

## KARL BARTH (1886-1968)

### 1. 1886-1921

Barth's Father was a Professor of Theology in Switzerland, and Barth followed in his footsteps, receiving a first class theological education in Switzerland and Germany before being ordained in the Reformed Church in 1908. The theological atmosphere in the German Universities was that of nineteenth century liberalism, represented by such theologians as Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Harnack.

In 1911 he became pastor in a small industrial town in Switzerland (Safenwil), and soon realised that his theological education had not equipped him to preach and minister to the people there. He was also totally disillusioned by the fact that all his teachers supported the Kaiser's War aims in 1914. The result of this was that he rejected their theology.

For a while Barth became actively involved in ~~the~~ Socialism, but soon became equally disillusioned with that. In 1921 he produced his famous Epistle to the Romans, which made a great impact (it was described as 'a bombshell'), but was almost entirely negative about the possibility of any meaningful theological endeavour.

### 2. 1921-1932

During this period Barth taught theology in German Universities. It was a time of trying to rediscover a theological method that could be relevant and positive. He went back to the Reformers, but his greatest discovery came in his study of Anselm. His book Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum ('Faith seeking understanding'), published in 1931, was a milestone, and became the key for his future writing.

### 3. 1932-1968

The first volume of Church Dogmatics appeared in 1932, and Barth continued to write volume after volume until his death. It was conceived in 5 sections, but the fifth section was never started. Between 1933 and 1945, Barth was a vigorous opponent of Nazism. He was largely responsible for writing the Barmen Declaration in 1934, which expressed the view that Nazism was a direct challenge to the Lordship of Christ and therefore could not be tolerated. It was the cornerstone of Church opposition to Hitler. Because of his refusal to sign a vow of allegiance to the State he had to leave his post in Bonn in 1935 and returned to Basel, where he remained, teaching and writing, for the rest of his life.

#### Some Books

1. Books by Barth: The Humanity of God (Collins. 1961 and 1967)  
Table Talk (ed. John Godsey) (Oliver and Boyd. 1963)  
Dogmatics in Outline (SCM. 1966)  
Church Dogmatics - Selection by Helmut Gollwitzer (T and T Clarke. 1961).
2. Books about Barth: Karl Barth and the Christian Message by Colin Brown (Tyndale. 1967)  
The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth by G C Berkouwer (Paternoster. 1956)  
Karl Barth by John Bowden (SCM) (1971)  
The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction by Herbert Hartwell (Duckworth. 1964)

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