

## Dear Friends of the Foundation:

We wrote recently that **Karl Barth** was a theologian of the Word of God. To the extent that it pleases God for it to be so, human preaching *is* the Word of God. At the same time, it continues to be a human word, and as such it is always subject to critical review and evaluation. This critical review and evaluation is the work of theology. That is to say, theology has its start in preaching. It is *not* true that preaching finds its start in theology.

The claim with which church proclamation steps forward and the expectation with which it is surrounded should not mislead us; it is always and always will be man's word. It is also something more than this and quite different. **When and where it pleases God, it is God's own Word. Upon the promise of this divine good-pleasure it is ventured in obedience. On this promise depend the claim and the expectation.** But proclamation both as preaching and sacrament does not cease to be representation, human service. ...

... [H]ow disastrously the Church must misunderstand itself if it can imagine that theological reflection is a matter for quiet situations and periods that suit and invite contemplation, a kind of peace-time luxury for which we are not only permitted but even commanded to find no time should things become really serious and exciting! As though there could be any more urgent task for a Church under assault from without than that of consolidating itself within, which means doing theological work! **As though the venture of proclamation did not mean that the Church permanently finds itself in an emergency! As though theology could be done properly without reference to this constant emergency!** Let there be no mistake. Because of these distorted ideas about theology, and dogmatics in particular, there arises and persists in the life of the Church a lasting and growing deficit for which we cannot expect those particularly active in this function to supply the needed balance. The whole Church must seriously want a serious theology if it is to have a serious theology. ...

The luxury of "quite untheological thought" and talk which has no part in the dogmatic question, a luxury in which theologians of all people are also prone to indulge very gladly and not without being vain about their freedom, can strictly be achieved only by secretly leaving the Church either temporarily or permanently. The freedom claimed when men think they can and should theologise "quite untheologically" is the freedom to prattle heretically or in a way that makes for heresy. There is no room in the Church for this freedom. ...

... Church proclamation is the raw material of dogmatics. But it would be a fatal confusion to try to reverse this and say that dogmatics is the raw material of proclamation.

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. 71-72, 76-77,

79 (emphasis added).

So let us study and learn the content and history of Christian theology in general and of Reformed theology in particular in order to criticize, to evaluate, and so to improve our preaching of the gospel, but certainly not in order to preach theology!

Grace and Peace,

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