

Week 3: Dialectical Theology. The de-historicizing of Christology

- ‘Dialectical’ theology was more than just a response to frustration about unsuccessful historical Jesus research.
- Rejection of history as major point of reference for Christology/soteriology.
- Often framed as caused and justified by WW I, but must ultimately be judged by its answers.

1. Søren Abaye Kierkegaard (1831-1855)

- Philosophical Fragments (1844). Online at: <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/texts/text7a.htm>
- Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments (1846)
- P.L. Gardiner, *Kierkegaard*, Oxford 1988
- A. Hannay (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, Cambridge 1997
- J. Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates. A Study in Philosophy and Faith*, Cambridge 2006.

Kierkegaard II

- Wholehearted rejection of Hegelian synthesis.
- Dichotomy of faith and knowledge.
- Religious truth is attained as something alien to humans. → Cannot be gained by 'Socratic' method.
- It involves sin, the conscious turning away of humans from God.
- Therefore it can only be taught by a teacher who can first change the learner → God himself.

Kierkegaard III

- God must approach the human being as someone like him → Incarnation.
- This is paradoxical, the Absolute Paradox.
- Causes polemical response; only accepted through 'leap' into faith.
- → Faith is always miracle.
- Therefore no difference between 'first' and 'second' disciple.

Kierkegaard IV

- The fascination of this 'Christology' lies in its focus on the utter strangeness of the union of divine and human.
- Also: no 'impartial' Christology possible, only faith will grasp it (intimate connection with existentialist anthropology!)
- No conceptualisation of the Incarnation as such (it's a paradox!)

2. The early Karl Barth

- K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1919, 2nd ed. 1921, ET: 1933.
- T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth. An Introduction to his Early Theology*, London 1962.
- B. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, Oxford 1995.
- R.E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis. The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period*, Tübingen 2001.

Karl Barth (1886-1968)

- From 1911 pastor at Safenwil (Switzerland)
- Break with the liberalism of his academic teachers and their forebears (esp. Schleiermacher)
- Influence of Kierkegaard, Kant, Religious Socialism (and indeed political socialism).
- Major criticism of theology since 18th century: put humanity at the centre of theology, rather than God.

Barth III

- Major document of his early period is his commentary on Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*
- Barth all but ignores historical scholarship.
- Reads St Paul under the assumption that he was speaking of God – the problems with that would be the same then and now.
- Central tenet (with Kierkegaard): dichotomy of God and man.
- Christ signifies the intersection of two planes, a known and an unknown.

Barth IV

- ‘The point on the line of intersection is no more extended onto the known plane than is the unknown plane of which it proclaims the existence. The effulgence, or, rather, the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell, the void by which the point on the line of intersection makes itself known in the concrete world of history, is not – even though it be named the life of Jesus – that other world which touches our world in Him.’
(29)

Barth V

- Combination of two elements from Kierkegaard: infinite difference between God and humanity & Incarnation as a paradox.
- Consequently, Christological focus on the resurrection:
- The Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God, and the apprehending of God in Jesus. The Resurrection is the emergence of the necessity of giving glory to God: the reckoning with what is unknown and unobservable in Jesus, the recognition of him as Paradox ... In the resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world ... (30)

Barth VI

- At the resurrection Jesus is 'proclaimed' Son of God (cf. Rom 1, 4) – this is all that matters:
- '[This] is the significance of Jesus, and, apart from this, Jesus has no more significance or insignificance than may be attached to any man or thing or period of history in itself.' (30)
- The crucial event is not the 'merging or fusion' of God and man, but the unveiling of the coming Kingdom of God.

Barth VII

- Relevance of eschatology (cf. Schweitzer!)
- Barth: this meant an expectation of something entirely different from history, not some dramatic end of history.
- Rejects assumption of early Christian 'crisis' because the Parousia, the 2nd coming of Christ, did not occur.
- Eschatology is as much a matter of hope now as it was then:

Barth VIII

- ‘But that day and that hour no man knoweth – *not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father* (Mk 13, 32). Do not our ears burn when we hear this? Will there never be an end of all our ceaseless talk about the *delay* of the Parousia? ... The end of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event, no legendary ‘destruction’ of the world; it has nothing to do with any historical, or ‘telluric’ or cosmic catastrophe. The end of which the New Testament speaks is really the End; so utterly the End, that in the measuring of nearness or distance our nineteen hundred years are not merely of little, but of no importance’. (500)

Barth IX

- Barth manages to break away from major Christological patterns of the 19th century.
- The liabilities of the early 20th century discovery of eschatology are virtually turned into an asset.
- Theocentric, not Christocentric theology.
- Notion of the Incarnation practically vanishes: Jesus is an occasion for the resurrection to occur.