked to call the Scriptures) are necessary to the understanding of the 'opera Dei'. The Biblical revelation does not abolish the former

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. vi. 1.

2. Ibid., I. xi. 1.

3. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, I, p. 60.

4. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. vi. 2.

revelation of God. Nor does it supplement it in the sense that it makes more clear to man something of which he had a dim perception before. But it does supplement it in that it is necessary for the clarification of that which merely perplexed man and for the interpretation of that which was so mysterious that man never understood it at all. For Calvin the Scriptures became the means by which man could come to know the true God.

1. The Record of Special Revelation

The supernatural revelation was first given by God to men in visions and dreams through the patriarchs and the prophets. He inscribed such a distinctive knowledge of himself upon their hearts that they were fully persuaded that what they revealed and spoke proceeded from God himself. As Calvin writes:

But, whether God reveals himself to the patriarchs by oracles and visions, or suggested by means of the ministry of men, what should be handed down by tradition to their posterity, it is beyond a doubt that their minds were impressed with a firm assurance of the doctrine, so that they were persuaded and convinced that the information that they received came from God.¹

Calvin believed that the oracles and visions which were given to the Patriarchs were not at first recorded, but were passed on by oral tradition. He does not doubt, however, the absolute accuracy of these oral traditions. Nevertheless, in order that the special revelation of

1. Ibid.

God might be preserved unblemished for all future generations, God commanded that it be recorded. Calvin says:

In order that the truth might remain in the world in a continual course of instruction to all ages, he determined that the same oracles which he had deposited with the Patriarchs should be committed to public records.¹

It was necessary that God's Word be recorded in order that the religious leaders might have an objective guide and standard by which they could determine the truth concerning God and communicate this truth to their people. Calvin believes "it was His will that His Word should be committed to writing, in order that the priests might derive from it whatever they would communicate to the people, and that all the doctrine which should be delivered might be examined by that rule."² In addition, Calvin recognized that the truth of God is easily corrupted by men. Thus he declares "it pleased the Lord to commit the history to writing, for the purpose of preserving its purity."³

He further realized that the "mutability of the human mind" would result in the corruption of the Word of God unless it was recorded:

For if we consider the mutability of the human mind, it will be easy to perceive the necessity of the heavenly doctrine being thus committed to writing, that it might not be lost in oblivion or evaporate in error, or be corrupted by

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid, IV. viii. 6.

3. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, I, p. 59.

the presumption of men.¹

That in brief is Calvin's account for the origin of written Scripture. He always refers to God's special revelation by identifying it directly with the written Word.

2. The Belief in Progressive Revelation

The supernatural revelation of God came in progressive stages until it reached its climax in the incarnation of Christ. The first special manifestation of God to Adam was like the kindling of some feeble sparks. But the revelation increased in its clarity. God made himself known more and more clearly to his people. The kindled fire became more brilliant until in Christ it illuminated the whole world. Calvin indicates the nature of this revelation:

It was like the kindling of some feeble sparks. Subsequent accessions caused a considerable enlargement of the light, which continued to increase more and more, and diffuse its splendor through a wide extent, till at length, every cloud being dissipated, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness completely illuminated the whole world.²

Man is not to expect further prophecies or special revelations, for in Christ we find the perfect and final revelation of God. Calvin declares:

God will not in the future, as in ages past, speak from time to time by one and another, that he will not add prophecies to prophecies,

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. vi. 3.

2. Ibid., II. x. 20.

or revelations to revelations, but that he has completed all the branches of instruction in his Son.¹

Progressive revelation thus reaches its climax in Christ.

3. The Supremacy of the Scripture

As the special revelation of God to man, Calvin held the Scripture alone as the norm and criterion for thought and life. He asserts:

We should not allow ourselves to investigate God anywhere but in his sacred Word, or to form any ideas of him but such as are agreeable to his Word, or to speak anything concerning him but what is derived from the same Word.²

Here we have a classic statement of what is technically called the 'formal principle' of the Reformation. Calvin's whole theology had its source in the Scriptures. In his quest for a knowledge of God he would not go beyond what the teaching of Scripture authorized. Hunter states:

Every doctrine that presented itself for acceptance had to submit to the test of the touchstone of the Word. If it could not approve itself by proven affinities to the body of revealed truth, he would have nothing to do with it and declined to stamp it with the hallmark of the authentic Christian faith.³

Steadfastly Calvin upholds the idea that God has revealed to us only that which he desires we should know and that it is not legitimate for us to wander beyond the area of truth defined by Scripture. Constantly in his commentaries, when dealing with a subject which stirs

1. Ibid., IV. viii. 7.

2. Ibid., I. xiii. 21.

3. Hunter, op. cit., pp. 45, 46.

perplexity or inquisitiveness he diligently searches the Scripture for possible enlightenment. He resolutely refuses to go a step further than Scripture will permit.

Calvin insists that if we are to know God, then we must first become students of Scripture. He asks, "for what is the beginning of true learning but a ready promptness to hear the Word of God."¹ However, he declares that man is not naturally inclined to hear the Word of God. This is due to the pride which characterizes the life of every man. It is his besetting sin. Although man is ignorant, he thinks that he knows the truth. But as long as he presumes knowledge, he continues in ignorance. According to the testimony of St. John, "if you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."²

Calvin is convinced that we must humble ourselves to the realization of our ignorance and submit ourselves to the Scriptures as our authority. It is this obedient submission to the Word of God that is the foundation of a true knowledge of God. He asserts:

Hence originates all true wisdom, when we embrace with reverence the testimony which God has been pleased therein to deliver concerning himself. For obedience is the source, not only of an absolutely perfect and complete faith, but of all right knowledge of God.³

Calvin did not believe that man could ever know the

1. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. vii. 5.

2. John 9:41

3. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. vi. 2.

'essentia Dei' from the testimony of Scripture. For the 'essentia' of God is and remains incomprehensible to us and will always remain hidden from us. The very act of revelation entails the accompanying act of veiling and concealing. In view of this Calvin says, "His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, so that his majesty is not to be perceived by the human senses."¹ Further he declares that God gives us "a description, not of what he is in himself, but of what he is towards us, that our knowledge of him may consist rather in a lively perception, than in vain and aery speculation."² Thus even in Scripture we do not know all about God, for there remains the ultimate which we cannot approach. Through Scripture we can know God truly, but we cannot know him wholly.

4. Christ as the Ultimate Revelation of God

Calvin firmly held that Jesus Christ was the ultimate revelation of God. He maintained that the Old Testament contained sufficient knowledge and enlightenment for the Hebrews until the coming of Christ in the flesh, but that after the incarnation the Old Testament revelations were no longer sufficient for the salvation of man. When Christ broke into human history the final and supreme revelation was witnessed by mankind. Calvin writes:

1. Ibid., I. v. 1.
2. Ibid., I. x. 2.

But when, at length, the Wisdom of God was manifested in the flesh, it openly declared to us all that the human mind is capable of comprehending, or ought to think, concerning the heavenly Father. Now, therefore, since Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has shone upon us, we enjoy the full splendor of Divine truth, resembling the brightness of noonday, whereas the light enjoyed before was a kind of twilight.¹

He testifies, therefore, that Christ illuminated the whole world. In Christ, God who was formerly hidden, has revealed himself. In his commentary he writes, "what had been hidden in God is revealed to us in Christ as man, and life, which was formerly inaccessible is now placed before our eyes."² Calvin declared that Christ is the "visible representation" and the "lively image" of the invisible God:

The Son is said to know the Father, not because he reveals him by his Spirit, but because, being the lively image of him, he represents him visibly in his own person.³

Christ, as the eternal Word made flesh is the 'imago Dei'. It is "in him alone that God, who is otherwise invisible, is manifested to us."⁴

A summary of Calvin's thought may be found in the

1. Ibid., IV. viii. 7.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Gospel according to John, trans. by William Pringle, I, Edinburgh, Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1847, p. 119.

3. John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, trans. by William Pringle, I, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1949, p. 320.

4. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, trans. by John Pringle, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948, p. 84.

following words:

The sum is this, that God in himself, that is, in his naked majesty, is invisible, and that not to the eyes of the body merely, but also to men's understandings, and that He is revealed to us in Christ alone, that we may behold Him as in a mirror. For in Christ he shows us his righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power - in short, his entire self. We must beware of seeking him elsewhere, for everything that would set itself up as a representation of God, apart from Christ, will be an idol.¹

Thus Calvin stands firmly in the Reformation tradition, which is to say that a knowledge of God is indissolubly bound up in Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ man has no knowledge of God, no salvation, nor does he enjoy the blessings of God. Apart from him man wanders in a maze, always seeking but never finding the object of his quest.

F. Calvin's Idea of the Inspiration of Scripture

Inasmuch as Calvin directs us to the Scripture as the source of our true knowledge of God, it is important for us to determine the conception which he held concerning the authority and inspiration of the Bible. For as the source of God's supernatural revelation it was imperative that the Scripture be shown to be trustworthy and authoritative in all respects.

1. The Need for an Authoritative Standard

The Reformation was essentially a revolt against the idea of authority in the Church of Rome. It was a

1. Ibid.

common notion that the authority of Scripture depended on the opinion and word of the Church. But this idea Calvin vigorously denies. For the eternal and unchanging truth of God to depend upon the whims and fantasies of men was blasphemous. Instead, Calvin declared that it was the Church that depended upon the Scripture for its existence:

If the doctrine of the prophets and apostles be the foundation of the Church, it must have been certain, antecedently to the foundation of the Church. It is a very false notion therefore, that the power of judging of the Scripture belongs to the Church, so as to make the certainty of it dependent on the Church's will, since without the Scripture, the Church itself would never have existed.¹

In challenging and overthrowing the authority of the Church, Calvin, along with the other Reformers, found it necessary to elevate Scripture to a place of ultimate authority. He insists "that the teaching of the Bible on all things necessary to be known is complete, sufficient, self-consistent, and harmonious."² If the Scriptures were to be the sole rule of faith and conduct for man then it would be necessary to lift them to such a place of supreme authority that they could be thought of as the very words of God. Calvin accepted such a view of Scripture. According to Hunter:

Calvin recognized that only a hearty acceptance of the Scripture as the Word of God could make it sharper than a two edged sword.³

1. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. vii. 2.

2. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

The authority of Scripture is authenticated primarily by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives inward testimony that the Word of Scripture is the Word of God. Calvin constantly claims that those who have faith do not need to prove the authority of Scripture. For "the Word of the Lord constrains us by its majesty, as by a violent impulse, to yield obedience to it."¹ Calvin sometimes speaks of external 'proofs' which testify to the authority of Scripture, such as the witness of the Church. But always his main appeal is to the work of the Holy Spirit. He asserts:

The Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.²

2. The Canon of Scripture

Calvin accepted the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as being the very word of God. He did not doubt the canonicity of these books, but received them without exception as fully inspired. It has been held by some, however, that Calvin was doubtful of the canonicity of some of these books. They rest their case upon the fact that he did not write commentaries on the three books attributed to Solomon, the two short epistles of

1. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, trans. by John Pringle, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948. p. 100.

2. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. vii. 5.

John, and the Apocalypse. In addition, he never quoted from II and III John and quoted from I John in such a way as would seem to exclude the other two epistles. He says, "we need not wonder that those whom John, in his canonical Epistle (referring to I John)...."¹ Again he writes referring to I John, "but we see the accomplishment of what John says, in his canonical Epistle...."²

Nevertheless the evidence points conclusively to Calvin's acceptance of the whole body of Scripture. As Warfield states:

It is also true that he expresses himself with moderation when adducing the evidence for the canonicity of this book or that, and in his modes of statement quite clearly betrays his recognition that the evidence is more copious or more weighty in some cases than in others. But he represents the evidence as sufficient in all cases and declares with confidence his conclusion in favor of the canonicity of the whole body of books which make up our Bible, and in all his writings and controversies acts firmly on this presupposition.³

The following incident illustrates the importance that Calvin attached to the acceptance of the Scriptures in their integrity. When Castellon was examined as to his fitness for the ministry by Calvin and other ministers of Geneva, he was judged worthy to fulfill the functions of a pastor except at one point. He refused to accept the Song of Solomon as canonical. It was because of this fact that Castellon was finally rejected as a candidate

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1. Ibid., III. iii. 23.
 2. Ibid., III. ii. 21.
 3. Warfield, op. cit., p. 52.

for the ministry.¹ Calvin felt that the rejection of one book would set a dangerous precedent for the future.

3. The Mode of Inspiration

Calvin insisted that the Scriptures were the very words of God which had been recorded by inspired men. He thought of these words as coming from the mouth of God. He insists, "Scripture has come down from heaven as if the living words of God themselves were heard in it."² Again he says that "we have received it from God's own mouth by the ministry of men."³ He therefore recognized that the Scriptures were written by human hands while believing that the human authors of Scripture were bound to record the revelation exactly as they had received it. He spoke of the authors "merely as organs of the Holy Spirit who set down nothing of their own, so that there appears no admixture of what is human in their product."⁴ What he is saying is that the Scriptures are wholly divine for "it is God who speaks with us and not mortal men"⁵ It appears therefore from the language he used that Calvin thought of the mode of inspiration by which

1. Ibid., pp. 52, 53.

2. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. vii. 1.

3. Ibid., I. vii. 5.

4. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. by William Pringle, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948, p. 249.

5. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. by John Owen, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948, p. 390.

God communicated to men as that of dictation.

In his essay dealing with the Biblical authority in the Continental Reformation, Brian A. Gerrish calls attention to a fact which is quite obvious, but often overlooked, that the reformers lived in a time when the dictation theory of inspiration went unchallenged in principle.¹ Realizing this, one should expect Calvin to adhere to this idea and it is easy to conclude from his writings that Calvin believed the human writers to be an almost negligible element in the production of the Scriptures. In fact, he might well speak of them as the writings of the Spirit, as to think of them as the product of men who actually moved pens.

Warfield suggests that although the term 'dictare' was in common use in Calvin's time it was used to express the effects rather than the mode of inspiration. He writes:

It is not unfair to urge, however, that this language is figurative; and that what Calvin has in mind is not to insist that the mode of inspiration was dictation, but that the result of inspiration is as if it were by dictation, viz., the production of a pure word of God free from all human admixtures.²

Whatever else we may conclude, we must say that at least Calvin held that the effect of inspiration was the production of a pure Scripture, free from all human

1. Brian A. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, X (1957), pp. 336-339

2. Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-64.

error.

4. The Problem of Errors in Scripture

Calvin believed the Scriptures to be authentic and authoritative from beginning to end. He does not allow that errors can exist. And yet when Calvin enters into the exposition of the individual portions of Scripture we find that he is faced with numerous difficulties. It would seem that he did not always cling tenaciously to his idea of complete inerrancy, but was forced to admit with reluctance at times that a certain human element was present in the composition of Scripture. Various writings betrayed the qualities and temperaments of their respective authors. Even Calvin was forced to recognize this human influence was present. One of the most outstanding examples of this is found in his comments concerning David in Psalm 39. He writes:

I admit, that he speaks in a becoming manner, in acknowledging that there is no hope of his being restored to health, until God cease to manifest his displeasure; but he errs in this, that he asks a respite, just that he may have time to die.¹

Here we find that Calvin admits a human error in the text. But still he insists that the idiosyncrasies of the writers were always under such control of the Holy Spirit, that they manifested themselves exactly according to his requirements.

1. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, II, p. 88.

When he suggests that an error has found its way into the text of Matthew 27:9, he is speaking not of the original but of the transmitted text. In His exposition of Acts 7:16 he writes:

And whereas he (Stephen) saith afterwords, they were laid in the Sepulchre which Abraham had bought of the sons of Hemor, it is manifest that there is a fault in the word of Abraham Wherefore this place must be amended.¹

Again Calvin suggests the error was due to a copyist and was not found in the original but in the transmitted text.

In defending Paul for his inaccurate quotations of Scripture, Calvin declares that the meaning Paul puts into the quotation must be the primary consideration. He says concerning I Corinthians 2:9:

We ought to place more dependence on Paul's meaning than upon any other consideration. For where shall we find a surer or more faithful interpreter of this authoritative declaration which the Spirit of God dictated to Isaiah than he himself in the exposition which he has furnished by the mouth of Paul.²

Thus we discover that if there is something wrong with the words of Scripture as they stand, Calvin resourcefully states that after all it is not the words but the doctrine that is of prime importance. The apostles, when

1. John Calvin, Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles, trans. by Henry Beveridge, I, Edinburgh, Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1844, p. 265.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, pp. 107, 108.

they quoted Scripture were concerned primarily with its meaning. But in reality we find that Calvin was driven to admit the existence of errors in Scripture although he would never admit this in an unqualified statement.

Although it may appear as if Calvin was somewhat inconsistent at this point, one thing is clear; his admission of problem passages did not have a significant effect upon his main doctrine of the Divine inspiration of Scripture. He held firmly to the idea of Scripture as coming from the very mouth of God.

In the previous discussion it has been shown that Calvin accepted a supernatural revelation which was completely authoritative and reliable, being the very words of God. However, this special revelation as found in the Scripture is not sufficient in itself to cure the blindness of sinful man. There must also be a supernatural illumination which will enable man to grasp the meaning of God's objective revelation in Scripture. This illumination comes through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

G. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

God has given a special revelation of himself in the Scripture which Calvin believed to be the pure Word of God written by "sure and authentic amanuenses of the

Holy Spirit."¹ But not only did the Holy Spirit direct the recording of sacred Scripture but he is also the interpreter of Scripture. Man cannot gain an adequate knowledge of God through the Scriptures unless the Holy Spirit is present to illuminate his mind. Calvin regarded the testimony of the Spirit as a "secret,"² "internal,"³ and "inward"⁴ action of the Holy Spirit by which the soul is "illuminated."⁵ This inward teaching of the Spirit is the means by which we are convinced beyond all doubt that the Scriptures are from God. As Calvin testifies, "the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose word it is."⁶

1. The Development of the Doctrine

In the first edition of the "Institutes" which appeared in 1536 the idea of the testimony of the Holy Spirit already was present. Even though it had not yet been developed to any great degree into a doctrine, it represented a very significant advance in the theological thinking of that day, for already Calvin spoke with unusual insight of the utter helplessness of the human soul in all its sin and of its complete dependence on the sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit. It was in the

1. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV. viii. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, I. vii. 4.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, I. vii. 5.

5. *Ibid.*, I. vii. 3.

6. *Ibid.*, I. vii. 4.

edition of 1539 that the doctrine was developed in the form that was retained by Calvin to the end.

The formation in 1539 of a precise and complete doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit had an extraordinary effect on Protestantism. The Lutherans as well as the Reformed adopted it at once and made it the basis not only of their reasoned defense of Protestantism, but also of their structure of Christian doctrine and of their confidence in Christian living.

2. The Function of the Spirit

The function of the Spirit was to confirm the Scriptures and seal them to our understanding. There was always a unity which existed between the Word and Spirit. Calvin states:

We do not receive the illumination of the Spirit of God to make us condemn the external word, and take pleasure only in the secret inspiration, like many fanatics, who do not regard themselves spiritual except they reject the word of God, and substitute in its place their own wild speculations.¹

He declared, then, that the Holy Spirit did not reveal to man new revelations but instead confirmed the one true revelation which had been given in the Scriptures. Again he asserts:

Hence the office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the

1. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, IV, p. 413.

very doctrine which the gospel recommends.¹

Calvin constantly speaks of this unity between the Word and Spirit, for he insists the Holy Spirit only manifests himself in connection with the Scripture. For "the Lord has established a kind of mutual connection between the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit."²

Only in the union of the two can an effective revelation be made to the sin-darkened mind of man.

Warfield writes:

The whole objective revelation of God lies, thus in the Word. But the whole subjective capacitating for the reception of this revelation lies in the will of the Spirit. Either, by itself, is wholly ineffective to the result aimed at--the production of knowledge is not only rendered possible to man; it is rendered certain.³

If man separates himself from either the Word or the Spirit he is unable to gain a true knowledge of God. Only when both are present is the illumination of man's mind possible. Calvin's idea of the testimony of the Holy Spirit is central to his whole conception of revelation.

H. Summary

According to Calvin men are endowed by nature with a 'sensus deitatis', which is supported by a rich

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. ix. 1.

2. Ibid., I. ix. 3.

3. Warfield, op. cit., p. 83.

revelation of God as seen in his works and embodied in his deeds. And yet because of the corruption of men's hearts they are blinded to the revelation of God's works and deeds. In mercy he intervenes in the affairs of men and gives to them an objective revelation and a subjective apprehension of the truth of this revelation. The Word by the Spirit is made efficacious and the knowledge of God is found to be trustworthy in its character and complete in its purpose.

CHAPTER II

THE IDEA OF REVELATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

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A. Introduction

The name of Karl Barth is well known to our generation. For over forty years he has had a tremendous influence in the theological world. There is little doubt that he has made greater contributions to the theological climate of Protestantism than any other man in this century. Even as early as 1930, Dr. Alvin Zerbe wrote:

People in the United States who have kept in touch with religious thought know that the celebrated Swiss theologian, Dr. Karl Barth, has hurled an enormous bomb into the theological camp and has caused a scatterment right and left. Theologians are not quite sure what has hit them, but they are agreed that it was something beyond the ordinary.¹

He goes on to declare, "Barthianism is an all-inclusive world-view, probably the most original and comprehensive, certainly the most revolutionary of recent times."²

Barth's theological significance began as a revolt against the liberal theology of his day. The prevailing theological thought of that day had been built on the foundation of the systems of Schleiermacher and Ritschl.

1. Alvin S. Zerbe, *The Karl Barth Theology*, Cleveland, Central Publishing House, 1930, p. v.

2. *Ibid*, p. ix.

These systems replaced God and his revelation with man and his religious experiences. In stressing the value and validity of religious experience they sought to develop their theology on the basis of religious consciousness, claiming this to be in harmony with modern thought. But in attempting to adapt her message to meet the needs of the modern world the Church lost her vitality and it's theology became subject to relativism and subjectivism.

It was into the center of this theological world that Karl Barth came forth to proclaim a simple but consistent theme: "let God be God and man be man." Since that time he has been the center of theological debate for over four decades and has probably, more than any other man, led the Church back to a more orthodox theology.

The influence of Karl Barth is still strong. T. F. Torrance of Edinburgh has declared:

Karl Barth is incontestably the greatest figure in modern theology since Schleiermacher, occupying an honored position among the great elite of the church - Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin.¹

As Schleiermacher dominated the theology of the nineteenth century so Barth has dominated the twentieth. Reinhold

1. T. F. Torrance, Ten Makers of Modern Protestant Thought, ed. by George L. Hunt, New York, Association press, 1958, p. 58.

Niebuhr, although he has always been a critic of Barth does admit that Barth is "something of a genius" who possesses "more imagination than any other living theologian."¹ L. Harold De Wolf sums it up well:

There is no doubt that Karl Barth has made a stronger impact upon Protestant theology than any other man of the twentieth century, thus far. So varied and far-reaching is his influence that whether one welcomes his ideas or opposes them one cannot ignore them and still gain even an elementary understanding of the present situation in theology.²

Barth's idea of revelation has made a great impact on contemporary theological thinking and it is to this subject that we now turn.

B. Fundamental Tenets of Barthian Theology

The theology of Karl Barth is not easy to understand. This is the testimony of many who have studied his works. Even the German who is more familiar with the dialectical method which Barth employs finds his thought difficult. However, Barth does not apologize on account of this fact. He feels life is complex and that no theology which faces the facts of life and meets them squarely can be called simple.

One who writes about Barth's thought realizes the inadequacy of his best efforts. He knows that the best

1. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Quality of Our Lives," *The Christian Century*, LXXVII, No. 19 (May 11, 1960), p. 570.

2. L. Harold De Wolf, *Present Trends in Christian Thought*, New York, Association Press, 1960, p. 78f.

that he can hope to do is to deal in a fragmentary way with a few of the more important aspects of the Barthian thought, realizing that when he is finished he has left unsaid far more than he has said. One of the difficulties is that his theology is essentially a movement. It moves and progresses; it does not crystallize. The attempt to give an adequate statement to his thought he likens to the attempt to draw the picture of a flying bird. The result at best can only show the bird in one position. It cannot give the bird in its flight.

But while the theology of Barth is a movement rather than a position, it is equally true that the main outlines of his thought are quite clear. There has been a line of continuity to the present. It is with these basic assumptions that we are primarily concerned as we seek to understand Barth's idea of revelation. If we can understand the clear and unmistakable principles and assumptions which he sets forth, then we will have the key which will make his whole theology more intelligible.

1. The Idea of the Two Worlds

The idea of a world of time qualitatively different from a world of eternity is an important key to Barth's thought. He says:

If I have a system, it is the qualitative difference between time and eternity, which in the negative and positive sense is ever kept in mind.¹

1. Quoted from Zerbe, op. cit., p. viii.

Barth believes in the existence of another world, the world of God that stands in utter contradiction to the world of man. He is sure that we must start from the belief in the existence of this world of God, and that only as we start with this assumption are we able to come to an understanding of the world of man.

There is a difference between time and eternity, and the difference is not quantitative but qualitative. There is a This-side and a Yon-side, but the Yon-side is the real side. God is God and man is man. The world in which man lives now is distinct from the world of God. Between the two there is a chasm vast and deep. It is here where we begin to meet with difficulty. The world of eternity exists in such utter contradiction to the world of time that our earthbound imaginations do not possess the necessary categories for a proper description of it. If the world of eternity is qualitatively distinct from the world of time, it follows that it is impossible for a positive disclosure of it to be made to earthbound eyes. Therefore God remains the unknown God. Barth states:

God the absolute boundary and beginning of all that we are and have and do; God who is distinguished qualitatively from men and from everything human, and must never be identified with anything which we name, or experience, or conceive, or worship, as God; the First and the Last, and consequently, the Unknown, who is never a known thing in the midst of other known things; God, the Lord, the Creator, the Redeemer - this is the living God.¹

1. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwin C. Hoskyns, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, pp. 330-331.

God remains separated from man qualitatively and there is no way in which man can bridge the deep chasm which divides them. Barth's criticism of modern thought was that it had forgotten the existence of the Yon-side and had sought to explain the world of time without considering its relation to that of eternity.

The existence of the world of eternity explains the presence of contradictions in life in the world of time. Barth holds that the absence of our knowledge of the nature of the world of eternity is the real cause of our inability to solve the seeming contradictions.

2. The Use of Paradox

Karl Barth is known for his use of paradox. Paradox brings out truth by expressing it in seemingly contradictory statements that force men to go beneath appearance to reality to solve the contradiction. Second Corinthians offers a striking example of the use of paradox:

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true, as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.¹

Paradox is often used by Barth to express a contradiction that cannot be resolved because the solution of it lies in that "other world" which is responsible for its

1. II Corinthians 6:8 - 10.

existence. In this sense it does not express the self-contradictory, but it does express that which is at present incapable of solution. The study of paradox brings us to a consideration of that which is closely connected with it, Barth's use of the dialectical method.

3. The Dialectical Method

Barth's theology has been described as dialectical.

Georges Casalis suggests the following meaning:

It expresses the tension that necessarily characterizes all theological formulations. Since what is involved is the encounter between God and man, the mystery of the incarnation, the justification of the sinner, judgement, grace and the resurrection from the dead, no simple statement will suffice; the truth, the reality, can only be grasped by paradox.¹

Barth contends that so long as we are here on earth, we can not do otherwise in theology than proceed by using the method of statement and counter-statement. Both the affirmation and denial contain an element of truth. The ultimate truth lies somewhere between the two and cannot be perfectly caught and expressed in human categories. The necessity of the dialectic arises from the existence of that other world which man is not fully qualified to lay hold of.

In discussing the question of how we are to speak of God, Barth suggests three possible solutions. The first is dogmatism, which is intellectual systematizing.

1. Georges Casalis, *Portrait of Karl Barth*, trans. by Robert Brown, Garden City, Doubleday and Company, 1963, p. 127.

The second is that of self criticism which is mysticism.

The third is the dialectic, which is best. Barth declares:

The third way is the way of dialectic. It is the way of Paul and the Reformers, and intrinsically it is by far the best. The great truths of dogmatism and self-criticism are presupposed by it, but also it is their fragmentariness, their merely relative nature. This way undertakes seriously and positively to develop the idea of God on the one hand and the criticism of man and all things human on the other.¹

Barth goes on to illustrate the proper use of the dialectic:

Our task is to interpret the Yes by the No and the No by the Yes without delaying more than a moment in either a fixed Yes or a fixed No; to speak of the glory of God in creation, for example, only to pass to emphasize God's complete concealment from us in that creation (as in Romans 8); to speak of death and the transitory quality of this life only to remember the majesty of the wholly other life which meets us at the moment of death; of the creation of man in the image of God simply and solely to give warning once for all that man as we know him is a fallen man, whose misery we know better than his glory; and on the other hand, to speak of sin only to point out that we should not know it were it not forgiven us.²

To those who object to his method Barth replies: "My friend, you must understand that if you ask about God and if I am really to tell you about him, dialectic is all that can be expected from me"³

Although there is similarity between the Barthian and Hegelian dialectic there is this important distinc-

1. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. by Douglas Horton, The Pilgrim Press, 1928, p. 207.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

tion. The Hegelian method lay in the statement of the thesis and the antithesis. This was followed by the synthesis in which an attempt was made to combine in one statement the elements of truth found in both the thesis and antithesis. Barth does not draw the synthesis. He believes the synthesis lies in the realm of truth to which man in this life cannot enter. The synthesis is with God. John McConnachie comments on this point when he states, "the synthesis is with God, who alone can speak the undialectic word, the Amen, beyond which there is no going."¹ The dialectic flows in the last analysis from the conception of the two worlds and the realization of the otherness of the world of eternity.

4. The Divine Initiative

A necessary development of the idea of the two worlds which stand in qualitative distinction from each other is the position of Barth that theology starts with God and not man. If it is true that the gap between God and man is between utter incommensurables, then it will inevitably follow that man cannot rise from himself to God. All that man can know must come from God's disclosure of himself. Birch Hoyle comments on Barth's position as follows:

It is the mark of this kind of theology in contrast to the usual method of procedure

1. John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1932, p. 80.

followed for almost a century now, to start from above, from the God-side, and work down to man. ¹

This approach to theology was significant because it challenged the basis upon which liberal theology rested. Since the days of Schleiermacher, liberal theology assumed that man was the certainty and that God was the question, and that the method of approach was to proceed from man the known, to God, the unknown. It taught that we gained our knowledge of God by a study of the highest and best that we know in man.

Barth holds that this approach is impossible. For a God thus gained is only a creation of the mind of man and such a God is not really God. We cannot lay hold of God in our own strength. Our knowledge of God must come from our hearing God's disclosure of himself.

The fundamental tenets of Barthian theology which have been discussed in the preceding sections lay the groundwork for a proper understanding of Barth's idea of revelation. We now proceed to a consideration of Barth's idea of God.

C. Barth's Idea of God

Even as Calvin, Barth is "intoxicated" with the idea of God. His theology is theocentric from beginning

1. Birch Hoyle, *The Teaching of Karl Barth*, London, Student Christian Movement Press, 1930, p. 155.

to end. God is the center of his thinking, the basis for his entire theology. He believes that theology will never speak with certainty until we begin with God and not man. All things must be seen through his eyes and judged by him. Of course, Barth's position is a reaction in part to the very common conviction that there is not a vast distance between God and man, but that God and man belong together and in each other are fulfilled. Barth is dominated by the thought of the distance which exists between God and man and insists that theology must stand firm upon the basis of God's absolute transcendence.

1. The Transcendent God

The theology of Schleiermacher controlled the thought of the nineteenth century. Adapted by Albrecht Ritschl, this liberal theology entered the twentieth century and gained supporters in Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, and Ernst Troeltsch. In his early life Barth was an avid reader and admirer of Schleiermacher and he adopted this liberal theology as his own. However, after his theological study was completed, Barth began his ministry as assistant pastor of the German Reformed Church in Geneva. Here he made further study of the life and thought of John Calvin. He was greatly influenced by Calvin's thinking, especially by Calvin's emphasis on the transcendent God. Gradually Barth's reaction to liberalism

came to expression. With the publication of his "Romerbrief" a commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in 1919, he began his unrelenting attack on those who would seek to see God immanent in the life and experience of man.

From that day the thought of transcendence is clearly prominent in his works. For Barth, God is God and man is man and there can be no fusion of the two. Therefore his writings frequently speak of God as "the transcendent other," "the wholly other," "the unrecognized," "the uncomprehended," "the unknown God," and "the incommensurable Yonder." Barth sums up his thought on the matter with these words:

There is no way from us to God--not even via negativa--not even a via dialectica nor paradoxa. The god who stood at the end of some human way--even of this way--would not be God.¹

Barth has been vehemently attacked in regard to his doctrine of God. He has been accused of being practically agnostic at this point. But what Barth says is that there is no way from man to God. He goes on to assert that the only way between God and man is that which leads from God to man. This way he finds in Jesus Christ. God is unknowable apart from his self-disclosure in Christ.

2. The Immanent God

Many have felt that when Barth speaks of God as the "wholly other" he has tended to put God outside the

1. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 177.

world altogether so that at best he cannot be more than an occasional visitor. However, Brunner points out that the Barthian position is often misunderstood when he declares:

When here and elsewhere we distinguish between the transcendent God of the Bible and the God-Idea of the religion of immanence, it is important to note that we are treating an epistemological but not a cosmological transcendence, i.e., we hold that God cannot be known by his active presence in the world. His presence in nature and history is not denied, but it is regarded as hidden so that what God is, is not revealed.¹

Barth is not denying the immanence of God, but what he believes to be the wholly unscriptural philosophy known as immanentism, a product of the autonomous human reason untaught by revelation. He maintains that God as Creator upholds all things by his mighty power. He has not abandoned the world, neither is he merged in the world, but he rules within the world he has made. God is present in the world, but as God the "Wholly Other." The immanence of which Barth speaks does not erase the distinctions between God and man.

Certainly in the volumes of his "Dogmatics" and especially in his essay on "The Humanity of God," Barth shows he believes in the immanence of God properly understood. God is present in this world, "not distant only, but also near, not only free as he confronts it but bound to it by his sovereign choice, not transcen-

1. Emil Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931, p. 28.

dent only, but also immanent."¹

D. Barth's Idea of the Knowledge of God

If the world of time is separated qualitatively from the world of eternity and if man can only approach God and think of him rightly after God in his grace has spoken to him, then how does man gain a knowledge of the true God? There have been many ways by which man has sought to gain an understanding of God. Barth declares that most of them have been false paths because they have ignored the distance which exists between the Creator and the creature. Because of sin man has been led astray in his search for a knowledge of God.

1. The Effect of Sin

Barth proclaims the idea of a sinful fallen humanity with great force and emphasis as did Calvin. The theology of Schleiermacher and other liberal nineteenth century theologians had tended to regard sin less seriously. Sin was considered as a defect. Human nature was observed optimistically and was becoming more godly as the time went on.

Barth rejected all easy going views of sin. He pictures it in its awfulness. Sin is rebellion against God, disobedience to his will, pride which ignores the

1. H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, London, Nisbet and Company, 1937, p. 301.

distance between Creator and creature--an attempt by man to be like God. He declares:

Sin is a robbing of God: a robbery which becomes apparent in our arrogant endeavor to cross the line of death by which we are bounded; in our drunken blurring of the distance which separates us from God.¹

Barth even goes further than Calvin in describing the disruptive effects of sin by declaring that the image of God in man has not only been corrupted but that it has been completely destroyed.

2. The Unknowability of God Apart from His Self-Disclosure

Because sin has destroyed even the image of God in man therefore God is inaccessible to him. There is no path which leads from man to God. All efforts toward God are vain for an unbridgable gulf separates man from him. As Barth insists, "there can be no question about our throwing a bridge between us and God."² Man cannot arrive at any knowledge of God by his own efforts. Barth further states:

If God were not gracious (and this means if he retained the majesty of His Godhead for Himself), if He did not of his own free decision turn towards men, there would be no revelation; man would be left to himself. If God's grace were not complete, if that grace did not consist in an inconceivably real descent of God into our depths, there would be no revelation³

1. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 168.

2. Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, trans. by J. Strathearn Mc Nab, London, The Student Christian Movement, 1930, p. 42.

3. Karl Barth, *Revelation*, ed. by John Ballie and Hugh Martin, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1937, p. 53.

Yet, man has sought to discover God through his own efforts. Barth insists that all such efforts are futile..

a. The Futility of Human Reason

Barth contends that human reason cannot arrive at ultimate truth, for God absolutely transcends all reason. He states that "our reason can never carry us over from God's incomprehensibility."¹ A knowledge of God is in no way dependent upon man for God is absolute mystery. He cannot be found, known, or described by man's rational powers. God is not to be placed upon the dissecting table of human reason and speculative inquiry for he is never the object of thought or discovery, but is the subject.

b. The Inadequacy of Mysticism

Barth rejects mysticism as a means of arriving at a knowledge of God for it is essentially human and never can progress beyond the human self. On the basis of mystical experience one does not reach God, but only an object to which he gives the name "God." For what man finds in the depths of the human spirit is not God himself, but a man-made God-- a God in man's own image. H. R. Mackintosh speaks Barth's mind when he says:

We must utterly reject the view, always flattering and always widespread, that if we are to see God with the deepest assurance of His presence, we must look within ourselves.²

1. Karl Barth, *Credo*, trans. by J. Strathearn Mc Nab, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 12.

2. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

c. The Failure of Religious Experience

Schleiermacher made religious experience the starting point of theology saying that it was a ladder reaching from man to God. Barth rejects this idea for he holds that a religious consciousness does not enable us to escape from the sinfulness of our nature; thus it can never lead us to God. The fact that man is religious does not mean that man has found God. In fact religion has often become a challenge to God. The Prophets, Christ, Paul, and the Reformers all spoke against the religion of their day. Religious experience can not lead us to a knowledge of God.

John McConnachie sums up Barth's position concerning the unknowability of God apart from his self-disclosure with the following words:

There is no way from man to God. All so called pathways to God fade out in the sand before they reach their goal. Since God is God and man is man, separated by so great distance, not spatially and metaphysically, but epistemologically and spiritually, man is without hope of knowledge of God unless God comes to him.¹

Man's quest for God is satisfied not by speculation, or by moral, or religious efforts. If man can speak of God it is only because God has spoken first.

3. The Problem of Natural Theology

Karl Barth professes to be "an avowed opponent

1. John McConnachie, The Barthian Theology and the Man of Today, pp. 217, 218.

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of all natural theology."¹ But to some degree his rejection of natural theology may be considered a matter of terminology. For Barth's thought is not a cosmological dualism that shuts God off from all relation to his world. He writes: "We live in the world, and in this world is God's world, created, sustained, and ruled by him."² But he adds:

We live in a world that is modified by the apostasy of man from God, by man's having cut himself off from God, having set himself in opposition to God, having become his enemy.³

How would Barth explain the familiar passage in the nineteenth Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament showeth his handiwork?"⁴ He would say that the Psalmist was a man who had already come to know God in his Word for he devotes half of the Psalm to a meditation on the law of Jehovah. Barth would never deny that the Christian who has found God in Jesus Christ will have eyes to see in the world of nature the God whom he has come to know in Christ. The Barthian position is just that a man cannot rise from nature to Christ.

McConnachie gives the heart of the Barthian contention:

1. Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, trans. by J.L.M. Haire and Ian Henderson, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939, p. 6.

2. Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, p. 47.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 48

4. Psalm 19:1

In a world which has fallen out of its original unity with its Creator, we can still see his tracks, but they are the tracks of a Great Unknown. Not in Nature, any more than in History, nor in Religion, apart from Revelation, says Barth, is God to be found. Nature is not capable of revealing what is beyond the relativity of concrete existence. *Finitum non capax infiniti*. We can only come to know God the Creator through God the Reconciler, as he gives himself to be known in the Word of the Cross.¹

Thus the Barthian conclusion is that natural theology gives merely thoughts about God. God himself is known only as he reveals himself in his Word. Mackintosh puts it another way. He says:

Barth is maintaining that 'revelation' is far too great a term for all such faint and ambiguous suggestions of God which are all the sinner can detect in Creation. For one thing, they are audible solely to faith, which is evoked only by the true revelation in Christ; and secondly, they are definitely not such as lead men into reconciliation with the true God. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' There is no real revelation which is not a Divine unveiling of Grace to us, to me, the sinful. This, once we recognize it, strips bare that pride which would light heartedly and self-confidently cast around for revelations in other quarters.²

It is impossible therefore for Barth to accept either progressive revelation or general revelation.

a. Rejection of Progressive Revelation

Revelation for Barth is never a general disclosure of the Divine in nature, man, or human history coming to a supreme climax. It is not spiritual evolution moving from lower human history to higher till it finds the

1. John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, p. 280.

2. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

fullest expression in Jesus Christ. Christ's uniqueness and once-for-allness does away with all possibility of progressivism. Revelation is absolute and never relative. If there is anything relative it is always man's perception of revelation which is always imperfect because of sin.

Revelation consists in one definite occasion in history, one unique event, in which God meets man. It is not a last event of a series of events. It is the one event in which time was intersected by eternity.

b. Rejection of General Revelation

Not only does Barth reject progressive revelation but also general revelation. He emphatically declares this when he says:

No series of mere events, of history, or personal experience, however many and wonderful they may be, can give us God.¹

The world as it is does not reveal God to us. Revelation can be thought of only in terms of Incarnation. God's special contact with history is limited to that one event alone.

Thus, he is forced to say that the Old Testament is not true revelation but the messages of the Old Testament prophets are but "tokens of revelation. The witness of the Old Testament is a token pointing to a future revelation. Even the words and deeds of Jesus are but

1. Karl Barth, Credo, p. 12.

"tokens" of revelation. He states, "the words and deeds of Jesus do not as such cease to be tokens that can do no more than point toward the Kingdom of God that transcends them!"¹ He insists further that "none of the tokens of revelation is the revelation itself. The revelation, here and now, is Jesus Christ alone."² This presents problems, however, which are difficult for Barth to answer.

c. Reasons for the Rejection

We have already examined the basis for Barth's rejection of natural theology. As this idea is so significant in Barth's theology, we will consider the reasons in even greater detail. Barth holds that Luther and Calvin desired;

to see both the church and human salvation founded on the Word of God alone, on God's revelation in Jesus Christ, as it is attested in the Scripture, and on faith in that Word.³

Natural theology would build on something other than the Scriptures and God's revelation in Jesus Christ, hence must be regarded as opposed to the basic principle of the Reformation.

Barth held that to worship the "God" of natural theology is only to worship the creature of man's reason, an idol of man's own making, an idol possessing no reality beyond man's deluded imagination. He says:

1. Karl Barth, Revelation, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 81.

3. Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation, pp. 8, 9.

The God who has made himself known to us in Christ is not the "God" of Aristotle or of any other philosopher, learning with the benefit of biblical revelation.¹

The one and only God is not conceived in human thought at all.

Finally, Barth rejects natural theology because it implies a denial of man's total depravity. Since man is known by the Christian to be totally depraved, as Barth holds, he is able to contribute nothing to God's communication of himself.

E. The Self-Revelation of God in Christ

The God of whom Barth speaks can be known only through his special revelation. Barth states that, "only revelation.... can carry us over from God's incomprehensibility."² Since man is removed from God by an infinite qualitative difference and since man cannot reach up to God, but is helpless because of his sin, God must reveal himself if man is ever to know anything of him. This is a fundamental fact of Barthian theology. Only as God speaks, only when it pleases him to make himself known to man, can he have a knowledge of God. Barth says:

If God had not become man, then everything we could conceive and say about God would hang in the air as arbitrarily, as mistakenly, and as

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. by G. T. Thomson, vol. I, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 449.

2. Karl Barth, *Credo*, p. 12.

misleadingly, as the corresponding ideas which in the long run have been fashioned about God and man in all religions and cosmic speculations.¹

Only as God reveals himself as Reconciler and Redeemer can man be drawn over the line which separates the world of time from the world of eternity. Barth insists that "to know anything about revelation in the original, true and strict sense of the concept, we must know about Jesus Christ."²

1. Revelation as Incarnation

God's revelation is inextricably bound up with the Incarnation. In fact in the true sense revelation is Incarnation. Barth declares the mystery of this truth:

Here the hidden, the eternal, the incomprehensible God has taken visible form here the abyss is bridged, that here, in and with this revelation, our reconciliation is accomplished.³

For God to reveal himself is to descend into our depths, to meet us as a man amongst men, in all the distance and the nearness of human form.

In the Incarnation God unveils himself to man that the gulf between man and himself might be bridged. Barth says:

God unveils himself to man. He might have remained hidden, veiled, unknown, were it not for his supreme love. God has taken it upon himself to bridge the gulf between man and himself. We can regard his self-unveiling only as his act in which to man, who has no power to unveil him, he himself unveils himself.⁴

1. Karl Barth, Credo, p. 40.

2. Karl Barth, Revelation, p. 45.

3. Karl Barth, Credo, p. 46.

4. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, p. 369.

Above all, Jesus Christ is the revelation of God because in his existence he is the reconciliation. Only as we know God to have reconciled us to himself by his Son do we know him at all. Barth insists that reconciliation must not be thought of as something supplementary to, or following upon, the revelation of God in Christ. His reconciliation is itself revelation. Because only in Jesus Christ reconciliation takes place between God and man, therefore he truly and solely reveals God. Barth testifies:

Jesus Christ is the revelation because he is, as the grace of God made manifest, the way, the only way, by which men may come to know God and by which a relationship, and more than this, a communion, between man and God is established. Jesus Christ is the revelation, because in his existence he is the reconciliation. Only as he beholds the reconciliation that has taken place between God and man, can man know God. Anything that man may imagine he knows about God apart from reconciliation, that is to say in his natural position as a rebel against God and consequently under the wrath of God, is in truth but the idol of his own heart.¹

Thus, in the Incarnation Christ reveals God to man and reconciles man to God.

2. The Uniqueness of this Revelation

Barth contends that Christ is absolutely different, new, unique; not simply the best of previously developing revelation. He is not just man raised to the

1. Karl Barth, Revelation, p. 55.

highest degree, but in him the Eternal Word of God has become flesh. Barth writes:

To believe in him as the Son of God, is to be aware of no other Son of God along side of him, ie., of no other revelations which might also be the revelation of God himself; of no other reconciliations in which one might be aware of being reconciled to God.¹

He adds:

The fundamental problem with which Scripture faces us regarding revelation consists in this, that the revelation attested in it refuses to be regarded as just any sort of revelation, along side of which there is or might be other revelations. It absolutely insists upon being regarded in its uniqueness.²

Barth goes further than attaching exclusive significance to Jesus Christ. He attaches the revelation significance not to the Jesus of history, but only to the Christ of faith, the Christ of the resurrection. He believed that it was only in this Christ of faith, and not in the historical figure that God was known.

This does not mean that Barth denied that Jesus lived and moved in history. He was attacking the liberal reconstruction of Jesus which made a distinction between the Jesus who was presented in the New Testament and the Jesus of history. According to this method of approach the Jesus of history was the most wonderful personality that has ever come into history. He so impressed those who knew him that after his death they

1. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, p. 486.
2. Ibid., p. 339.

continued to magnify him until at last under the influence of Paul they ascribed to him deity. It was the intention of liberal theology to reconstruct the real Jesus, the Jesus of history. McConnachie sums up Barth's criticism of "the historic Jesus" of modern theology with these words:

It is not too much to say that while liberal theology has given us a Jesus of History who wins us by the beauty and wisdom of his words, and the large-hearted charity of his works, and the selfless devotion of his life and death, it has lost to us the God-Man, the second person of the trinity. The Christ whom Barth gives us is the Christ of Faith, the Christ of Paul and John, the Christ of Nicea, the God-Man.¹

3. The Finality of this Revelation

If we apprehend the revelation in Jesus Christ as pure Grace, Barth cannot see how it is possible to imagine receiving a disclosure of God elsewhere. He declares:

Just as a man can have only one father, is born once and dies once, so he can only believe and know one revelation. It is possible to collate and compare a number of religions, not a number of revelations. He who says revelation says-- a revelation which is unique, taking place once for all, irrevocable and unrepeatable.²

Thus Christ is the once-for all, and final revealer of God to man.

1. John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, p. 170.

2. Quoted from Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

4. The Hiddenness of God

Barth of necessity uses paradox as he seeks to describe the fact that God remains hidden even in his revelation. He writes:

These words 'revelation of God the Father' contain a remarkable contradiction, so far as God the Father is just not manifest to us in revelation itself, or is manifest only as God who remains hidden from us even in his revelation and just there, who in disclosing himself, conceals himself, who, in coming near to us, remains far from us, who, in being kind to us, remains holy.¹

Our creatureliness demands and necessitates that God remain hidden in his revelation.

5. The Super-Historicity of this Revelation

Barth contends that Christian revelation is outside history and yet, within history, as the one event in which the meaning of history is really and truly seen. Jesus is the revelation of God in history. In him two worlds meet, the world of God and the world of man, the world of eternity and the world of time.

Mere history however is never revelation. History is temporal and is of man. God may act within history but history is not the revealing act of God. Hoyle briefly gives Barth's thought: "Revelation is trans-history, it comes into history but is not of it."² While history is not revelation, it does not follow that God's revela-

1. Karl Barth, *Credo*, p. 20.
2. Hoyle, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

tion does not happen and is not found within history. The historical facts contained in the Scripture concerning the life of Jesus all point to him as being a historical figure. While the years 1-30 A.D. are not revelation in themselves, yet God's revelation took place within those years.

Barth's position is a reaction against those who would seek to find a basis for revelation in the process of history. While revelation is history, history is not revelation

F. Revelation and the Scripture

Karl Barth has a great devotion to Scripture. He claims that his theology is a theology of the Word of God. The Bible is central in his thought and receives primary attention, for it is the Word of a speaking God.

Brunner asserts:

ok In the Bible we hear a language that we hear nowhere else, we meet a God whom we meet nowhere else that is why we believe in the Scriptures.¹

In the Bible we have the Word of a self-revealing, ever living God. It is hidden, under the frail outward form of human words, but it is present nevertheless. In the Bible Barth believes we have God speaking his Word, his revelation. He insists that if we are to learn of God we must go back to the Scripture, but more precisely, not to the

1. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931, p. 93.

Scripture so much as through Scripture to the events of which Scripture itself is only the witness. It is this idea of Scripture as a witness to revelation which is very significant in Barth's theology. We shall discuss it more fully.

1. The Form of the Word

Barth distinguishes three forms of the Word of God. In this he is true to his fundamental principle of the qualitative distinction between the world of time and the world of eternity. To Barth there must be a difference between the Word of God and the Word of man.

The first form of the Word is the Word which is spoken in the world of eternity. This is the real Word of God, without the medium of the written Word, without the service of the church. This is the Word of God in its first original form or address and is not to be identified with the text of Scripture.

The second form of the Word of God is found in the testimony to it of those to whom God has spoken. It is the testimony of man to the revelation which he has received from God. Amos testifies to the Word which he has received from the Lord. He declares:

x Here this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. ✓

1. Amos 3:1,2

Before Amos spoke to Israel, the Word of God spoke to him. The message which he delivered to Israel was his testimony to the revelation he had received. The two, in the thought of Barth, although closely related are not to be considered identical.

The third form of the Word of God is the Word of God as it becomes the content of Christian proclamation. As a man humbles himself in the presence of the divine word in the Scripture, the same Spirit that spoke to those who wrote the Scripture speaks to him and gives him the content of the Christian proclamation that he is to deliver through the sermon. Preaching for Barth is no longer "foolishness" but a divine necessity. For he testifies: "Proclamation is human language in and through which God himself speaks."¹ The Christian message becomes possible only when the revelation to which the Scripture bears witness is received, and the essence of preaching is to accept that witness and make it live again for those who hear. In preaching the Church does not talk to herself, she is not uttering a personal opinion, but speaks as the Scripture, bearing witness to a unique event, guides her to speak.

Thus Barth, by distinguishing the three forms of the Word of God, never permits himself to lose sight of his fundamental principle in which he holds that

1. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, p. 57.

man's word is not God's Word. God speaks through the frail and fallible words of men, but Barth never identifies the Word of God and the word of man. The second and third forms of the Word of God must never be identified with revelation itself. Nevertheless, Barth holds that at any given moment God can make it identical. He states:

It is one and the same, whether we regard it as revelation, as the Bible, or as proclamation. In so far as proclamation really rests upon recollection of the revelation attested in the Bible, and is therefore the obedient repetition of the Biblical witness, it is no less the Word of God than the Bible; and so far as the Bible really attests revelation, it is no less the Word of God than revelation itself.¹

2. The Bible as a Human Book

Barth gives authority to the content of Scripture rather than to its form. The message that it has to bring to the individual is of primary importance. The Bible is a human book and along with other human literature is subject to human error. He writes:

The Bible is a literary monument of an ancient racial religion and of a Hellenistic cultus religion of the Near East. A human document like any other, it can lay no a priori dogmatic claim to special attention and consideration.²

Brunner even goes further when he writes:

That is why in the Bible we find so many errors and inaccuracies, so much that is no better than what man has said and done in other places and in other times; the Bible is full of frailty and

1. Ibid., p. 136.

2. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 60.

fallibility which is characteristic of all that is human.¹

In fact it may be said that Barth "glories" in the fact that God speaks through the pages of a fallible text, so that the test will not be an end in itself, but a witness beyond itself to Jesus Christ.

With this attitude toward Scripture, it is not surprising that the Barthian school gives the critic an undisputed right to examine Biblical documents with the instruments of literary and historical criticism. The real reason for Barth's freedom in his attitude toward the Bible is that it is in harmony with his basic principles. His conception of the otherness of God leads him to refuse to identify the words of man with the Word of God.

The authority which Barth gives to Scripture relates, therefore, to its divine content. The Bible carries the note of authority because it bears God's message. Even though it is true that the Bible is a human book and therefore subject to errors and contradictions, its words are the agents through which God speaks to men. Therefore, Brunner sums up Barth's thought when he says: "The Scriptures and the Scriptures alone are God's Word."²

Barthians are very emphatic in their stress that

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1. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 96.
 2. Emil Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis*, p. 19.

the Bible is absolutely necessary for Christianity. Brunner states: "Christianity without the Bible would long ago have degenerated into an unrecognizable caricature."¹ The revelation of God is not in a book or a doctrine but in a living person. The book is needed, however, to carry on the "tradition" regarding the historical Person of the Revealer.

3. The Bible as Witness to Revelation

Barth never identifies Scripture with revelation. The Scripture is a witness to the revelation in Jesus Christ in whom the hidden word is conveyed. Barth says:

He does the Bible a poor honor, and an unwelcome one, who identifies it with revelation. The Bible itself is not the revelation which has taken place, but as God's Word speaking to us and heard of us, it witnesses to the revelation.²

However, the Scriptures can become God's Word for us. When some part of Scripture through the working of the Holy Spirit lays hold on us--revelation takes place. Barth declares:

The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be his Word, so far as God speaks through it.³

The Bible is God's Word in so far as he speaks through it and this he does when a portion of it lays hold of us in God's name and by the working of his Spirit.

1. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 83.

2. Quoted from Hoyle, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

3. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, I, p. 124.

4. The Subordination of the Scriptures to Christ

Barth holds that the Scriptures testify of Christ and their supreme importance lies in that testimony. In fact in this witness is the reason for their existence. If the Scriptures do not point to him, then they do not fulfil their proper function and are not true Scriptures. Barth quotes Luther with approval that the "Scriptures are the crib wherein Christ is laid," thus clearly giving the Scriptures a place of subordination. Brunner brings the position of Barth into focus when he states:

But for the true Christian the Bible is not a divine oracle of instruction; it is the testimony or witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.... The relation between the Scripture and this person is clearly one of subordination.¹

We need the Bible because through the Bible and the Bible alone can we know and understand Christ.

5. The Concern for Content

Barth took issue with liberal theology which thought of Scripture as a record of experiences of men in their search for God. He holds that the Bible is not a record of man's spiritual pilgrimage but rather a record of the testimony of man to a God-given revelation.

He writes:

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about man. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God, but what he says to

1. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 84.

us; not how we shall find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ.¹

Barth criticizes the modern concern with the form of Scripture and emphasizes the necessity of a drive from form to content. He feels that the modern age has been so desperately concerned in its attempt to show the fallibility or infallibility of the Scripture record that it has forgotten to concern itself with the content of the message of Scripture. Barth, as we have seen, admits the right of criticism to examine the form of Scripture. His accusation is that the critics have stopped at the point which is the real starting point of the true exegete. He says:

For it is too clear that intelligent and fruitful discussion of the Bible begins when the judgment as to its human, its historical, and its psychological character has been made and put behind us. Would that the teachers of our high and lower schools, and with them the progressive element among the clergy of our established churches, would forthwith resolve to have done with the battle that once had its time but now has had it! The special content of this human document, the remarkable something with which the writers of these stories and those who stood behind them were concerned, the biblical object-- this is the question that will engage and engross us today.²

Barth believes that many exegetes of the Scripture in our century have failed to go back of form to

1. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 43.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

content. They have filled the pages of their commentaries with a study of the possible constructions of sentences and exhaustive studies of the meanings of Greek words. But they have forgotten to concern themselves to give the message of the book to their generation. It is to this end that Barth has dedicated his efforts.

G. Man's Reception of Revelation

How is this revelation in Jesus Christ received by man whose mind is utterly transcended by that Word? Barth would say that man hears the Word of God through faith. According to him, we have in the Bible a ^{revelation} revelation, but a veiled ^{revelation} revelation which is accessible only to faith. The Holy Spirit speaks from the Scripture to man at the "existential moment" and authenticates the Word in his heart.

When a man responds favorably to God's Word, it is not man's doing that accounts for this response. He cannot respond because he is a creature of the world and a sinner in whom the image of God is utterly destroyed. He does not have the capacity to respond for every point of contact has been destroyed by sin. Therefore, when he is enabled to receive the divine ^{message} revelation, it is God's act not man's. Barth testifies: "He who believes, knows even this the fact that he believes, is God's work

and gift."¹ ^{word} revelation explicitly includes the bestowing on man the gift to recognize and believe it. The imparting of the Spirit and the creating of faith within, is an essential element of revelation itself.

1. The Nature of Faith

By faith alone we are made capable to receive the ^{Word} revelation of God. It only becomes real to the man of faith. Faith becomes an act of decision, of obedience to God, by which man accepts his Grace. Barth says, "... the Word of God becomes operative on and in a decision of the man to whom it is spoken."²

Faith is not merely the believing in a set of propositions, but is a decisive act by which we acknowledge God, surrender ourselves to him, offer him our obedient loyalty and unswerving devotion. Man is placed in a "crisis" where he must make a decision as to whether his act shall be one of belief or unbelief, obedience or disobedience. Where there is no obedience there is no faith. Even though Barth says that "faith is of course a human experience"³ it is still not clear just how much part man himself plays in the act of faith. For Barth is continually speaking of faith as an act of God. He writes:

In faith, man must regard his very self in its activity as determined by the Word of God

1. Karl Barth, Credo, p. 131.

2. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, p. 235.

3. Ibid., p. 208.

.... Man acts by believing, but the fact that he believes by acting is God's act. Man is the subject of faith.¹

It is by faith that we are able to accept the invitation of the Bible to come and seek ^{God's message!} revelation. Barth declares:

The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves toward the highest answer. This daring is faith; and we read the Bible rightly ... when we read it in faith.²

Faith is an act in which the whole personality, the Ego, unites to answer God's challenge.

2. The Witness of the Holy Spirit

Barth believes that ultimately the authority of Scripture to ^{revelation} in Jesus Christ rests on the testimony of the Holy Spirit. McConnachie gives Barth's thought in this matter when he says:

The Holy Spirit is indispensible. Through the witness of the Spirit, the Bible becomes for us the Word of God, the Jesus of history becomes the Christ of faith; the Cross and Resurrection become present realities; through the Spirit the new man is created, justified, sanctified, and lives daily in the promise of a coming redemption.³

The Holy Spirit guarantees to man what man cannot guarantee to himself-- his personal participation in ^{God's} revelation. Barth insists: "The act of the Holy Spirit

1. Ibid., p. 281.

2. Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 32.

3. John McConnachie, The Significance of Karl Barth, p. 244.

in revelation is the 'yea' of God's Word."¹ This then, is the final Christian authority, the witness of the Holy Spirit to God's Word spoken to the soul of the individual. This is the means by which God's ^{message} revelation in Jesus Christ is communicated to man.

H. Summary

Karl Barth strongly reacts against the whole modern psychological movement which makes religious experience the starting point of theology, seeking to pass from the human side to the Divine, from the subjective to the objective. He declares that it is impossible to do this, for between God and man is a chasm, caused by sin, which can never be bridged by efforts from the human side. His mind is filled with the thought of the qualitative difference between the world of time and the world of eternity. God is "wholly other", completely unknowable apart from his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

If God and man are ever to meet, it will not be by man reaching to God, but by eternity breaking into time, by a vertical miracle striking the horizontal plane of history. Revelation, then, consists in one definite occasion in history, one unique event, the Incarnation, by which God meets man. It is the one event in which

1. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, p. 519.

time was intersected by eternity. Here then is the justification for the affirmation of Barth that attaches exclusive revelation value to Jesus Christ. In the Incarnation alone is God revealed. Until the Incarnation, God was altogether unknown and unknowable, the "Altogether-other." Therefore, Barth attaches no revelation value to nature, history, and man's conscience. He acknowledges that the world was created by God and therefore one might expect to find traces of his revelation there, but according to Barth, the tracks of God in the world have become "the tracks of the Unknown."

But Barth goes further than attaching exclusive significance to Jesus Christ. He attaches the revelation significance, not to the Jesus of history, but only to the Christ of faith. Only in this Christ of faith, is God known. Man must listen in the attitude of awe, trust, and obedience.

CHAPTER III

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IDEA OF REVELATION
IN THE THEOLOGY OF
JOHN CALVIN AND KARL BARTH

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IDEA OF REVELATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN AND KARL BARTH

In this concluding chapter a brief comparison will be made of the thought of John Calvin and Karl Barth as it deals with some of the more significant aspects of revelation. An attempt will then be made to give the relevance of their ideas to contemporary theology.

A. Similarities and Differences

Barth for many years has shown a keen interest in the theology of John Calvin. He claims that the real implications of his message are in harmony with a true understanding of the Reformation thought. We find, however, that while there are many points of agreement between these two men, there are also distinct differences.

1. The Idea of God

The theological systems of both Calvin and Barth were wholly theocentric. Both men possessed an overwhelming devotion to a God who was utterly transcendent and who therefore could not be known through human spec-

ulation. Man cannot reach up to God in any way but God must reveal himself if he is to be known.

Calvin and Barth differ sharply when it comes to the question of how this transcendent God reveals himself. Barth declares that God reveals himself only in Jesus Christ. The Incarnation was the only event in which the world of eternity entered into the world of time enabling revelation to take place. Karl Barth as "an avowed opponent of all natural theology"¹ stands in sharp contrast to John Calvin.

Although Calvin admits that natural theology is radically inadequate for the nurture of a living redemptive faith, he still insists that the God who reveals himself in creation, providence, and conscience is the same God who comes to us in Jesus Christ. He declares: "We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity."² Calvin believed that God truly reveals himself to man through nature. The fact that sin has destroyed man's ability to benefit from this revelation does not alter the fact that real revelation has taken place. Barth's conception of the "two worlds" prevents him from accepting this position.

1. Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, p. 6.

2. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. iii. 1.

2. The Idea of Christ

Both Calvin and Barth agree that without the supernatural revelation which has come in Jesus Christ man would have no true knowledge of God. Christ has supreme revelatory significance for them both. Without him their theologies would be barren, lifeless, and empty.

But there is a difference. For Barth, revelation is inextricably bound up with Jesus Christ. In fact, he would say that in a true sense revelation is Jesus Christ. It has come to man through the Incarnation. He testifies:

Jesus Christ is the revelation, because in His existence He is the reconciliation. Only as he beholds the reconciliation that has taken place between God and man, can man know God.¹

Although Calvin finds in Christ the perfect and final revelation of God, he fails to invest him with the revelatory office to the degree that Barth does. Calvin believes in progressive revelation. God has revealed himself in progressive stages until his revelation has reached its climax in Jesus Christ. He writes:

God will not in the future, as in ages past, speak from time to time by one and another, that he will not add prophecies to prophecies, or revelations to revelations, but that he has completed all the branches of instruction in his Son.²

1. Karl Barth, Revelation, p. 55.

2. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV. viii. 7.

3. The Idea of the Holy Spirit

Calvin and Barth give to the Holy Spirit an all important place in their thought. Both testify to the inability of man to perceive and appropriate revelation except by faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is through the witness of the Holy Spirit that man knows that he has heard the Word of God.

The real disagreement comes when we ask just what the content of that witness is. It concerns the nature of the written Word from which the Spirit speaks to the heart of the believer. Barth gives authority only to the Word that is witnessed to in Scripture. He says, "the act of the Holy Spirit in revelation is the 'yea' of God's Word."¹ Revelation value is affirmed only to the message which the Holy Spirit brings home to the believer.

To Calvin, the Holy Spirit affirms that the whole Bible is the Word of God. He holds that the Holy Spirit did not reveal to man new revelations but instead confirmed the one true revelation which had been given in the Scriptures. The function of the Spirit is to confirm the Scriptures and seal them to our understanding. He says:

But since we are not favored with daily oracles from heaven, and since it is only in the Scriptures that God has been pleased to preserve his truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as

1. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, I, p. 519.

if they had heard the very words pronounced by God himself.¹

While Calvin shares with Barth the emphasis on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he goes beyond him in his idea of the authority of the written Word.

4. The Idea of Man

Man is sinful and corrupt. It is sin that erects a barrier between God and man and makes fellowship between the Creator and the creature impossible. Only the special light of revelation can enable man to see God. Barth and Calvin hold firmly to this position.

Calvin insists that the 'imago Dei' is not totally destroyed by sin. However, it is so corrupted that it cannot penetrate to the mystery of the knowledge of God.

He writes:

Reason, therefore could not be totally destroyed, but is partly debilitated, partly vitiated, so that it exhibits nothing but deformity and ruin So the will, also, being inseparable from the nature of man, is not annihilated; but it is fettered by depraved and inordinate desires, so that it cannot aspire after anything that is good.²

Barth goes much further than Calvin in regard to the effect of sin upon man. He declares that the 'imago Dei' has been completely destroyed by sin. This accounts for his thought of God as the "wholly other" who has no relationship with man except as he is revealed in Jesus Christ.

1. John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I. vii. 1.

2. Ibid., II. ii. 12.

5. The Idea of Scripture

Calvin and Barth elevate the Scripture to a place of paramount importance. They believe it to be the authoritative source of our knowledge of God and seek to rescue it from obscurity. The Scripture is the only source of revelation and therefore must be given a central position in Christian theology.

But there is a vital difference in their views of Scripture. Stated simply it is this: Calvin held the Bible to be the Word of God while Barth insists that the function of the Bible is to witness to the Word of God. Calvin lifted the Scriptures to a place of supreme authority and considered them as the very words of God, "complete, sufficient, self-consistent, and harmonious."¹ According to Hunter:

Calvin recognized that only a hearty acceptance of Scripture as the Word of God could make it sharper than a two edged sword.²

The absolute authority and finality of Scripture as the Word of God were essential to his whole theological system. Thus, it is understandable why Calvin would reject all Biblical criticism.

The Bible is also central in the thought of Karl Barth, for it is the Word of a speaking God. Emil Brunner speaks Barth's mind when he says:

In the Bible we hear a language that we hear

1. Hunter, op. cit., p. 79.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

nowhere else, we meet a God whom we meet nowhere else . . . that is why we believe in the Scriptures.¹

Nevertheless, in Barth's thought the Scripture remains only a witness to revelation, not revelation itself.

What accounts for Barth's position concerning the nature of Scripture? We will give two reasons. The first is the philosophic assumption from which Barth starts. He assumes the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. He makes the assumption central to his theology. His idea of Scripture flows inevitably from this position. He could not be true to his original position and fail to make a distinction between the Word of God in its original form and the human witness to that Word.

The second reason for Barth's attitude toward Scripture flows from the historic situation in which he found himself. He wrote from Germany during the years in which this country was the center of a radical criticism of the Bible. Criticism had done its destructive work and it seemed as though the foundations of the faith were to be destroyed. The need of the hour was for a doctrine which could admit the validity of criticism and at the same time call men to a high and worthy conception of the Word of God. Barth's position was well suited to this need. The most radical Biblical criticism could be accepted without undermining the faith.

1. Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 93.

B. Relevance to Contemporary Theological Thought

John Calvin and Karl Barth each have had a tremendous influence upon the thinking of the Christian world. Together, they have disturbed the complacent theological world and revitalized its thinking with a wholly theocentric theology. They continue to confront our contemporary society with a message of dynamic importance.

1. Relevance of Calvin

Barth has been instrumental in rekindling a widespread interest in the theology of Calvin. Klooster points out this truth:

This new interest has already led to the republication and retranslation of Calvin's writings. New studies on various phases of Calvin's thought have been published. New translations of the "Institutes" have appeared in French, German, Dutch and just recently in English. The commentaries and tracts of Calvin are being issued in new, up-to-date translations. In Japan, a Calvin Translation Society is at work translating the writings both of Calvin and of Barth.¹

Calvinism is once again experiencing a period of recognition and influence. A growing number of thinkers are turning again to Calvin for help and guidance in the solution of contemporary problems. All of this suggests that within the theology of Calvin there remains elements of vitality to contribute to an age of theological uncertainties. The fundamental ideas of Calvin which are

1. Fred Klooster, *The Significance of Barth's Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1961, pp. 24, 25.

again coming into prominence are capable of striking the world of current theological thinking with disturbing if not quickening power.

2. Relevance of Barth

No matter how one may finally evaluate the theology of Karl Barth, the influence which his thought has had during the past forty years is tremendous. Through his leadership the strangle-hold of the liberal theology of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, which dominated the nineteenth century, has been broken. He has infused new life into theology by re-emphasizing fundamental Christian doctrines in a way which has captivated the hearts of Christians everywhere. His idea of revelation with its emphasis on the transcendent God, depraved man, and the Incarnation has stimulated the entire theological world.

Hugh Mackintosh has made one of the finest statements of the relevance of Karl Barth to our day. He writes:

The theology of Barth, criticize it as we may, is the Christian thinking of a great Christian mind, explosive and often unduly emphatic, but none the less of incalculable import for the Church of our time.¹

Barth is compelling us to face with renewed vigor the problems of life and death which the modern world thrusts upon us.

1. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 319.

C. Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this study to illuminate the thought of John Calvin and Karl Barth on the subject of revelation and to bring into focus the relevant issues involved in the contemporary discussion of this subject. It is hoped that, at least to a limited degree, this purpose has been achieved.

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