

Dear Friends of the Foundation:

At least twice in recent emails we have mentioned the name of **Karl Barth**. I am keenly aware that some of you have written dissertations on, and published books about, Karl Barth. I also realize that others of you may not be so familiar with him.

Barth was preeminently a theologian of the **Word of God**. While other theologians may start with nature or philosophy, or even with literature, race, or gender, Barth was a theologian of the Word of God. As such, he was a Reformed theologian (“Reformed” is short for “Reformed according to the Word of God”), and as such he was the true successor to **John Calvin**.

To say this is to enter into a great debate in the church today. Some, of course, do not even like John Calvin. And among those who do, some would argue that Friedrich Schleiermacher (a theologian of experience) is his legitimate heir. But the readings selected in the bibliographies of the Foundation intend to follow the line of thought that flows from Augustine, to Calvin, and to Barth.

Karl Barth’s major work is titled, in translation from the German, ***Church Dogmatics***. It includes four “volumes,” and these are divided into a total of twelve “parts,” one of which is farther divided into two “halves,” with the result that each of these thirteen components is a separately bound book. And even with that, he did not complete the fourth volume.

One of the things that Barth does is to examine something in great depth from one perspective, then turn it ever so slightly and examine it again from that perspective, and then turn it again, and so forth. It makes me think of someone turning, and appreciating the light coming from each facet of, a finely cut diamond. I mention this mainly to establish a disclaimer that sometimes it is not possible to obtain a brief quote from Barth that adequately represents his thought! But having said that, I want to try to do so, anyway.

Barth understands theology to be the work of the church critically examining the content of its distinctive language about God, particularly its proclamation and preaching. This requires, of course, understanding what that proclamation is:

Not all human talk is talk about God. It could be and should be. There is no reason in principle why it should not be. God is the Lord from whom and to whom we exist. Even the realities and truths distinct from Him and us which usually form the concrete occasion and subject of human speech exist from Him and unto Him. Hence there is no genuinely profane speech. In the last resort, there is only talk about God. Yet serious reflection on human talk about God must take as its starting-point the fact that this is not at all the case, that it is quite impossible to interpret human talk as such as talk about God. We do not know man, i.e., ourselves, as man in his original estate and therefore as the man of the kingdom of glory. Of this man it might well be said that all his talk is talk about God. But we do not know ourselves as this man. We know ourselves only as the man to whom mercy is shown as one who is fallen, lost and condemned. We

know ourselves only as man in the kingdom of grace, of the present age between the time of creation and that of redemption. We stand under the sign of a decision constantly taken between the secularity and the sanctification of our existence, between sin and grace, between a being as man which forgets God, which is absolutely neutral in relation to Him and therefore absolutely hostile, and one which in His revelation is awakened by faith to being in the Church, to the appropriation of His promise. ...

The event in which God acts consists wholly in the fact that men are visibly awakened, separated and gathered by God to being in the visible Church. ...

Not all talk in the Church's worship seeks to be proclamation. It does not seek to be such when it is talk addressed by man to God. The Church's prayers and hymns and confessions of faith obviously are what they purport to be only to the extent that so far as possible they cease to attempt the impossible task of proclaiming something to God or the unworthy one of incidentally proclaiming something to man. They are the response to God of the praise, confession and thanksgiving of those to whom proclamation concerning Him has come. ...

The talk about God to be found in the Church, however, is meant to be proclamation when it is directed to men with the definitive claim and expectation that it has to declare the Word of God to them. We at once see that the concept "talk about God" is set here in quite a new light, and indeed acquires a content which threatens to burst it wide open. ... [H]ere, in what is said about God, there lies concealed as the meaning and purpose of the action the intention to speak the Word of God Himself. ...

Proclamation is human speech in and by which God Himself speaks like a king through the mouth of his herald, and which is meant to be heard and accepted as speech in and by which God Himself speaks, and therefore heard and accepted in faith as divine decision concerning life and death, as divine judgment and pardon, eternal Law and eternal Gospel both together.

Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*. Ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance. Four volumes, in twelve parts. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1936-1977. Volume 1, part 1, pp. 47-48, 49, 51, 52 (emphasis added).

This is the high task to which we are called. This is the commission we are given. This is the work in which the Foundation wishes to support all of you who pastor churches and preach the Word of God.

Grace and Peace,

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*
Foundation for Reformed Theology

4103 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23230-3818
(804) 678-8352
www.foundationrt.org

The Foundation is exempt from Federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) and is not a private foundation as defined by Section 509(a) of the Internal Revenue Code.