

Life and Activity of Protestant Theologian Karl Barth

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Abstract:

Karl Barth, one of the most important Protestant theologians of the twentieth century and even of the history of Protestantism, has been well-known as a particularly prolific theologian and, at the same time, an original thinker, due to his specific theological ideas and conclusions, new even for Protestantism, with a special contribution to the Protestant theology and the directions of modern and contemporary Western Christianity. About Barth, the German theologian E. Jüngel stated that "death of Karl Barth puts an end to a period in the history of theology. Whether this end is today at the same time a beginning, we cannot say. The uncertainty does not lie in the theological work that Barth left behind. It lies in the power of understanding of our time, for which this great man is too simple, his simplicity is too great, his life and activity are too rich, and his rich work is too alive to know him enough. Greatness calls for distance, and here we can talk without embarrassment about greatness. Karl Barth has given a lot to his time. His time, however, took little from him. We can assume that the future of Karl Barth's theology is still ahead of us for a long time." However, Karl Barth is a very great Protestant theologian, exclusively trained in a Western theological space, and this context deprived him thoroughly of the possibility of knowing the thinking and patristic spirituality of the Eastern Church, with the depths and richness of the writings of the Church Fathers.

Keywords:

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Introduction

In the following lines, we will try to draft a brief presentation of the life and activity of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), as this year (2016) we commemorate 130 years from his birth. Barth is one of the most important Protestant theologians of the twentieth century and even of the history of Protestantism, and his name is very often referred to in Protestant academic and church life not only in Europe but, above all, in the United States of America, where a true Barthian current has been created after his death.

Karl Barth is well-known as a particularly prolific theologian, his vast work being often compared to that of great Christian writers (Origen, Blessed Augustine, Thomas Aquinas), and an original thinker, due to his specific theological ideas and conclusions, new even for Protestantism.

According to our knowledge, this following work is pioneering, and there is no similar presentation of Karl Barth's life and activity in Romanian theology periodicals until now.

Life and Activity of Karl Barth

Basel Town

The life and activity of Karl Barth are, in our opinion, indissolubly linked to the city of Basel in Switzerland. The city interferes so profoundly, through its historical and cultural paradigm, with the life and work of the great theologian, that we cannot prevent ourselves from revealing the *pattern*. In fact, the approach does not imply any innovative element, as Barth considered himself a typical citizen of the city², devoting himself to his work *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (Protestant Theology in nineteenth Century)*, the typology of the theologian from Basel, a sort of self-portrait that we will follow in this text.

Basel is therefore a trenchant town, the Rhine irrevocably dividing the fortress in two - Gross Basel (Big Basel) and Klein Basel (Little Basel) - a bridge over the river was built only in 1225 without removing the customs and the "free zone", which keeps until today its name of "Freie Strasse" (Free Street). A city of cosmopolitan appearances that juggles the concept of tolerance in a unique, unattackable way, although at the end of the day and today everybody goes to bed

² „Among other things that left their mark on him, he was religiously distanced from the deeply rooted circles of Basel, and yet, of course, still a typical Basel citizen (*jedenfalls doch auch ein typischer Basler*)”. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf. Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1978, p. 17.

in his side of the fortress in a very well-measured order of social status, ethnicity and level of education.

The Order has always been based on the same criteria: Basel has received Huguenots refugees in the fourteenth century, but has vehemently defended its citizenship rights; Lionel Gossman (b. 1929), a Scottish-American scholar, noted that the city was and remained small³, and even the 30-year-old movement of the Huguenots was subject to drastic selection⁴, which the recommendations of the city's historical guide eludes, mentioning Basel only as an "international meeting place". For these reasons, Basel remains in our opinion a city of "borders"⁵ and especially one of mentality borders.

Coming back to the typology of the theologian from Basel, paradoxically, it overlaps, on the one hand, the briefly presented historical sketch and, on the other hand, the role of Karl Barth in modern Western-European theology. Here is the defining passage: "The theologian from Basel, who represents this spirit, is from the beginning and totally, essentially conservative, an initially shy individual, defined by *quieta non movere*, and this will always come out somewhere about his person. At the same time, however, he has an almost sympathetic secret pleasure for the radicalism and extravagance of others, for example, of all incited strangers, whom, from David Joris to Nietzsche and Overback, he had heartlessly received in his fortress for the contrast they brought. While he finds them frighteningly interesting, yet he hesitates to make them his own"⁶.

This is the passage from which we intend to approach a short biography of Karl Barth. Under these auspices we intend to portray the personality of the one designated by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) as "the most important theologian since

³„The modest size of Basel is not an insignificant fact and it was not an accident. Restricting immigration into the city had been the deliberate policy of the *Rat*, or Senate, for centuries. During certain periods of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, acquisition of citizenship was made easier in order to make up for the catastrophic loss of life caused by outbreaks of the plague... as well as for the Catholic and conservative citizens who left the city after it embraced the Reformation". Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA, 2000, p. 18 ff.

⁴„Even in times of severe religious persecution of Protestants in France and inquisitors in Italy, Basel did not receive everything and everybody - but only the clever ones - and those refugees (French and Italian) who could have enriched the city with the skills and their capital". Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, p. 18.

⁵Albrecht Grözinger, „Basel als religiöses Laboratorium des Postmoderne", in Thomas K. Kuhn, Martin Sallmann (Hgg.), *Religion in Basel*, Schwabe & Co. AG, Basel, 2001, p. 111.

⁶Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1994, p. 124.

Thomas Aquinas”⁷, while the Christic revelations of the same pope were criticized by Barth, with *sympathetic delight*, in an imaginative exercise, the theologian being convinced that the revealing Christian discourse of the Pope would have been followed by the words told to St. Apostle Paul, the addressee being this time the same Pius XII: “Pius, Pius, why do you persecute me?”⁸

Andreas Lindst, a Swiss historian and writer, portrays Karl Barth's personality as a typical Basel one, although he is convinced that the latter has distanced himself a lot from Basel's culture and tradition: “Barth has grown far beyond the Basel-specific traditions, from which he stood up. However, through his vitality and spiritual liveliness, his human spontaneity, his great love for Mozart, his cheerful and liberating superiority, being against the false pathos and bigotry, even ironizing his own inclinations, remains fully devoted to Basel and its inhabitants, along with their strengths and weaknesses, with their qualities and misbehaviours, feeling, despite everything, to be a true *civisBasiliensis*”⁹.

First Part of Karl Barth's Life

Karl Barth's life begins in Basel on May 10, 1886, when Johann Friedrich Barth and Anna Katharina, born Sartorius, are blessed with the first-born, Karli, baptized after the name of the mother's elder brother.

Established in Basel, not long before the birth of their first son, and though Karli will spend his childhood in Bern, the Barth family has close ties with the city, both grandparents being pastors in Basel from the second half of the nineteenth century. The tradition of pastorship is followed by Friedrich Barth, who in turn served for 7 years in Reitnau, Aargau canton, before settling in the city on the Rhine. Friedrich Barth starts to study theology in Basel, where he meets, in various circumstances, Franz Overbeck (1837-1905), a friend of Nietzsche (1844-1900), continuing his studies in Leipzig and finally graduating from Tübingen. The personalities whom he comes in contact with will definitely influence his spiritual life and implicitly the “background” where the young Karl Barth will develop later, as he recalls in one of his biographical notes the references his father kept regarding his teachers, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and Johann Tobias Beck (1804-1878). About Johann Tobias Beck, Fritz Barth says, “I was able to know this venerable man undisturbed, whose first lectures were listened to by my

⁷ Karl Barth in *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth, 25.09.2012.

⁸ Hans Küng, *My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs*, MPG Books Ltd, London, 2004, p. 132.

⁹ Idem, *Karl Barth. In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1971, p. 147.

father in the twelfth hour of his life and of my study. From him I have inherited the deepest impressions, he has become not only a teacher for me, but also a spiritual father who led me from the arid plain of self-sufficient criticism to the green pasture of the word of God. I should be thankful to him and happy thanks to him to be sure of my faith as a theologian”¹⁰.

Not even as far as his mother is concerned did the family environment escape religious influences, despite the father's life orientations, Anna Katharina Santorius often hears her mother's life slogan, Karl Barth's grandmother: “Anna, biblical and church teachings are like a building from which no stone must be broken, otherwise the whole collapses”¹¹.

In 1888, at the second anniversary of Karli, which coincided with the arrival of his brother Peter (Bäti), the Barth family moved to Bern. There, in 1892, Karli would start school, where he became a very tough reader in a very short time, given that, according to his own testimony, “arithmetic was not at all appealing from the beginning, and my writing has never embellished; on the contrary, I soon became a passionate reader”¹². In fact, the school has never been an attraction for the young pupil, who fails to assert himself in the ranks of his colleagues. Mozart and the soldierly games are the two alternatives that make the little schoolboy's life easier, and if the second hobby does not have the confirmation of continuity, Mozart, first heard from his father as he played the piano, becomes a self-living passion, Barth describing the unique immortal music of the Austrian genius in one of his works, called *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*: in his music, “the sun shines, but its burning is consumed, it does not burn. The heavens surround the Earth but without crushing it, smashing it or swallowing it. And so the Earth lives and remains, without feeling as a consequence that it must rise up in a titanic uprising against heavens”¹³. It is a magnificent description, which, if we superpose it over Barthian theology, we find that the two are confounded in a simple and austere harmony.

His first literary attempts coincide with the confirmation period, 1902, circumscribed by the establishment of literary circles in the 1900s and the times when Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) were brought into discussion under the auspices of the terrible perplexity of Western Europe, that started a new existential era with Nietzsche and his question, “Does God exist?” This whole frame, and especially the “tutoring” about life, death, resurrection, from the confirmation lessons will guide the young Karl Barth on the

¹⁰ Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, Theologische Verlag Zürich, 1956, p. 43.

path of theology, guided by his father's example. One evening, a decisive thing happened, as Karl Barth himself confessed: "On the evening of my confirmation day (March 23, 1902), I bravely decided to become a theologian, without thinking about preaching, pastoral care and so on, but more, in the hope that this study will lead me on the road to achieving an understanding of the confession of faith, which until then was floating for me in a dark atmosphere (*wohl aber in der Hoffnung, auf dem Wege dieses Studiums zur Realisierung eines mir dunkel vorschwebendensachlichen Verstehens des Glaubensbekenntnisses*)"¹⁴.

Under this motto, Karl Barth begins the Faculty of Theology at the University of Berne on October 17, 1904, being noticed this time as a hardworking student. He attends conferences and presents his works, but the university environment at that time does not allow him to evolve as he wishes, so after the first four semesters he moves to Germany, to Berlin¹⁵. The transfer would be an important step for the young theologian, the opening of new perspectives which, metaphorically speaking, would translate into a sort of dizzying waltz between Barth and liberal theology, under the direction of the theologian Adolf von Harnack, despite his father's wish. Friz Barth, a positivist theologian, of a gentle conservatism, an adept of pietism, influenced by Johann Tobias Beck, a fervent critic of both liberal and conservative wings in Germany, in whose contribution to nineteenth-century theology Karl Barth noticed "a high autonomy and independence against modern and revolutionary theological methods"¹⁶, would have wanted his son to stay as far away from the "devastating" influences of liberal theology as possible, Berlin being a niche solution for his son, a sort of middle choice between Marburg, the extreme liberal at that time and the Halle or Greifswald - centres of conservative theology in Germany. Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), professor of systematic theology, was Fritz Barth's target in the theological orientation of his son. However, the latter's choice was directed to the History of Dogmatics, a lecture given by Adolf von Harnack, whose personality

¹⁴Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 43.

¹⁵"Bern at that time was something of a theological backwater. Little took place there that was exciting and innovative. Even the liberals on the faculty seemed out of step with the times. They all adhered to the old speculative (Hegelian) line in theology which followed F. C. Baur and regarded the advent of Ritschlianism with horror. Karl dutifully completed his first four semesters at Bern and then he did as many Swiss theological students did; he proposed to continue his study in Germany, where the truly important developments were taking place". Bruce L. Mc Cormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909 – 1936*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p. 36.

¹⁶„Die hohe Selbständigkeit und Unabhängigkeit gegenüber den revolutionären wie den reaktionären Methoden in der Theologie". Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 563.

and method would soon capture the whole interest of the student Karl Barth. About this, Barth himself remembered: “Then I said to myself, this is the great moment. You are with the time theologian next to you; why care about museums, theatres, concert halls any more”¹⁷.

To further outline the importance of the *encounter* with the liberal theology and the abyss created between the background, the paternal directives, and the new breeze embraced in Berlin, it is enough to superpose Johann Tobias Beck's *gnosis* - that is, “biblical realism” and his knowledge through faith, cantered exclusively on the Bible - Harnack's thesis that the religious content of the Bible is not unequivocal, but quite diverse. If we determine it for faith, cult and life, we need a better foundation rather than the subjective and individual experience. We need to define historical knowledge and critical reflection. How can theology deal with the diversity of biblical content, if not rationally, through historical analysis? Historical knowledge and critical reflection are indispensable if we want to avoid naive Biblicism¹⁸. Of course, the Berlin experience is very important for what would become, from this moment on, Karl Barth, a resonant name in Western theology, Harnack and Herrmann being only two of the names that give a new amplitude to young Barth's horizon, their embrace being certainly a consequence of the escapade from the closed Swiss theological environment; especially given that not long afterward, Barth will disengage from the liberal spirit.

We certainly wonder what would have happened if instead of Harnack's previously quoted passage, Barth would have encountered the deciphered paradigm of Raskolnikov's disease, the “paranoia of reason” (Max Horkheimer, 1895-1973) which, since the nineteenth century will thrive the world under the most imprisoned auspices “within the current of spreading socialist, communist, Hitleriste, and *liberal grafts* etc.”, that is, “some new sorts of microbes were attacking the bodies of men, but these microbes were endowed with intelligence and will. Men attacked by them became at once mad and furious. But never had men considered themselves so intellectual and so completely in possession of the truth as these sufferers, never had they considered their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible”¹⁹. Of course, an unanswered

¹⁷ „Denn ich sagte mir, das ist der grosse Augenblick: du bist mit dem Theologen der Zeit zusammen; was kümmern dich Museen, Theater, Konzertsäle”. Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 51.

¹⁸ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Cambridge, 2000, p. 321.

¹⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Planet Publish, Translated by Constance Garnett, p. 960, http://www.planetpublish.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Crime_and_Punishment_T.pdf

challenge, because the great shortcoming of the Western cultural system is, in our view, due to the fact that it presents itself only as a system in an offensive phase, precisely in order to defend the disconcerting symphony of opinions and systems, which as a whole, can only be put together in a conceptual way. In this sense, we would have wanted Barth to meet Dostoevsky (1821-1881) in the same Berlin-ideological opening exercise, as we would have liked Martin Luther (1483-1546) to have known the ecumenical Eastern synodal activity after 431.

April 1908 is the date of Karl Barth's transfer to Marburg, marked by the encounter with "my college theology professor"²⁰, as Barth himself stated referring to the person of Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922), a theologian influenced by neo-Kantian thinking. Under these auspices, Barth also embraces Neo-Kantianism, along with his brother, Heinrich Barth, without being a novice in the field, and joins simultaneously the disciples of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834).

In conclusion, we can say that the period of acceptance of the solution to Liberal Protestantism meant for Barth, in principle, a triumph of *ethics* in the struggle with the doctrine. Enlightenment leaves to Protestant liberalism the inheritance of anthropocentric accents, denouncing the encounter between God and man, the first exiling Himself in the irrational infinite and as such impenetrable, the latter *evolving*, on the one hand, keeping as an appendix an unconscious dependence on God, rather a sort of corruptible mysticism of the rational (Schleiermacher), and on the other hand, he is fishing God in everything on earth, naturalizing Him, and from here very easily, in rational ways, exiling His deity in derision, being left to use biblical "fictions" as a behavioural modelling fairy tale as a *possible* prime example of what could mean a noble, loving soul, who got rid off any doctrinal debate (Adolf von Harnack). On these evolutionary, modelling principles, the Protestant Liberal Theology metamorphosed into the *panacea* of European world illnesses at the beginning of the 20th century, acquiring paradoxically warlike doctrinal dimensions, grasping the enlightened minds of the theological school in the background of the First World War, of its underlying goals to the "doctrine" of *civilizing ethics*. It is the time of Karl Barth's breakup from the liberal Protestant Theology that finds the young theologian during his pastoral life in the rural parish of Safenwil in Switzerland, where he worked between 1911 and 1921.

See also Ilie Bădescu, *Noologia – Cunoașterea ordinii spirituale a lumii. Sistem de sociologienologică (Noology – The Knowledge of the Spiritual Order. System of Noological Sociology)*, Valahia Publishing House, Euxin Collection, Bucharest, 2001, p. 136 ff.

²⁰ „Herrmann war der theologische Lehrer meiner Studentenzzeit”. Busch, *Karl Barth's Lebenslauf*, p. 56.

Pastoral activity had begun two years before, the internship taking place in Geneva, a city where he would meet his future wife, the violinist Nelly Hoffmann, whom he marries in 1913, and their first child, Franziska, was born in 1914. The parochial life at the beginning of the First World War will bring new confrontations. The community has a pronounced industrial character, their preoccupations far outweigh Barth's bookish familiar framework and brings him into a situation of confrontation with the lucrative dimension of social and religious life; issues such as social legislation or the insurance system predominate the parish agenda, creating an environment leading to the debate of the egalitarian principle. Through his friend, the theologian Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1974), Barth contacts the Swiss social-democratic wing, represented by Hermann Kutter (1863-1931), Leonhard Ragaz (1868-1945), Christoph Blumhardt (1842-1919), entering their circle and sharing their orientation.

In order to have a better picture of the new direction Barth heads to, it is important to note that Christian socialism emerges as a movement in connection with the pontifical encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, given by Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), in the cathedral of St. Peter of Rome, on May 15, 1891, referring to "the rights and duties of capital and labour". In the vast process of industrialization of the epoch, the encyclical seeks a middle path between the exploitation of the poor class and the defence of private property; and although it clearly positions itself in favour of the latter²¹, is considered the starting point of the left Christian movement. The Protestant side of Christian socialism is circumscribed to the social evangelism movement, a meeting of Christian ethics and class struggle based on the Kantian principle, according to which justice, an objective

²¹Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII *Rerum Novarum* stipulates the following in the 4th paragraph: „To remedy these wrongs the socialists, working on the poor man's envy of the rich, are striving to do away with private property, and contend that individual possessions should become the common property of all, to be administered by the State or by municipal bodies. They hold that by thus transferring property from private individuals to the community, the present mischievous state of things will be set to rights, in as much as each citizen will then get his fair share of what ever there is to enjoy. But their contentions are so clearly powerless to end the controversy that were they carried into effect the workingman himself would be among the first to suffer. They are, moreover, emphatically unjust, for they would rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the State, and create utter confusion in the community.”. *Rerum Novarum, Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor*, Given at St. Peter's in Rome, May 15, 1891, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html, March 10th, 2014.

paradigmatic concept, should prevail over the subjective good, a good therefore without moral relevance²².

In such a context, in 1919 appears one of the most important works of Karl Barth, *Römerbrief (Commentary to the Epistle to Romans)*. The circumstances in which Barth writes the commentary on the epistle of St. Paul the Apostle are undoubtedly marked by the spectre of the world conflagration, to which his political initiatives will be added, one of which is that, at the same time, Barth establishes a local politics association against the entrepreneurs in the area with an activity not at all neglected by them, the pastoral and university activity and why not, the birth of the two children Markus and Christoph in 1915 and 1917. In short, the *Epistle to Romans* represents an upheaval of heavenly horizons and earthly contexts in which Barth works, subtly dedicated, just as St. Apostle Paul says, "both to the Allies and to the barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish" (*Romans* 1, 14). A manifesto whose quintessence minimizes the "modelling" role of the Christian who, as he once tasted the cup of "truth", he begins to share it with the gun in his hand with the "barbarians". In Barth's vision, "The Gospel does not require man to engage in a conflict of religions or philosophies, nor does it force him to keep away from these controversies. In the announcement of the limitation of the known world by another unknown one, the Gospel does not compete with the many attempts to reveal in the known world a more or less unknown and higher form of existence in order to make it accessible to man. The gospel is not a truth among other truths (*sie ist nicht eine Wahrheit neben andere*). It rather puts the other truths under question (*sie stellt alle Wahrheiten in Frage*). The Gospel is not the door, but the hook (*sie ist Angel nicht Türe*)"²³. The most suggestive commentary on the above-mentioned work, and at the same time a first step towards dialectical theology, is brought by the author himself, who in one of his lectures stated: "In the Bible, we are revealed something unspoken, something that should be visible to us - not history, not ethics, not religion, but basically a new world (*eine gerade zuneue Welt*): not the right thinking of man about God, but the right thinking of God about people, so the Bible leads us from the old world atmosphere to the door of a new world, the world of God (*an die Tür einer neuen Welt, der Welt Gottes*)"²⁴.

Barth finishes his comments to the Epistle to the Romans in 1917, and the paper is published two years later, in 1919, and re-published in 1922. Through the

²²See the *Second Section* of "Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals" from Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Translation by Allan W. Wood, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 22 ff.

²³Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005, p. 11.

²⁴*Ibidem*.

Epistle to Romans, Barth became well known in Germany, in 1921 the University of Göttingen proposes him an academic position. Between 1921 and 1930, Barth teaches at the universities of Göttingen and Münster. The change will bring the space needed for the practice to impose himself at a theoretical level, Barth's discourse gains thus the magnitude of the university auditorium, turning into a doctrine: the dialectical theology.

Dialectical Theology

Dialectical theology is a current theology in Protestantism in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, which wanted to vehemently assert against Protestant liberal theology of the nineteenth century and proposed the rediscovery of the Word of God through a theology "from top to bottom" by returning to the initial ideas of the great reformers of the sixteenth century. The main initiator of the movement is Karl Barth, who will be gradually followed by Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967), Emil Brunner (1889-1966), Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1974) etc.

The dialectical theology or neo-orthodoxy, as it was called, is approached by Karl Barth in a vast process of re-finding the authentic Protestantism, of safeguarding faith from the nets of the century's enlightenments that bear the same name, which liberal theologians have led to an extreme. Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli are the ones who rediscover the perspectives of a theology not enough deepened during school.

In fact, dialectical theology emerges as a trenchant alternative to German liberalism. In the latter's view, God is, as in a ping-pong match, thrown away from earth, where He had become a sort of tool within His own creation, finally mistaken for a kind of appendage of the created hand, subtly metamorphosed, but resolutely, in a creative hand and ready to get rid of any reminiscences that reminded this hand of its origins, thrown away as previously said in its incognoscible dimension, into the infinite of metaphysics, far from any rationalizing and full of divine grace attempt, as the only method of abolishing sin, from where He would disappear in the mid-60s, suppressed by Nietzschean hymns.

The period of dialectical theology will bring various lectures largely illustrated by the classic figures of Protestantism.

The corollary of the orientation towards dialectical theology is represented by the Declaration from Barmen, containing six theses, with other six corresponding antitheses, given at the council from May 29-31, 1934, in Barmen (Germany), of the newly established Confessional Church (Bekennende Kirche), attended by 139

representatives from 18 Evangelical and Reformed Churches in Germany²⁵. Although it appears on behalf of several theologians, it is acknowledged to be written by Karl Barth. It is a synthesis of the theological principles that Barth embraces. To begin with, it speaks of disposing of liberal naturalist theology²⁶. This would mislead the branch of liberal theologians, who proceeded from the thesis that the Gospel reveals God's will on earth, and thus mixing up human power or laws, with divine power and care. In this sense, the second Thesis clearly states the rejection of any “false doctrine according to which there would be areas of our life in which we do not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords, or that there would be areas in which we would not need justification and salvation through Him”²⁷. The following theses give the main idea of the Declaration, that the word of man cannot be mistaken for the Word of God. More concretely speaking, the Declaration from Barmen rejects the influence of Nazism on German Christianity because the obedience of the Christian Church to our Saviour Jesus should give it the power to withstand other masters of the world no matter how much power and influence they would have.

In October 1934, Karl Barth became a founding member of the Leading Council (Reichsbruderrat) of the Confessing Church of Germany, but in a month he would resign from this position for political and social reasons²⁸.

„Kirchliche Dogmatik” and the Return to Basel

In 1925, Hans Jakob, the fourth son of Karl Barth, was born. The same year Barth began his collaboration with the University of Münster, where he also gets his PhD in Theology, becoming well-known and followed for his lectures. He will also meet Charlotte (Lollo) von Kirschbaum in 1924, who will become his tenacious assistant, heavily involved in the Barthian scientific approach, entering

²⁵Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 85.

²⁶ „*Wer eject the false doctrine, according to which the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamations, beyond and besides the Word of God, other events, powers, historical figures, and truths as revelation of God*” (*Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und müsse die Kirche als Quelle ihrer Verkündigung ausser und neben diesem einen Worte Gottes auch noch andere Ereignisse und Mächte, Gestalten und Wahrheiten als Gottes Offenbarung anerkennen*). *Barmer Theologische Erklärung*, These 1, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Grundlagen,

https://www.ekd.de/glauben/grundlagen/barmer_theologische_erklaerung.html, June 20, 2012.

²⁷ „Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als gebe es Bereiche unseres Lebens, in denen wir nicht Jesus Christus, sondern anderen Herren zu eigen wären, Bereiche, in denen wir nicht der Rechtfertigung und Heiligung durch ihn bedürften”. *Barmer Theologische Erklärung*, These 2.

²⁸Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 259.

his own family environment, fact that aroused high controversy. Between 1930 and 1935, Barth worked in Bonn.

In 1932 starts the publication of *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Church Dogmatics), with a first volume entitled *Die Lehrevom Wort Gottes* (Teachings about the Word of God), a great work dedicated not only to scholars in the field, but also to the secular world.

In 1935, he had to give up his professor position at the University of Bonn because he did not want to swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), because “Barth could not accept the obligation of unconditional allegiance to one person, therefore without any legal delimitation. It was clear to him that this oath was far more than a service oath”²⁹. That is why he immediately received an order to leave his position, on the grounds that he was Swiss, incompatible with the German desideratum, and therefore he would have to give up his Swiss citizenship to become a German citizen. Several colleagues wanted to help him through their intervention, the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann was one of them, with whom Karl Barth had a very close relationship, but all efforts were futile³⁰. Barth was summoned by the Berlin Higher Administrative Court and, besides leaving Germany, he was forced to pay one fifth of his annual salary³¹.

Once back in Switzerland, he would be appointed Professor of Dogmatics at the Department of Systematic Theology of the University of Basel, where, in addition to the courses and lectures, he will continue to write on the most important work of his life, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, the second volume being published in 1938.

After the end of the Second World War, he returned to Germany in August 1945 in Frankfurt am Main on the occasion of the meeting of the Confessional Church Leadership Council, where he participated again. He is much involved in the social, political and moral recovery of Germany after the end of the world conflagration, but without a decisive role in the political activity of the country, acting only at the level of the intellectual class³². “Barth travels back to Germany after 1945, says Karl Kupisch (1903-1982), as a good friend of the neighbour country. He even wanted to help with his advices or warnings. His interest was particularly directed toward the Churches in Germany, from whom he expected a fundamental change after the terrible conflagration. But he soon admitted that this

²⁹Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 88.

³⁰*Ibidem*, p. 92.

³¹Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 274.

³²Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 111.

could not be possible through a good organization "from upper levels", but only by a thorough general awakening³³.

In 1946-1947, he will again give Dogmatics lectures at the University of Bonn. From the rector of this university he receives the invitation to move definitively to Germany, and thus Barth sees himself facing a great dilemma: returning to Germany, the country that had ostracized him on doctrinal grounds, now requesting him to actually help to restore it, or the country of cantons, Switzerland, where he could fully devote himself to his academic activity. "Barth put a serious thought about it, whether to move permanently to Germany, and whether the power and time he had left were to be devoted exclusively to the problems and needs of the German people. "Personally, this problem of German rebuilding seems very complicated", said Karl Barth, "both from the point of view of the environment and from the point of view of the Germans, so it is obvious I am facing a big decision". Many of his old friends wanted Barth to return to Germany. But it must also be said with all the strength that the determination to stay in Basel was the right decision. In this way he could fully devote himself to his own work, to continue and perhaps to finish the work of *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, leaving his direct involvement in Germany's problems as well as in the problems of the other countries in great difficulty, to be circumscribed only on singular occasions³⁴.

He finally chose to stay in Basel and continue his academic activity. Thus, between 1945 and 1959, there were published most of the volumes of *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, volumes that address different theological subjects. In fact, this monumental work is the revised and augmented form of Dogmatic Theology courses that Karl Barth had taught at the Department of Dogmatics of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Basel. "It was a considerable work that cost him a lot of effort and long hours", says Eberhard Busch (b. 1937). During a semester, for example, he had to write at least 8 pages every day for the manuscript that went to print. In order to give a 4 hours lectures of Dogmatics to his students, he intensely prepared during 30 to 40 hours³⁵.

In 1948, he attends the conference of the Churches World Council in Amsterdam, together with the Protestant theologian Emil Brunner and other well-known Christian theologians, presenting World's Disorder and God's Salvation Plan³⁶ paper.

³³Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 116.

³⁴*Ibidem*, p. 116–118.

³⁵Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 387.

³⁶ „Die Unordnung der Welt und Gottes Heilsplan.“ Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 371.

From 1955 on, he moves to his last residence in Bruderholzallee, Basel, where the Karl Barth Archive³⁷ is today. There he continues his academic and theological work, making many long journeys abroad, in Hungary, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Denmark, France, the Vatican etc., where he lectures or participates to conferences or receives important prizes and awards.

During the academic year 1961-1962, he teaches Dogmatics at the University of Basel, summarizing his entire work of Dogmatic Theology, called *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* (Introduction to Evangelical Theology), which will later be published in a book bearing the same name³⁸.

On March 1st, 1962, he gives his last lectures at the Basel Theology School, the farewell lecture for his students, and afterwards he retired, but continued to give various lectures and conferences in the country and abroad.

The same year, he will take a 7 weeks visit to the United States, where he will “give lectures in different places in the East, West, and in the centre of the American continent”³⁹, receiving the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Chicago.

The next period will be a difficult one for Barth, in terms of health: he suffers from several surgeries that required a long period of hospitalization.

Karl Barth was appreciated by higher education institutions abroad, receiving the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Utrecht (1936), St. Andrews (Aberdeen, Scotland, 1937), Oxford (1938), Budapest (1954), Edinburgh (1956), Geneva and Strasbourg (1959), Chicago (1962), Paris (1963), while the Münster University, under the pressure of Nazism, will withdraw his title of Doctor Honoris Causa in 1939, which they had given him with great sympathy in 1922, due to the publication of the Second Edition of the Epistle to Romans (*Der Römerbrief*), and in 1925 they had invited him as a professor of Dogmatics. Only in 1946, after the end of the Second World War, they will be given back his title.

His fundamental work, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, is unfortunately unfinished. Karl Kupisch said that “its author was 45 when he started the work, with

³⁷The Karl Barth Archive has been personally researched for 2 years, between 2004-2006, during my PhD studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Basel.

³⁸Karl Barth said: "After my retirement from academic activity, I was once again given the opportunity to hold courses and seminars in the winter semester 1961-1962 because of the fact that there was not a replacement in the position of professor, owned by me until then. The lectures in this book, *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, are actually the manuscript of these courses, that is, what I seriously sought, I taught and represented in the field of evangelical theology for all five years as a student, twelve years old pastor and then forty years as a teacher". Karl Barth, *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, Theologischer Verlag, Zürich, 1985, p. 7.

³⁹Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 473.

impressive force. The last volume totally finished was published in 1959 (Vol. IV, 3, Teachings about Reconciliation - Die Versöhnungslehre), when Barth was 73 years old. However, he started to write the fourth volume of the Tome IV (IV, 4, Teaching about Baptism - Die Lehre von der Taufe)⁴⁰. From this last volume, only one fragment will be published in 1967, one year before Karl Barth's death.

Another part of the 4th volume, entitled The Command of God the Reconciliator (Das Gebot Gottes des Versöhners), was published after the Karl Barth's death by Hans Anton Drewes, the director of the Karl Barth's Archives in Basel, whom I had the great honour to know personally and with whom I collaborated. This last volume includes the lectures of Dogmatics given by Karl Barth at the University of Basel between 1959 and 1961.

“Although Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics has a total of 9.185 pages (nine times longer than Institutio Christianae Religionis of Jean Calvin and twice as big as the entire Summa of Thomas Aquinas) – says Eberhard Busch – it remains an unfinished work, un opus imperfectum”⁴¹. The last part, the fifth tome, “The Teaching about Salvation. Eschatology” (Die Lehre von der Erlösung. Eschatologie) could not be written because of Barth's poor health.

Karl Barth died on December 10, 1968, in Basel, at the age of 82.

Conclusion

Through his life and activity, Karl Barth remains one of the greatest Protestant theologians of the last century, with a special contribution to Protestant Theology and the directions of modern and contemporary Western Christianity.

Eberhard Jüngel (1934), a German evangelical theologian and disciple of Karl Barth, appraised in appreciative terms Barth's influence on Western theology as follows: “In any case, the death of Karl Barth puts an end to a period in the history of theology. Whether this end is today at the same time a beginning, we cannot say. The uncertainty does not lie in the theological work that Barth left behind. It lies in the power of understanding of our time, for which this great man is too simple, his simplicity is too great, his life and activity are too rich, and his rich work is too alive to know him enough. Greatness calls for distance, and here we can talk without embarrassment about greatness. Karl Barth has given a lot to his time. His time, however, took little from him. We can assume that the future of Karl Barth's theology is still ahead of us for a long time”⁴².

Karl Barth's personality was formed exclusively in the Western theological space, especially the Protestant one, thus not having the opportunity to know the

⁴⁰Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 103.

⁴¹Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, p. 504.

⁴²Kupisch, *Karl Barth*, p. 146.

patristic thinking and spirituality of the Eastern Church. The depths of the work of the Holy Eastern Fathers were unknown to him, and this was felt in his thinking and his entire theological work.

Last but not least, it is worth saying that Karl Barth's work and theology were well known (in the very original language) by the great theologian of ecumenical orthodoxy and "spiritual patriarch" of Romanian theology, Father Dumitru Stăniloae⁴³, who has been contemporaneous to Karl Barth most of his life and who refers to and cites from Karl Barth's work in his fundamental opus, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, and in other works, often with an Orthodox critical attitude.

⁴³† Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, „Foreword”, in Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 3, *The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior*, trans. by Fr Ioan Ionita, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, USA, 2011, p. vii.