

Editorial

Restoration from Liberalism

KARL BARTH'S *Romerbrief* first appeared in 1918, and it was without exaggeration an epoch-making book. It marked a definite stand against liberal Protestant theology which was then dominant throughout Europe and which was so man-centred and so deeply influenced by late nineteenth century evolutionary optimism. Against all that a relatively unknown Swiss pastor rediscovered the biblical truth that man was fallen and remained deep in sin until redeemed by the transcendent grace of God reaching down to helpless man. The first fruits of that rediscovery of reformed theology was *Romerbrief*. It is not really a commentary in the normal sense of that word, but rather a theological treatise written loosely round the Epistle to the Romans. Barth has been probably the major influence during the twentieth century in re-establishing an intellectual and yet profoundly pastoral (just because it was theological in the best sense) reformed theology. But Barth did not subsequently develop his theology in the traditional Reformation manner. Indeed at certain points he has taken issue with mainstream reformed theology, partly due to his relentlessly christological method of interpreting Scripture, Old and New Testaments alike, and partly due to the situations confronting him—first the German Christians and the stand the Barthians made against this perversion of Christianity in the Barmen Declaration and the Confessing Church. This left Barth very anti-State-churches, almost (and very understandably) emotionally so. Then later he adopted Baptist interpretations of the sacrament of initiation. One might argue from this, and these two theological opinions are related, that Barth had thereby placed himself in the Anabaptist rather than the Reformation camp, for all the major Reformers were agreed on infant baptism and a multitudinous territorial understanding of the church. However that may be, Barth has placed all Christendom in his debt (certainly including Rome though perhaps excluding the isolated Eastern Orthodox) by his vigorous and unquestionably biblical insistence on the stark reality of the fall and its consequences for mankind, and the sovereignty of redeeming grace as God's answer. Barth is *the* theologian of our

time, and unless we are greatly mistaken he will go down as such in the history books when other men are seen to be the products of passing fashions and current theological crazes. Barth may not hit the headlines of the world's press in the way radical 'Death of God' advocates do, but he has made a far more lasting and significant contribution in the realm of serious dogmatic theology, a subject in which the English speaking world has been singularly weak in recent decades. The republication of Barth's *Romerbrief* in English translation as an OUP paperback (574 pp., 15s.) is greatly to be welcomed. The translation is that by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and is based on the sixth edition of the German original.

Since the above paragraph was written, news has come through of the death of Karl Barth. The churches and the world of theology will be the poorer as a result. Despite the resurgence of German and American radical theology in the last decade, Barth remains the greatest of twentieth century theologians yet to appear. His emphasis on divine transcendence, the theology of grace, a christological approach to all theological problems have had the effect of driving theologians back to the Bible again. Barth's writings whether popular sermons, exegetical studies or massive theology as in the unfinished *Dogmatics* are immensely stimulating. Whether one agrees with his theological position or not, one cannot but thank God for this Swiss theological giant who forced Christian thinkers to take systematic theology seriously again and for his uncompromising stand for scriptura sola and his concern to persuade all theologians to sit under and listen to the Bible.

Charles Davis

THE stir caused by Charles Davis leaving the Church of Rome and marrying has now died down, or rather been superseded by the vigorous reaction against the intransigent papal pontification on birth control. But a particularly interesting article appeared from Charles Davis in *New Christian* for 22 August 1968 in which he explained, originally in an address to the Synod of the Anglican diocese of Edmonton, Canada, why he had not become an Anglican. Davis has always insisted that he has remained a Christian, and one might have expected that after his wedding in an Anglican parish church a man who had rebelled against the institutionalism of the Roman church would easily have found a place in the more free atmosphere of Anglicanism. Yet Davis does not feel this is his place. He laments the lack of systematic theology in the Church of England, and explains that he often found he had more in common intellectually with the

Church of Scotland than with Anglicans. That is particularly noteworthy coming from one who has rebelled against institutionalism, for all too much Anglicanism imagines that its delicate balances, lack of theological definitions and refusal to tackle a coherent systematic theology is the great answer to Roman dogmatism. Davis does not think so, and we can only hope that those Anglicans who have been so quick to hail avant garde Roman radicals will note what this now ex-Roman says about systematic theology. It reflects what Evangelicals have long felt. Davis wrote:

If the Anglican church is rich in biblical and historical theologians, systematic theology is poorly represented within it. More than that, I think that the systematic pattern of thought is foreign to the particular genius of Anglicanism.

Davis puts his point tactfully and delicately, but it is a devastating charge against Anglicans. In fact it would be truer to say against official Anglican lines, where ecclesiastical diplomats have been accustomed to skate deftly round all the real problems. There are encouraging signs that Anglo Catholics and Evangelicals alike are growing increasingly uneasy with this refusal to take theology seriously. Of course the diplomats imagine they are saving Anglicanism by keeping warring factions apart. But this is a shallow reading of the situation and we may suspect that it contains more than an element of rationalisation of theological shortcomings.

Missionary Publication

THE faculty of Gordon Divinity School, Wenham, Mass., USA decided a few years back to mark the seventy fifth anniversary of their college with an ambitious publication, which has now seen the light of day. It is *The Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Missions* of which Burton L. Goddard is the general editor (Nelson, 743 pp., \$25.00). Of the need for such a reference volume there can be little doubt, and an educational establishment which has sent more than a thousand students overseas to the mission field is an appropriate body to undertake such a task. The preface, which extends to only two pages, devotes one of these to explaining what the book is attempting to achieve. Mission is construed in the broader sense of any social or evangelistic work carried on in the name of Christianity. It is further defined as a work originating in one country and extending into another. The book is mainly confined to Protestant agencies, and concentrates on organisations rather than individuals. The editors express their awareness that they may have missed some items, but in

certain cases they have deliberately restricted the more marginal entries. They have tried to cover the whole world.

There is a full list of abbreviations, a list of area representatives and resource representatives, whose functions are not very clearly defined, but there is curiously no list of contributors, and indeed there appears to be no rationale at all about signatures under articles. Some are signed, but one is left to guess who the author might be. Some are signed with the office held by the author, but no name, e.g. CMS Literature Secretary—hardly very helpful since such officers change. Some are not signed at all. No explanation of all this is offered. There are two indices, the first of 'categories' is confessedly selective (how much use such selectivity can be is a moot point) and is mainly given over to a list of countries and areas, interspersed with denominations and special categories like youth. A supplementary index is added to indicate where further information relative to a particular agency can be found. Over 1,400 agencies are listed with addresses. The project is certainly ambitious, but as will already be apparent marred by certain editorial deficiencies. We turn now to some of the details and shall confine ourselves to matters Anglican and British, where our competence lies.

First, there are some notable omissions. Neither Church Society nor Church Pastoral-Aid Society are mentioned, perhaps because they are essentially home missions, though the former has an Irish branch and both have many overseas contacts. The whole question as to what constitutes an overseas mission wants a full explanation in the preface, but is scarcely mentioned. On the other hand a long established and distinguished body like the Irish Church Missions which works mainly in Eire but has long had offices in London finds no mention while the minute and much more recent Evangelical Protestant Society [English] gets half a column, presumably because it works a little in Ireland. Latimer House, Oxford is not mentioned at all, though its work is as wide as the Anglican Communion. There is, secondly, some inconsistency over British missionary agencies, for Dalton House, Bristol appears under BCMS as a college training women for ministry at home and overseas, whereas St. Michael's House, Oxford, recently amalgamated with Dalton, gets no mention though it does almost identical work. The British Council of Churches' International Department is mentioned, though the much more important Christian-Aid receives no entry and is only alluded to in certain places. No mention is made of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish Councils of Churches nor of the European one.

Thirdly, the addresses given appear to be of the society headquarters only, though this again is not explained; yet if the book is to be the much needed reference work, ought not several addresses to be given, especially where the international address is largely nominal? Scripture Union, for instance, is basically British, but a Swiss not a London

address is given. Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the USA is entered under its mission department, and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students has an entry, but the much larger IVF of London with its expanding work among overseas students does not feature.

Some of these may be just slips or part of the inevitable number of oversights which cannot be avoided in such a project, though it is surprising that such major bodies are entered wrong or omitted. What is, alas, plain is the ignorance of the editors about the whole British, and especially the Church of England, mission set up. They do not explain how they worked, so we are left to guess from the articles and names mentioned what happened. It appears that the editors mostly wrote to secretaries and societies, some of whom, e.g. CMS, wrote first class articles and some of whom virtually transferred their advertising blurb! Thus, under Bible Lands Society, we read 'The Society's help is greatly appreciated by Christian parents'. There is little evidence of any attempt to check and recheck these entries or even to standardise their format. This is bad in a would-be reference work. Most serious of all is the editor's failure to realise how Anglican missionary strategy has worked for centuries. One would have thought that Americans would be capable of recognising the Anglican tradition of missionary *private enterprise*, something which accounted historically for the enormous thrust. If Anglicans had waited for bishops and senior officials in the Government, and leading companies like the East India Company, they would have been sadly handicapped. Enterprising Anglicans saw this long ago and launched their great societies. The American editors seem to have been misled by the fact that there is a Methodist Missionary Society and the Church of Scotland has a missions department and so on. Thus we have articles on Lambeth which tell us that the Lambeth Conference has 'great authority' as a deliberative assembly, and that it is 'the central instance of the "common counsel of the Bishops in conference" which is the effective bond of unity within the Anglican Communion'. It is strange then that Lambeth Conferences contain contradictions, that Bishop Bayne can write of their being ignored, that scholars can advocate the ending of Lambeth gatherings, and on a wider front that such Pan-Anglican projects as MRI are such dismal failures. There is an element of propaganda in the Lambeth article, which is unsigned. The article on the Missionary and Ecumenical Council of the Church Assembly, which is signed and written by one of the Council's servants states rather grandiosely its aims and work, but it is scarcely clear that this baby is still in its cradle, and hardly commands general Anglican confidence; it is doubtful if the majority of Anglicans have ever even heard of it! The main section on the Anglican Communion seems to come under the article entry of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA. By a strange irony that is rather appropriate, for PECUSA has always been the chief driving force behind Pan-Anglicanism.

It is sad that this ambitious project, which would have met a real need, falls short. We can only hope the American section is more reliable, but the book is really a trial run for an important work rather than that work itself. Would it be too much to hope for a revised version for the eightieth anniversary? The main needs are editorial tidying up and copious checks and counterchecks on certain sections. A revised version could meet the undoubted need, and become a Gordon achievement of permanent value. The present volume is a useful beginning, but hardly more than that, and it needs handling with some care.