

Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*

Karl Barth. *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics*. Translated by R. Birch Hoyle. Foreword by Robin W. Lovin. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. This book was first published by Frederick Muller, Ltd., London, in 1938. [Note: delivered as a lecture on October 9, 1929]

Foreword:

“The significance of this lecture for today’s reader, however, lies chiefly in its concise presentation of the theological method that would become the basis for the *Church Dogmatics*.” (p. xvi)

Chapter One: The Holy Spirit as Creator

1. The Creator Spirit and the Created Spirit

Man’s being in the image of God only becomes actual fact when the Holy Spirit comes on the spot on man’s behalf. This likeness to God is therefore not, and will not be, a property of the human spirit created, but it is and remains the free work of the Creator upon his creature: a work only to be understood as grace and never to be comprehended by man (p. 3).

2. What Is Christian Life?

Christian life is human life that has been made open by the Holy Spirit to receive God’s Word. Thus the Holy Spirit, by virtue of his being present and at work, is the subjective aspect when revelation occurs. Man’s knowledge, which is imparted to him by scripture and experience, concerning what his Creator demands from him (i.e., “the orders of creation”), is not man’s own but becomes his in the Holy Spirit, when that information has been given through the Word (p. 6).

“The upshot of all of this is that theological ethics should not in any way try to say directly what God’s command is....An ethics that thinks it can know and set forth the command of God, the Creator, plants itself upon the throne of God: it stops and poisons the wells and is more fraught with peril to the Christian life than all cinemas and dancing-saloons piled together.” (pp. 9-10)

“Having said this, we have said the next thing, namely, that the hearing of the Word of God the creator, which makes human life to become Christian life, is not man’s work but God’s: the Holy Spirit’s work. Just as our spirit cannot produce the Word of God, so too

it cannot receive it...A sheer miracle must happen to him, a second miracle in addition to the miracle of his own existence, if his life shall be a true Christian life, which is a life within the hearing of God's word. This miracle is the office of the Holy Spirit." (pp. 10-11)

Chapter Two: The Holy Spirit as Reconciler

1. Creator and Created Spirit in Conflict

Being the Spirit of grace, the Holy Spirit strives against man's hostility to grace—in other words, man's seeking to justify himself by works; for this is the characteristic, unique sin that man cannot get rid of, nor escape thinking of. The Holy Spirit strives against this (p. 19).

"A dead person can only be raised, *resurrected*, and grave sin can only be *forgiven*." (p. 24)

2. The Holy Spirit and Repentance

Christian life is man's actual life in the Holy Spirit; man is accounted as righteous through the Word, or for Christ's sake; man's righteousness is by faith on his part, seen in repentance and trust. Because this righteousness—this being accounted as righteous—attaches to the actual man, it coincides with his sanctification. Man's own obedience to his own true reality as one being sanctified is in the Holy Spirit, and is only actual when it responds to the Holy Spirit (p. 25).

"Our relying on what man does is unbelief and that is indeed sin and paganism." (p. 28)

3. The Holy Spirit and Faith

4. The Holy Spirit and Christian Obedience

"It is of God's mercy and grace, not of their own nature, that works are without guilt: they are forgiven and good because of faith, to him who surrenders to this same mercy. Consequently we must be afraid of works but have comfort in God's mercy." (Luther) (p. 37)

Chapter Three: The Holy Spirit as Redeemer

1. The Spirit of Promise: Eschatology

The Holy Spirit is present to man in God's revelation as Spirit of promise. In the Holy Spirit, that is, in the finality and futurity of what, in principle, is transcendent of man's existence (on earth), man is a new creature: God's child (p. 59).

2. Christian Life: One of Hope, through the Spirit

Christian life is the new life in hope, begotten of the Holy Spirit. Seeing that the Christian man is hidden with Christ in God, he has always a conscience that is leading him into all truth: he is always bound to God in thankfulness and therefore in freedom; he prays, and because he prays he is always being heard (p. 64).

“It is always a sign of arrogance, cheap sentimentality, and lack of good taste when anyone appeals to his conscience. If anyone has a conscience he does not appeal to it: he lets it speak to him. And this is simply saying that in the Holy Spirit of the promise we *are* God's children and *have* a conscience.” (p. 66)

“The thankfulness and liberty of the children of God is truly our final, our future actuality.” (p. 67)

“The wonder of prayer...is the incoming of the Holy Spirit to the help of the man who is praying.” (p. 68)

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