

*Diastasis, totaliter aliter,* ‘the abolition of man’, ‘no point of contact’! It is not unheard-of even today to have Karl Barth’s theology and the verdict upon it summed up in such terms – as if the young revolutionary who dropped his *Römerbrief* bombshell, and later snarled his angry *Nein!* at Brunner, had on dismissal by the Nazis from Bonn in 1935 disappeared from view, instead of moving straight to Basle, to devote half a lifetime to his mature *Dogmatik.* Among the inalienable rights of late, great theologians, for which lesser practitioners of the art must even more fervently hope, is the honour of being understood and judged, Hegel-fashion, from the end looking back. The sobriety of later years deserves no less attention than the exuberance of youth; and in the case of Barth, one may justly continue to protest an anti-human understanding of God, an unworldly apprehension of creation, or an irrational view of revelation, only after open and objective encounter with his later thinking. Not to be ignored are the many new directions and emphases – at times, conscious repentings – in the *Church Dogmatics*; the remarkable reassessment of the early years in *The Humanity of God*; and the sheer openness, simplicity and modesty of *Evangelical Theology*, his final-semester, ‘swan-song’ lectures before retirement from Basle in 1962.

No one, of course, has ever *dreamt* of offering a verdict on Barth’s *Dogmatics*, in print or in the lecture-room, without a close familiarity with the massive work itself! Yet it is not only first time students of Barth, but also their already well-read mentors, who will find Bromiley’s *Introduction* a particularly valuable secondary tool. (Misleadingly titled, this is in essence a summary of the *Church Dogmatics.*) Bromiley intends to offer no substitute for the real thing; but he recognises how daunting for one and all can be the largeness of its large volumes, and the smallness of its small print. Uniquely qualified, as co-editor with T. F. Torrance of the English translation, Bromiley leads us chapter by chapter, down the arches of the years, down the labyrinthine ways, of Barth’s own mind. Along the way, with extraordinary lucidity, convoluted themes are unravelled and architectonic structures laid bare; and all the while a generous but unobtrusive use of page-references allows careful readers to know exactly where they are, and to move easily between précis and original. Though this is much more than a ‘what happens next’ account, but a highly readable work, full of thought-provoking, self-contained theological discussions in their own right, Bromiley has rightly chosen to keep himself in the background. Critique is minimal. Rarely, perhaps too rarely, are questions put to Barth, or, in his defence, to the critics of Barth. A good
test of the paraphraser’s objectivity is C.D. iv, 4, the concluding ‘Fragment’ on baptism. Bromiley, a passionate and very public defender of the baptising of infants, recounts Barth’s de-sacramentalising of baptism, and his rejection of paedobaptism, without a whisper of dissent. Only in his brief conclusion does he allow his own assessment of Barth’s strengths and weaknesses to become explicit. (Of the criticisms, some reflect Bromiley’s own conservative stance, e.g., Barth’s equivocation on the inspiration of Scripture, and his flirting with universalism; others are directed at flaws which anyone can perceive, such as the highly speculative conceptualising of das Nichtige.) So this aid-to-further-study, which cannot substitute for the Dogmatics itself, cannot replace either the ever growing corpus of critical evaluation. But at least Bromiley has avoided the common temptation of reducing Barth’s broad canvas and long pilgrimage to the Procrustean demands of scholarly shorthand (‘dialectic’, ‘neo-orthodox’, ‘Christomonist’, etc.), or of interpreting him as the exponent of one theme (grace, revelation, etc.), at the expense of his many others.

In truth, of course, Barth knew only one theme for that ‘evangelical’ theology which ‘intends to apprehend, to understand, and to speak of the God of the Gospel, in the midst of the variety of all other theologies’. But need a theology, or a theologian, of the Godness of God be un- or in- or anti-human? The delightful Foreword to the American edition of Evangelical Theology, omitted from an earlier British edition but now included in this reissue by T. & T. Clark, resonates with human warmth, good humour, and the sagacious enjoyment of old age. Barth expresses gratitude for his one, post-retirement, visit to the U.S.A., impishly recalling his ‘fantastic’ experiences of that country, and remembering with self-deprecating amusement the hero’s welcome that awaited him in Chicago, Princeton, and elsewhere, as he presented the first five of his ‘Evangelical Theology’ lectures. The entire series of seventeen pieces, offered as an introduction to dogmatic theology, and as a short account of what Barth thought he had been doing for the past sixty years, falsifies the labelling of him as opaque, authoritarian, or other-wordly. Concerned, right down to the concluding Gloria Patri, only with theological obedience and praise, he apprehends the God he praises not as Wholly Other, or as Absolute, but as Immanuel: partner to, and sharer with, men and women, whom he liberates for human life and speech and understanding. This makes theology a ‘happy science’, a mode of service and prayer, but also of play: the pursuit, in brief, of beauty, as apprehended with faith, hope and wonderment. But this earthing of his task in human experience renders the theologian vulnerable to the darker side of his nature also, to the loneliness, and sheer doubt, that beset his enterprise. Painfully, he knows that his words might sound in the ears of the one he seeks to glorify as a noisy Corinthian gong or clanging cymbal. There is more than historical interest, or pedagogical utility, but a moving glimpse of true human
greatness, in a retrospective volume wherein a ‘giant’, who has written so many important words, and to such acclaim, can still modestly imagine the voice of Amos deflating his aspirations – and ours: ‘I hate, I despise your lectures and seminars...; take away the hue and cry that you old men raise with your thick books and you young men with your dissertations! I will not listen to the melody of your reviews...’!!

ALAN E. LEWIS


What would a structuralist literary critic make of this book? In 1968 the late Roland Barthes wrote disapprovingly: ‘The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author... the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it,’ (*The Death of the Author*). I cannot imagine a study of literature further removed from the attitude of Barthes than this by Elisabeth Jay who clearly announces her intentions in her opening words.

The form in which this book is written is dictated by the belief that we cannot understand the work of the major English nineteenth-century novelists unless we have some knowledge of the world from which they come.

She is very much concerned with authors and the ways in which what they have to say have been shaped by their historical circumstances. Her book is, indeed, a classic example of a certain kind of literary criticism, regarded by some today as old-fashioned and misguided, but which, I believe, still has an important part to play in the interpretation of works of art. And the interpretation of works of art (certain nineteenth-century novels) seems to be her main purpose for she continues

The first part [of the book] provides this detailed background for the second, which considers individual authors and the tradition of Evangelical portrayal.

Yet, if this is the case, the book is oddly ‘partitioned’: two hundred and five pages are given over to the presentation of the historical background and only seventy-seven to the examination of the works of three major, and one minor, Victorian novelists. This leads me to wonder if there is some uncertainty of purpose in the book and to raise the question of the centre of the author’s interest. Is she using historical knowledge to increase our understanding of, and quicken our response to, the novels, or is she using the novels to illuminate certain areas of nineteenth-century English history?

That she does throw light on the history of Victorian England is undeniable. Her knowledge of the period is extensive and her presentation,