

[Unpublished book review by Gordon H. Clark from his papers at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary. A note on the original indicates that it was sent to Christianity Today. The date of the review is c. 1961. - DJD, 28 Nov, 2014]

TWO BOOKS BY KARL BARTH

Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, by Karl Barth

(John Knox Press, 1960, 173 pp. \$3.00) and

Deliverance to the Captives, by Karl Barth

(SCM Press Ltd., 1961, 160 pp.)

are reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, Professor of Philosophy, Butler University.

Finally – although Carrère's French translation also came as late as 1958 – Barth's Anselm, first published in 1931, has been translated into English, by a man so modest that his name does not appear on the title page – Ian Robertson.

Barth's detailed analysis of Anselm's argument, including the reply to Gaunilo, aims to show “That Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God has been repeatedly called the 'Ontological' Proof of God, that commentators have refused to see that it is in a different book altogether from the well-known teaching of Descartes and Leibniz, that anyone could seriously think that it is even remotely affected by what Kant put forward against these doctrine – all that is so much nonsense on which no more words ought to be wasted” (p. 171).

According to Barth Anselm did not try to prove the existence of God a priori, from the definition of God, as Descartes did, nor is Anselm's proof based on some neutral proposition acceptable to an unbeliever. A thesis, such as the existence of God or why God became man is taken as an unknown x, and its proof consists in deducing it from propositions a, b, c, which are taken as known parts of the Creed. Thus, proof of x depends on showing its necessary connection with the remainder of the Christian faith. Obviously Kant's remarks are irrelevant to such a procedure.

Even within this framework Barth denies that the existence of God is deduced from his nature.

He holds that it is deduced from the revealed name of God – that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But can a name that is not a mere name like Charles, but is rather a descriptive phrase, be so sharply separated from the nature of God? Does not such a phrase tells us something of what God is? On the answer to this question depends one's view as to the locus of Gaunilo's foolishness.

One may also doubt that Barth's view of the creedal framework of the proof, even though it describes Anselm's actual procedure in Cur Deus Homo, does justice either to his procedure in the Proslogion or to his avowed intention in Cur Deus Homo: “Leaving Christ out of view, as if nothing had ever been known of him, it proves by absolute reasons the impossibility that any man should be saved without him,” and that Christ's death must be proved “reasonable and necessary” so as to convince one “unwilling to believe anything not previously proved by reason.” At the end of his work Anselm makes his pupil say, “By this solution ... I see the truth of all that is contained in the Old and New Testaments, for in proving that God became man by necessity, leaving out what was taken from the Bible ..., you convince both Jew and pagan by the mere force of reason.”

But in any case Barth's book is a major contribution to Medieval studies.

After one has read Barth's scholarly Anselm and perchance some of his profound Church Dogmatics, it became a matter of interest what kind of sermons such a great man preaches, particularly to the prisoners in the Basel jail.

But how review a book of sermons? Naturally they are quite a come-down from his great writings. Some will strike a reader as good, others as poor. The first sermon of the collection seems strained at the beginning, rescued only by a peculiar shift to a pertinent application at the end. The second is a delightful Christmas message that could hardly be improved upon. And so on.

The message of the sermons seems to be that all men are totally depraved sinners who can be saved only by the grace of God exhibited in Christ's vicarious atonement. Therefore no one should be anxious about anything, least of all hell, for God has mercy on all, and even the unrepentant thief was saved: “Peter and the remaining disciples could only 'get in line behind' the two criminals who were first and up front. This is true for men of all times” (p 82).