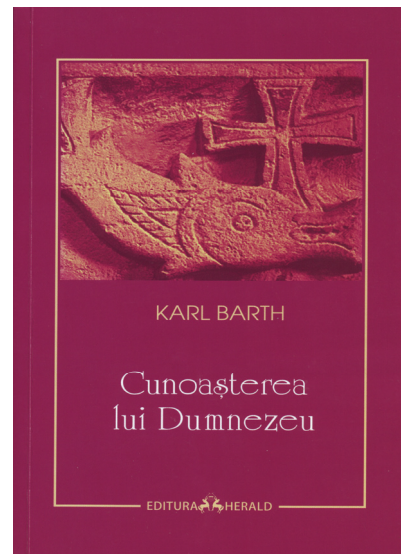


***The knowledge of God and the service of God***  
*According to the teaching of the reformation recalling the*  
*Scottish Confession of 1560*



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Karl Barth. *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu și slujirea lui Dumnezeu conform învățaturii reformate*. (Prelegerile Gifford despre Confesiunea Scoțiană susținute la Universitatea din Aberdeen în anii 1937 și 1938). Romanian translation by Laurian Kertesz & Emanuel Fișteag. Bucharest: Herald, 2011. Pp. 251

The book of the theologian Karl Barth has to be seen respecting the author's desire: that of combining the explicative-critique presentation with the basic texts of the *Scottish Confession of Faith*, without realizing an historical analysis of the problems. The main subject of Lord Gifford's will was the profound study of "the natural theology" and the Reformation teachings, but the paradox consists in the fact that the teachings of the Protestant Reformation and the renewal of the Church lay on the revelation of God and implicitly the total denial of "the natural theology". The two contrasting approaches prove to complete themselves, and the interest of this paperwork is the dialectic step made by Karl Barth in order to clarify the existing paradox.

The twenty lectures of Karl Barth are a Reformation faith testimony that helps us in understanding that: „the way of man,

however, as the way in which God goes with him, is the history of Jesus Christ, i.e. the history of the victory in which God proves His glory even in the Fall of man and therefore the history of the restoration of man's glory is also necessary" (p.12).

Actually, Karl Barth's lectures are clarifications made to the Scots' Confession from 1560 (of the 25 articles) and a prolongation of Lord Gifford's desires of teaching "natural theology" - „a science of God, of the relations in which the world stands to Him and of the human ethics and morality resulting from the knowledge of Him”(p.52); even though Barth agrees: „such a science as Lord Gifford had in mind does exist, but I do not see how it is possible for it to exist”(p.53). If other Reformation confessions, together with Ancient and Modern dogmatic systems, get a special doctrine over the sin of Man, the *Scottish Confession* did not approach this subject. We witness a form of anthropology of the Reformation in which the sin of Man is accepted and perceived, by means of God's truth, as a common thing, in which the history of humankind and all people's sins are present in the history of the Man-Jesus Christ. The connection between the sin and the grace forbids us to allow the sin that can overwhelm or the human pessimism that can destroy the soul to get the last word.

The articles 7 and 8 have to be taken together, because by them we can find another new perspective over the Christological question „Cur Deus Homo”. The authors of the confession desired that *the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination* has to be understood by means of *Christology* and by other way around it, but they omitted to explain this mutual relation. It is the place in which Karl Barth intervenes, unifying two distinctive levels of meaning: “the course of action that God adopts towards man is identical with the existence of Jesus Christ. The existence of Jesus Christ is, eventually, the decision of and the choice of man” (p.108).

Studying thoroughly the themes, Karl Barth emphasizes two errors: an objective one, belonging to Calvin; and a subjective one belonging to the Lutherans. He concludes by saying that: „The true mystery of Predestination is neither the secular mystery of determinism nor the equally, secular mystery of Indeterminism, but the holy and real mystery of Jesus Christ” (p.115).

The deepness of Confession is to be found in the article 12 that brings arguments in the favor of the fact that to serving God and God's cognition are inseparable. These call and they are in fact two concentric centers – an assertion of the Psalm 36:9, „In tuo lumine

vedebimus lumen” / „We see the light in our own light”. The knowledge of God supposes obedience towards God; the obedience means to accept the truth; and, in the light of the truth embracing, to accept our salvation.

The 14<sup>th</sup> lecture of the author is a kind of unification of the 16, 17 and 25 articles, regarding his view over the Church, the immortality of the soul and the gifts offered to the Church, as a specific Confession: “Out of the quihilk Kirk, there is neither life, nor eternall happiness” (p.176); and, according to Barth, „The road that leads from the outward form of the Church to Its mystery, from the two-sided visible and public character to the true nature, unity and Holiness of It, that is the road of faith”(p.180).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> lecture, regarding the Church and the churches, the author launches the question: who will be the judge of the doctrine? He presents a different position to that sustained by the Catholic doctrine of the time and he considers that the world’s standards such as the age of the Church, Its place, the succession, the number of the Apostles do not convince in valuating the Truth, because all of them sustains the human judgment and not the real. „The true Church is distinguished from the false only by the fact that in It Jesus Christ is *present in His power*” (p.190).

Three distinctive points are mentioned when the references are to the Truth of God in connection with His Church – some aspects that refer to the spiritual nature and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. But the final criteria of judgment are attributed to the supreme Instance, to God Himself.

An interesting point of view is that of the continuous Reformation, “the true Church, i.e. the reformed Church, is always undergoing this reformation, the reformation, that is, of Its preaching, sacraments and ordinance by the Word of God” (p.192). This is an open approach that is adapting to the new generation view and to the course of history, generally; this is a reform to be understood as a true spiritual change from inside.

„The Confession needs to be read and understood as a signpost pointing of the Scripture”(p.59). The next lecture explains the fact that article 20 of the Confession does not deny the authority of the Councils and the human instruments to lead the Church, but claims a justification that focuses on God’s words, a justification that is not final, but continuously adapted, always reformatted; it is a confession of active belief, never completely concluded, always on its way...

In Its recognized limits, the Confession opens a pathway towards God's words, in a humble way; and It has to be perceived from the perspective of the specific time It has been written. I stress such a position, because the subject regarding the Sacraments has to be understood as belonging just to the Reformation theological part (considering mainly the Baptism and the Last Supper), being written in controversy with the service of the Church in the Middle Age and being understood as church service and work of the faith in the Holy Spirit. Although, a slight distinction, which is specific to the Reformation dogma, can be perceived: „The church service would be a lost cause if its content is the Christian piety and morality and not the Christian faith” (p.213).

The Scottish Confession recognizes that the religious service was instituted by God Himself and it can not be separated by its content. Thus, it explains the Reformation point of view, opposite to the Roman-Catholic one regarding the true function of the sacraments. Karl Barth tries to outline a deep problem that would be not the religious service and its beauty, its solemnity and its mystery, but the problem of our obedience. From this obedience, the man's true spiritual change can emerge together with the reformation of the religious service that proved to be a constant interest of the evangelical churches: „the church existing through revelation and continuing to exist through faith” (p.222). However, the conclusion of all times is taken in consideration by Karl Barth, as regards both the Catholic and the Protestant positions: „The Roman Catholic church has a sacramental service without preaching... We have a service with a sermon, but without sacraments. Both types of services are impossible” (p.224). The desired solution is to accept a sincere critique of the religious service, which represents a theological act, a disputable, adaptable and scrutinized one; “this effort of criticism, scrutiny and discrimination, all things that are considered, represents nothing else than *theology*” (p.227).

„The State's service of God” – the title of the 24<sup>th</sup> article – is one of an unquestionable interest even today, with its intention to find the universal answer besides the affirmations made since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The relation between the state and the Church, the moral implications and the ethical reasons, the world as mission of the Church, the political order and the service, the faith order and the force are some of the themes mentioned in this article.

The presentation ends with a personal prayer analyzed by Karl Barth: „Arise, Oh, Lord, and let the enemies to amaze themselves; let them to flee from thy presence that they hate: Your God name. Give Your servants the strength to speake Your word, and let al the cleaved peoples to knowledge You.” (p.250).

The theologian reflects that the natural theology does not need such a prayer to understand the entire measure exposed in the lectures; but the Reformation teachings do. Is it an advantage, finally?