

## BARTHIAN FOG

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THE PRESBYTERIAN has been honored with three splendid articles by Dr. John W. Bowman, on Barthianism. [*to be posted soon*] The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., is fortunate in having Dr. Bowman, and the Presbyterian Church, U.S., is fortunate in having Rev. Holmes Rolston as experts on Barthianism. We do not know Dr. Bowman, but we assign him a place in the galaxy of scholars.

The Achilles heel of Barthian Theology is his doctrine of Scripture, especially of Inspiration. The formation of the written word is a "*paradox*" in Barthian language. A paradox is a contradiction. The written word has a human and a divine element, which, according to Barth, are in contradiction. The human letter or writing is the human element, and as it is wholly human, and contradicts the divine, it is imperfect, and therefore an infallible word is impossible.

Barth is willing to admit that the influx of the divine revelation to the prophet's mind is of God, and is infallible. But the efflux, resulting in the writing of the Word, is only human and faulty. All this is due to an inadequate view of Inspiration, and a neglect of the testimony of the Scriptures, which are our only source of information.

One error of Barth in this is an inheritance from the philosophy of Hegel. We observed in studying Hegel's philosophy that he called a difference a contradiction. A human element and a divine element are different, but not a contradiction. If you are a semi-Pantheist, you will identify the human and divine. If you are a normal Theist, you will recognize an almighty immanence, and a supernatural providence, that can guarantee an infallible efflux and produce an infallible Word.

Barth's conception of the Word of God is subjected to a tenuous refinement like Kant's "*Ding an sich*," till it is difficult to get one's fingers on it. The written word is not the word of God, according to Barth. The spoken word is not the word. It is something in and through and behind all this.

Here is the German tendency to go back of the thing to the thing behind the thing, which always results in vagueness. A good example is the recent Form Criticism. It all has an unsettling tendency.

Somewhat more confusing is Barth's Dialectic, which he inherited from Hegel, who borrowed it from Fichte. It is called "logic"; but in our estimation it is not logic at all. When a conclusion necessarily results from the combination of major and minor premises, we call that logic. But the German scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, is to our mind an invalid process, because there is no necessary connection in thought between the synthesis and the other terms. But perhaps we may say casually that a German would not be indigenous without some idiosyncrasy. The tendency to mere speculation and vagueness is confusing to an American who looks for conciseness and terse expression. Theology as a whole is capable of simple and lucid statement. Job said: "Oh, that my adversary had written a book!" But we may say: "Oh, that the German critics would talk United States!"

Barth deserves praise for exalting the sovereignty and authority of God; but his doctrine of Scripture is fatal to any sound theology.

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