

Karl Barth's Social Action

The Development of Karl Barth's Theopraxis

By Andreas Lundén

“Don't forget to say that I have always been interested in politics...
...and consider that it belongs to the life of a theologian.”¹

- Karl Barth

Introduction

Karl Barth stands out as one of the most fascinating persons of the 20th century. Until this day, he is considered an excellent conversation partner for a wide range of theological issues. But Barth also lived an interesting public life. Barth views drove him to courageously engage in the issues of his time. “A silent community, merely observing the event of time, would not be a Christian community,”² he once said. With one hand in the Scriptures and the other in a newspaper, he continued through out his life, to be an important prophetic voice to society.

In his early years, as a young pastor in Safenwil-Aargau, he sided with the oppressed workers by joining the Swiss Social Democratic Party (1911). He felt that he visibly had to take a stance against the apparent injustices. That didn't stop him from continually criticizing the same party for its vote to support the war. Later in life (1933) Barth was escorted out of Germany because he refused to pledge allegiance to “Der Führer.” During the war he boldly continued to speak up against Germany and also criticized the Swiss government for closing its borders to almost 100,000 refugees. Not surprisingly, in 1941, he was banned to speak politically through out Switzerland. Soon after the end of the war Barth “flip flopped” and embraced the German people, now despised by large portions of the Swiss. In the 1940's and 60's, he refused to speak up against the communist regime in Russia. For Barth, the real danger in the West was not communism but a sense of widespread well-being. Thus, to many people's dismay, Barth saved his fire and brimstone speeches for a more subtle threat in the West: capitalism.

When a German Methodist bishop visited an American Theological Seminary in the 1950's he was asked what had been Karl Barth's major contributions to the Church in Europe. His first answer surprised no one: he helped the Church rediscover the Bible. His second answer, though,

¹ Karl Barth quoted in George Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth,” 181.

² Karl Barth quoted in Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 80.

stunned the class – that Barth has called the Church to social and political responsibility. In what followed the American students challenged the bishop, mainly with American stereotypes projected on Barth.³ They argued fiercely that Barth's theology was too "eschatologically driven" and that he emphasized man's sinfulness too much, with the implication "that he was unable to do justice to the relative differences between men and political systems." For Barth, according to the students, salvation consisted only in receiving God's forgiveness, it failed, however, to provide the power for a new life, and thus there was no hope for either individual or social improvement. After hearing the students out, the bishop responded, baffled: "You cannot be talking about Karl Barth."⁴ The bishop's response is certainly justified. Although Karl Barth primarily was known as a theologian he remained politically involved through out his life - from his early years as a young student until his late years when speaking his mind concerning the cold war.

Barth was a radical person. He never seemed to say what people wanted to hear. Instead, he had the frustrating gift of taking an unexpected stance on most contemporary issues. In his essay, "Barth as Political Thinker," William Hordern points out that, "all the great 20th century theologians started out as political radicals who attacked the status quo. But as the years passed they became conservatives who supported the status quo. All except Karl Barth; he remained a radical to the end."⁵

Radicals, especially radicals for Jesus, are worth taking a closer look at. My goal in this essay is simple. I will trace the development of Barth's theology as it relates specifically to social engagement. In order to clearly reveal Barth's growth I will place three of Barth's writings in their proper contexts, all three representing a different time period of his life, and point to changes in Barth's thinking. These writings are "Jesus and the Movement for Social Justice,"⁶ written in 1911, "The Barmen Declaration"⁷ from 1934, and "Against Abstract Anti-Communism; Answer to Brunner"⁸ (1948). This study will show that Barth's theology for social action (early 1930's and on) cannot be understood properly apart from his previous breaks with liberalism (1915), religious socialism (1919) and dialectical theology (1928). Beyond this comparison, my argument will hopefully also reveal Barth's clear and creative mind, even in the midst of great political tension.

³ Ronald Niebuhr has argued that Barth's theology only in relevant to society in times of crisis. See George Hunsinger, "Toward a Radical Barth," in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 182.

⁴ William Hordern, "Barth as Political Thinker," 412.

⁵ William Hordern, "Barth as Political Thinker." *The Christian Century* (March 26, 1969), 412.

⁶ Karl Barth, "Jesus and the Movement for Social Justice," in *Karl Barth – Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 98-113.

⁷ Karl Barth, "The Barmen Declaration" in *Karl Barth – Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 148-150.

⁸ Karl Barth, "Against Abstract Anti-Communism; Answer to Brunner," in *Karl Barth – Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 148-150.

The Early Years at Safenwil: Religious Socialism (1909 – 1919)

What is of interest here is the connection between Barth's theology and praxis, a subject that hasn't seized to be discussed since Barth passed away in 1968. The appearance of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt's book *Theology and Socialism: The Example of Karl Barth* sparked on this particular matter an intense debate in the early 1970's. Marquardt argues in this book, "his (Barth's) theology not only arose from but aims towards socialist action; that revolution was the basic concept for Barth's understanding of both God and society. Barth's mature Christology provided the final grounding for leftist convictions arrived at earlier."⁹ He also argued that, for Barth, a church that bears witness to God's kingdom must herself become an agency of revolution within society. According to Marquardt, Barth's political engagement was far from peripheral – it was central – and thus drove his entire thinking. Marquardt's opinions were followed by much interesting debate. While studying these various arguments is well spent time we shall here limit ourselves to saying that Marquardt helped us see, "for the first time the intimate connection in Barth's thought not simply between theology and ethics or between theology and politics, but precisely between theology and socialism."¹⁰

When Barth in 1909 left the academic world, he had already adopted socialist sympathies. During his years as a student, he also had developed a bittersweet relationship to liberal theology. Barth simultaneously questioned the unresolved dilemma, that "subjectivism and historicism both relativized the claim to revealed truth, whereas the concept of God's kingdom and its praxis implied, by definition, a validity that was universal"¹¹ Barth, thus, struggled with how to connect liberal theology to Christian praxis, yet at this point in time he saw no other alternative.

Most of the church members in Safenwil were textile workers and Barth soon became aware of their difficult economic situation. Many of them worked twelve-hour shifts for little pay. The situation simply did not allow for him to stay politically neutral. There was no way in which he could merely preach a nonaligned Gospel to them. Introduced for the first time, to the real problems of life, here in Safenwil, he helped organize three trade unions, he gave courses for workers, he joined the Social Democratic Party, and immersed himself in studies of practical activism. From these studies flowed writings and lectures like "Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice." This address was delivered only three months after he was instated as a pastor and stands as a great example of his early religious socialism.

The lecture is fascinating in that Barth is still very comfortable joining together Jesus and the socialist movement. We find also traces of liberal theology, which he would so radically break away from a few years later. For example, early on in his address Barth greets his listeners: "The spiritual power which...entered into history and life with Jesus."¹² These words fit extremely

⁹ George Hunsinger, "Toward a Radical Barth," 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 184.

¹¹ Karl Barth quoted in Ibid., 193.

¹² Karl Barth, "Jesus and the Movement for Social Justice," 99.

well with how he later in life summarized his theological education. “In it (the modern school), according to the teaching of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, Christianity was interpreted on the one hand as a historical phenomenon to be subjected to critical examination, and on the other hand as a matter of inner experience, of predominantly moral nature.”¹³ However, Barth’s growing suspicion towards liberal theology is evident in his critique of individualism, idealism and subjectivism.

The main thrust of his lecture is the identification between Jesus Christ and socialism. “Jesus is the movement for social justice, and the movement for social justice is Jesus in the present... The real contents of the person of Jesus can in fact be summed up by the words: movement for social justice.”¹⁴ What socialist have in common with Jesus, according to Barth, is not what they do but what they want. They desire “movement from below to above.” Barth draws heavily from the gospels and describes Jesus as a worker who identified with the poor and oppressed:

It must strike everyone who reads his New Testament without prejudice that that which Jesus Christ was and wanted and attained, as seen from the human side, was entirely a movement from below. He himself came from the lowest social class of the Jewish people at the time. You all recall the Christmas Story of the crib in Bethlehem. His father was a carpenter in an obscure town in Galilee, as he himself was during his entire life with the exception of his last years. Jesus was a worker, not a pastor.¹⁵

For Barth, those who argue that Jesus came merely for the purpose of conversion and spiritual life are influenced by a subtle Gnosticism. “Perhaps nowhere else has Christianity fallen farther away from the spirit of her Lord and Master than precisely in this estimation of the relation between spirit and matter, inner and outer.”¹⁶ The opposite to God is not earth, not matter, but evil, and redemption is not that humanity goes to heaven but that heaven comes to earth in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is within us, but it also obtains dominion over the external, “otherwise it does not deserve its name.” Here, we find evidence of a perspective that would be constitutive for Barth’s entire life work. The spiritual and physical must not under any circumstances be torn apart (this would be Barth’s main concern with dialectical theology). Thus, he rebukes the church, for despite evident social misery, which ought not to be, she has not summoned all her power “for the sake of the conviction that it ought not to be.”

Barth also rebukes capitalism. He argues that it stands in the way of the coming of the kingdom of God. After a lengthy argument he comes to the conclusion with regard to private property: “Private property is sin, because it is self seeking. What’s mine is absolutely not mine!”¹⁷ This statement seems to serve as the thrust for Christian activist engagement. Barth calls for a collective thinking that creates camaraderie. Barth sees unity in the social call to solidarity and Jesus’ call to repent. This unity is found ultimately in Jesus himself. “For Jesus there was only a

¹³ Clifford Green, “Karl Barth’s Life and Theology,” in *Karl Barth – Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 13.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, “Jesus and the Movement for Social Justice,” 99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

social God, a God of solidarity, therefore there was only a social religion, a religion of solidarity.”¹⁸ And later: “Real socialism is real Christianity in our time!”¹⁹ To Barth’s defense, he does not lump Jesus together with the socialist party. He does however, claim, that much of Socialism’s intent was embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus. Thus, Barth saw common ground between socialism and the kingdom of God. During his pastorate he still stressed God’s kingdom as a realistic goal to be realized through human action. His activist view of faith, and his relentless attack on pietism and other forms of inwardness, is evidence of this.

His “optimistic” view that man’s revolution could, by the means of socialism, change the world would alter with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The events surrounding what led up to these hostilities troubled him deeply. On the one hand, many of Barth’s former teachers agreed with the war policies, on other hand the German Social Democrats approved of the war in August 1914 (despite this disappointment he joined the same party he joined in Switzerland as late as 1915). In addition, by the end of the decade, the political situation had drastically changed. This new political landscape had brought far less than he hoped for. With the appearance of *Romans* in 1919, and its revision that followed in 1922, Barth broke with both liberal theology and religious socialism. We sense a very different tone in Barth: “We long for something else, we are still painfully aware that in spite of all the changes and revolutions, everything is as it was of old.” Barth was disillusioned and began to move towards a dialectic theology. For Barth God and revolution, from below to above, could no longer be conceived in relational synthesis. “The desired synthesis could be found only beyond history in God. Revolution, in other words, had ceased to be part of a relational nexus by becoming one of God’s predicates.”²⁰ Thus, Barth had revised his position on social action. The socialist task could receive its ground, limit and orientation in terms of God’s revolution alone. Looking back at his life Barth felt as if he had failed the people at Safenwil. Theology steeped in religion, morality and the divinity of man was not the theme of the Bible. A God merely a “pious notion,” an image projected, as a symbol of the heights and depths of the human psyche, could bring neither challenge, nor bring comfort. This could happen only by the freeing Word of the God. Liberal theology, even if coupled with socialism, imprisons humanity in itself.

Opposing Hitler: Recovering a Basis for Christian Social Action (1919-1945)

Barth continued his involvement in the Social Democratic Party with one distinction. He was now merely a member. What grew slowly in Barth’s mind was a dialectic theology, which Barth would continue to wrestle with until a more mature view emerged in the early 1930’s. In two main ways his *Romans* commentary marks a new era in protestant theology. First, Barth revitalized the Scriptures by actually dealing with them as the Word of God. In this new strange world he discovered that God can be known only through God alone. Man cannot secure any knowledge about God. Second, Barth focused on “the deity of God over human religiosity.”²¹ Barth started describing God as the wholly other as opposed to someone bound to history.

¹⁸ Ibid., 112.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114.

²⁰ Karl Barth quoted in George Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth,” 211.

²¹ Clifford Green, “Karl Barth’s Life and Theology,” 17.

The problem was Barth's theology endangered God's immanence. He was making God big at the expense of man. Thus, he did not (1) really deal with liberal theology in a positive sense, (2) he put the incarnation in question in that God's act in Jesus Christ was banished from history, and finally (3) he allowed for autonomy from God and thus opened up for secularism not unlike Luther's two-kingdom doctrine.²² It is interesting that this time does coincide with Barth rather sparse political involvement.

The "Barthian gap" between God and man would however be mended in time for the arrival of National Socialism and Adolf Hitler. Aided by Anselm, Barth moved from a dialectical to an analogical theological method. George Hunsinger provides an excellent summary of Barth's discoveries.

Theology proceeds as follows: it moves from actuality to the necessity of its object. God cannot be other than he is. God exists in a particular way; therefore, faith must conceive of him in this particular way. Faith seeks to understand the rationality of God as he actually exists. Understanding can only be derived from God, not God from understanding... Faith and creation depend on God. God depends on nothing other than himself."²³

With this foundation in place Barth had achieved the conceptually consistent understanding of God's sovereignty he had sought for the last decade. First, he overcame liberal theology by "establishing the objective basis of theology apart from faith."²⁴ Second, he was now able to speak of God as someone other than the image man projects on Him. Third, Barth had overcome the "gap" between God and man in dialectical theology, while still retaining its intentions. Theological concept could now conform to their object because of God's eternal intention to make himself accessible to humanity in Jesus Christ through faith. Finally, Barth found a positive basis for theory and praxis of resurrection hope. "Just as theological concepts were properly analogous to God's Word, so the human praxis of obedience was properly analogous to God's praxis in Jesus Christ."²⁵ In other words, when the great Hope is present, small hopes must arise before long.

Barth imagined now political praxis as analogy or parable to God's kingdom. God's kingdom was for him "the ground, limit, and orientation of all human action in the world."²⁶ Barth had come a long way, for he held now that God alone, not man, is the one who ultimately makes all things new. Thus, from the early 1930's and on Barth refused to identify liberation with a specific social or political goal. This does not mean that the Christians should flee, from engagement of the world, but rather that all ideologies must be approached with a healthy skepticism. For liberation is defined by an eschatological horizon of hope. It is firmly rooted in

George Hunsinger, "Toward a Radical Barth," 216.

²³ Ibid., 223.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

the liberating act of God electing humanity in Christ. To the extent that the Christian witnesses to this event she is free. She is free to engage the world redemptively. The Christian must therefore oppose structural oppression in order that the Word of God be heard above and beyond all human words. In this sense the dismantling of structural oppression, for Barth, is not an end in itself. It was with this theology in the back of his mind that he critiqued the events that began to unfold in Germany during the early 1930's. He was well prepared for the occasion.

Much can be said about the historical development of the 1930's in Germany. Here we shall limit ourselves to viewing "The Barmen Declaration" in the context of what has already been described above. It reflects many of those conclusions Barth had already come to in the last two decades. Although the document obviously responds to the times, it seems to be less reactionary than what characterized Barth's Safenwil period. The document, which consists of six short articles, is a rebuke against a fellow by the name of Adolf Hitler, and his Reich Church Administration, which consisted of those who had folded under the pressure of Der Führer's regime. Below, I will deal briefly with each section and point to obvious developments in Barth's theology.

(1) Barth's rejection of natural/liberal theology stands out in this first article. Barth presents a high view of scripture (also a rebuke of natural theology) and denies the existence of revelation outside of Christ. In this sense, while denying false connections of the church (negative) the Barmen Declaration also points to the Church's true identity in the Word of God (positive). Barth's Yes and No in Christ allowed for the church to speak freely and truthfully into culture, even during times of great turmoil. Here we have a God, not bound to history (as in Safenwil), but One who freely enters into this world through Christ.

(2) The Barmen Declaration is also a message to those who found it best that the church should stay out of politics. According to Barth this cannot be considered a Godly option. Rather, everything the church does is ultimately political. The existence of the church is theological, and theology does not belong to marginal cliques, but is the central activity of the church, because it derives from the Word of God. Barth, thus, rejects the claim that "there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him." Because Christ is Lord of all realms of life (including ideologies) there is no area in life that does not concern him, and should not be critiqued. Furthermore, for Barth, social action is, as we have seen, closely connected to God's election of Christ in His death and resurrection. Salvation does entail the forgiveness of sins, but God also makes a powerful claim upon our whole lives. The claim upon the church is for radical and courageous service to God and to the world. Barth argues elsewhere that, "God's word frees the church from the godless entanglements in this world, to free, grateful service to his creatures."²⁷ What we have here is that Barth is calling the church to be the church.

(3) The Barmen Declaration expands on the idea that Christ makes a radical claim upon the church. Because the church answers only to Christ, whom is her Lord, she must not fall for the temptation of communicating a message that culture wants to hear. She must remain faithful in

²⁷ Karl Barth quoted in Haddon Willmer, "Karl Barth," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 129.

her witness to Christ. The Declaration states, “We reject the false doctrine that the Church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day.” These words reveal that Barth, in stark contrast with his activity in Safenwil, has now become increasingly careful to align the church with ascendant political ideas.

(4) The purpose of the authority structures within the church is ministry, which the whole community is entrusted with carrying out. Barth also states that the church cannot “allow itself to give special leaders vested with ruling authority.” Again, the church is freed from the world, with ultimate purpose for ministry to it.

(5) Barth calls the church to be the church, and the state to fulfill its obligations, which are primarily to maintain “justice and peace, so far as human discernment and human ability make this possible, by means of the threat and use of force.” In this way the declaration critiques the totalitarian state, and “the installation of a ‘Reich’s bishop’ forced upon the Protestant Church. The last section serves as a rejection of liberal theology in that Gogarten’s natural orders, “and all secular moral theories based solely on principles of utilitarian or teleological calculations.”²⁸ Barth’s social ethics is therefore an ethic of divine command and human obedience, and because “these are apprehended in the hearing of the Word of God in the context of a concrete situation...it can never be reduced to a universal or natural law.”²⁹ In fact, God’s command challenges the status quo and our human notions of ethical reasoning, a point first asserted in his Romans commentary.³⁰

(6) Finally, the Barmen Declaration deals with the commission of the church, “which is the foundation of its freedom, consists in this: in Christ's stead, and so in the service of his own Word and work, to deliver all people, through preaching and sacrament, the message of the free grace of God.” The scriptures introducing this paragraph imply that this passage should also been seen in light of the “not yet.” In Romans *Barth* started to see the pressing need to free humanity from the responsibility of revolution. Barth argued that the church has only one concern the coming kingdom, the absolute revolution that comes from God. In this new situation, Barth’s views on eschatology, serve different purpose. By pointing to the not yet Barth is able to critique Hitler’s regime, in that Barth’s opponents understood the Third Reich to be the realized kingdom of God.

The Barmen Declaration reveals how far Barth had come since Safenwil. His pastorate and the following decade helped him formulate a theology that effectively addressed the underlying problems with both liberal theology and political action without any eschatological hope. He now stood firm in his theological convictions and was prepared to systematically sketch out his views on theology and social engagement.

²⁸ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought – The Twentieth Century*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 101.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

The Cold War: Engaging the Communist Threat (1945-1968)

With the End of World War II, Barth was able to theologize at a deeper level concerning Christian Social action. In 1946, Barth gave a lecture by the title of “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” in which he addresses the relation between church and state. Similarly to his doctrine of grace and nature, “the covenant of grace is the internal basis of creation and creation is the external basis of the covenant.”³¹ Barth speaks of the church as the inner circle of the Kingdom of God, and the state as the outer. Barth does by no means advocate a theocratic state, because the tasks of the Christian in the political realm are secular. A Christian state does not exist. For Barth, political systems are human inventions, to be tested experimentally to see if, through law, they provide an ‘external, relative and provisional humanization’ of existence. The responsibility of the Church is to witness to the state so that its activities resemble that of the kingdom of God (analogies). For example, the fact that Christ sought out the poor should result in the state taking responsibility for the poor and weak. Barth’s goal seems to be to further free the Church to truly be the Church, a project that started in 1919 with his first edition of Romans. He said much later: “True liberality must consist in speaking and thinking in responsibility and openness to all sides, backward and forward, in the past and in the future.”³²

With the rise of totalitarian Communism, most people saw no fundamental difference between this totalitarian monster and one that had been slain just a few years earlier. Surprisingly, Barth remained silent regarding the unfolding events that had started to cause a great deal of fear in the West. In 1948 Emil Brunner wrote him a letter in which he criticized Barth for not speaking up against the Soviet Union. According to Brunner, if anything, the Nazis were just a bunch of amateurs whereas the Soviet Union was a consistently totalitarian state.

Barth’s response, in letterform, was straight to the point and consistent with the theology he had developed up until this point in his career. Barth argues in the opening words that the church must not “concern itself eternally with various ‘isms’ and systems, but with historical realities as seen in light of the Word of God and of faith.”³³ The Church’s calling is not to fulfill natural law, according to liberal theology, but to live faithfully before the living Word. Therefore the church must never act on principle, but ought to judge each case spiritually and individually (i.e. divine commandment). Systematizing political history is therefore out of the question (I doubt he had spoken these words before 1919). As an alternative, the church preserves the freedom to judge every event afresh (we discussed this dynamic briefly above). Barth writes, “Yesterday it spoke from its position of responsibility, then today it should be silent if in this position it considers silence to be the better course. The unity and continuity of theology will best be preserved if the church does not let itself be discouraged from being up-to-date theologically.”³⁴

³¹ Karl Barth, “Public Theology and Political Ethics” in *Karl Barth – Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 265.

³² Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the stream*, 103.

³³ Karl Barth, “Against Abstract Anti-Communism; Answer to Brunner,” 297.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

The reason, then, that Barth did not oppose communism is that there were fundamental differences in the way these regimes were perceived. Hitler, was a source of political temptation for almost everyone. Barth reminds Brunner that Hitler even had English, French and American admirers. Barth describes the tragedy in Germany as obviously spiritual:

that it was a spell which notoriously revealed its power to overwhelm our souls, to persuade us to believe in its lies and to join in its evil-doings... We were hypnotized by it as a rabbit by a giant snake... It was a matter of life and death, of resistance against a godlessness which was in fact attacking body and soul, as was therefore effectively masked to thousand Christian eyes."³⁵

The situation with Communism was different in that the whole world was on alert. Need the Church really say what everybody else is already saying? "No, when the church witnesses it moves in fear and trembling, not with the stream but against it." If the church would speak up, Barth clarifies, "Whom would it teach, enlighten, rouse, set on the right path, comfort and lead to repentance and a new way of life?"³⁶

Thus, Barth's opinion was that the church ought to stand firm and discern carefully if this was a situation growing into a monster or not. Instead of assuming that totalitarianism must be opposed, based on its own shortcomings (as Brunner did) Barth points him to the first article of the Barmen Declaration: "We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures and truths as God's revelation." Thus, the church must fix her eyes primarily on Christ, not the events of history. Furthermore, concerning the church in the East and specifically Hungary (which Brunner addressed), Barth felt they were in a better place to speak first: "for Hungary, though not only for this country, everything depends on whether the church, not bound to abstract principles but to its living Lord, will seek and find its own way and also learn to choose freely the time for speech and the time for silence... without thereby becoming confused by another Gospel."³⁷

Conclusion

We have taken a brief look at three of Barth's most important writings. In this process we have learned, as initially stated, that one cannot properly understand Barth's later work without engaging the early stages of his career. With the rejection of liberal theology, to the dismissal of religious socialism, and finally the replacement of a dialectical theology with an analogical, Barth was prepared to be an effective activist for the kingdom of God. His divine command ethics that logically flow from his understanding of scripture and revelation (starting with Christology that includes humanity) gave him the space and courage to address culture redemptively. It is fascinating to see how Barth's theology freed him (and the Church) to speak, and not speak, with confidence, even in the midst of great political turmoil.

³⁵ Ibid., 298.

³⁶ Ibid., 300.

³⁷ Ibid., 301.

Where is the confidence that Barth speaks of in today's churches? Why is it that the church has turned into a frightened dog that barks at society as an attempt to catch its attention? The church in 2010, struggles equally with how to relate to culture, the state, and capitalism (we should have listened to Barth 50 years ago). I conclude, therefore, that the church can benefit greatly from Barth even today. Here and now, concerning the Church of America "everything depends on whether the church, not bound to abstract principles but to its living Lord, will seek and find its own way and also learn to choose freely the time for speech and the time for silence...without thereby becoming confused by another Gospel."