

If the question be asked, "What are the basic teachings of Karl Barth?" the question may be answered by looking at Barth's theological method, his controlling presuppositions, and some of his theological positions.

## THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

### Barth's Theological Method

Karl Barth attempted to repudiate every alliance with philosophy in order to develop a genuine "theology of the Word". Unfortunately, he adopted a number of first principles, the application of which to Scripture results in an exegesis which in a number of cases is forced, and a theology which, at many points, contradicts not only Scripture but also itself! His theological method may be represented by the following four steps:

- (1) He adopts certain philosophical-theological presuppositions
- (2) He draws certain logical inferences from these presuppositions
- (3) He applies these presuppositions and their logical inferences to his exegesis of Scripture, and interprets Scripture by means of them
- (4) He reluctantly admits that in some cases such application and interpretation cannot be fully carried out

### Barth's Basic (and Controlling) Presuppositions

#### 1. God is wholly transcendent

This foundation principle of all of Barth's theology is expressed in the Preface to the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*. Barth writes:

If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.

God is thus the totally Other. He is transcendent in every respect: in identity, in essence, and in character. God is infinite, man is finite; God is holy, man is sinner. Thus there is an infinite, unbridgeable chasm between God and man.

#### 2. God is rationaly inapprehensible

The discontinuity between God and man is so great that whatever we may say about God must of necessity be filled with paradox and contradiction. God cannot be known rationally, but only existentially.

#### 3. God is sovereign

God always remains above and free from created reality at every point. He is never caught in His own being, or in His decrees, or in His works, or in any system of "revealed truths".