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Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic 1932–1933: A Summons to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich. By **Angela Dienhart Hancock**. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013. xvi + 372 pp. $42.00.

Angela Dienhart Hancock offers a fascinating and engaging contextual reading of Barth's homiletic by setting it into a thick description of the political, academic and theological context of the end of the Weimar republic and the rise of the Third Reich in Germany.

The book is made up of two major parts: the setting of the scene and the representation of Barth's homiletic lectures. The first part, which makes up more than half of the volume, provides a detailed picture of the setting into which Barth's homiletic speaks, narrowing in on the scene from four different angles. In chapter 1, which sketches the trajectory of Karl Barth's theological biography from his studies in Marburg onwards, Hancock gives special attention to Barth's discovery of the threefold form of the Word. Against "many a flatfooted reading of Barth" (30) which perceive him as one-sidedly pointing to transcendence, Hancock aligns with those strands of Barth interpretation reading him as a strongly contextual thinker. She points out Barth's complex engagement with culture by the Leitmotifs of *Realdialektik* and *analogia fidei*, borrowing a concept from George

Hunsinger to draw on Bruce McCormack's analysis of Barth (26–30). Chapter 2, a portrayal of the political history of Weimar, highlights the precarious and unstable situation of the young republic after the war, the rise of National Socialism and how it impacted and was witnessed by Barth, the German church, and the theological academy. As a third angle, chapter 3 zooms in to scrutinize the political language of the Weimar years. Hancock dismisses the characterization of Germans as unpolitical as a myth. The permeation of the press, propaganda, theology and everyday language by political pathos shows them to be "hyper-political," if anything (97). In this situation, Barth's "silence" with regard to political events has to be read as a determined way to "deprive them of their pathos" (121) and, thus, as a "strategy of nonviolent resistance" (122). As a fourth route of advance to Barth's homiletic, Hancock presents the homiletic tradition and developments from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Emil Pfennigsdorf, professor of practical theology in Bonn at the time when Barth embarks on his own homiletic enterprise. She highlights the "war sermon" as a new paradigm of preaching as well as the conspicuous absence of studies about the homiletic of the Weimar era. She demonstrates how the "theme" sermon and the effectiveness of preaching become the call of the hour from "Political Theologians" (170). Barth's turn away from "theme" preaching towards the biblical text and from a rhetorical and formal homiletic to a principal homiletic stands in stark contrast to this use, but also in continuity to the enterprise of taking the modern listener and the modern task of preaching seriously: "Barth's emergency homiletic was born of the conviction that how these novice preachers went about their task as Weimar crumbled mattered" (91).

The second, somewhat shorter, part of the book (chapters 5-6), is dedicated to a re-narration of Barth's lectures on homiletics in the winter semester of 1932–33 and the summer semester of 1933. Hancock takes into account not only the published version of 1966, but also Charlotte von Kirschbaum's notes and student protocols, thus providing insight into hitherto unpublished sources. Session for session, she gives a synoptic account of the political developments around Barth's classroom and of the content of his teaching.

The tumultuous historic events covered start from the electoral campaign for presidential election in July 1932 up to the church elections of July 1933. She shows how in this agitated context, Barth's homiletic spoke out against fixed schemas of interpretation and application, how he encouraged the students "to think for themselves and made a point of engaging their ideas" (209). Again and again, Barth urged for careful listening to the biblical text over against already knowing what it should say, over and against theme sermons and political uses of the text—"the text is not to serve us, but we are to serve it" (264). In turn, Hancock convincingly shows that Barth is neither

opposed to historical criticism nor to taking the hearer and the situation into account—indeed, Barth is shown to stand in the tradition of modern homiletic, but opposing its political instrumentalization. His aim is to "decenter the preacher and deinstrumentalize the practice of preaching" (235), calling the students as preachers over again to humility and respect of the text. Barth reminds his students that a thorough exegetical study of the text in the original language is the minimum preparation necessary for a sermon (275) and that they have to take the "particular individuality" of the people under the Word into account—while, of course, the particular individuality is to be well differentiated from general concepts like "Volk" or "Rasse" (288).

In effect, Hancock portrays Barth's classroom as "the eye of the hurricane—a place of relative calm amid the roar and bluster of the Third Reich" (321), not shying back from the conclusion that "it was a place of resistance" (321). Barth's homiletic as well as his preaching in the time is conceived as "resistance, not in spite of, but because of, its disciplined attention to the way of witness of the biblical text" (310). "It is a strategy of nonviolent resistance that meets the pathos of conservativism with what Barth calls the 'Great Positive Possibility'—love of the other—and not with the pathos of revolution, which returns evil for evil and incites ideological warfare" (122).

The ambitious scope of her "synoptic" project—bringing political history, church history, history of homiletics, Barth's life and work, and finally, Barth's homiletic into a common scene—precludes that each of these areas be covered in detail. Thus, the choice of sources indicates that within each area, Hancock strongly relies on one or two main voices (Scholder/Evans, McCormack). At times, this makes for a certain bias in her representation. I will name just two examples, which however touch her main theses. One, the rhetoric of "resistance" is applied in a somewhat uncritical way—since Scholder, two generations of historians have been questioning the adequacy of this concept to any of the protagonists in the German church at that time. At least, the term would have to be clarified and defined more explicitly and critically rather than being reproduced emphatically. Two, Hancock's use of the concept "Political Theology," although not completely uncommon, shows the same bias. Both concepts are not just minor but pivotal terms within her study, as her main aim is to portray Barth's classroom as a point of resistance, founded in the word of God, against the political theology of contemporary homiletics.

Also, as the explicit aim of the author is to set Barth's homiletic into context, it is surprising how little the different parts interact. Mostly, they form a synoptic form of different narratives providing a certain contrast for each other, rather than being linked conceptually. For example, some key concepts

of the first part somehow go missing on the way to the second ("*Realdialektik*," "*analogia fidei*," etc).

Finally, after the account of Barth's classes on homiletics, I would have expected a concluding, more analytical chapter drawing the different strands together and examining them theoretically. Instead, a very short "Postscript" leaves the reader more or less with the impression of Barth's words only (324–328).

In a certain way, one could argue that Hancock "preaches" Barth's homiletic. She proves a faithful student of Barth. Hancock's account of Barth's homiletic is more a detailed, close-to-the-text re-narration, set into context as a study in contrasts, rather than an analysis. This shows a certain will to let Barth speak for himself, a treatment any good (Barthian) preacher would give his/her text. The extensive and valuable contextualization helps to "provide more insight into what was heard than into what was said" (193). Interjections like, "How this . . . would have sounded in . . . one can only imagine" (228) or "How hard this would be to hear for these young German Protestant ministerial candidates . . . " (236), are common. Hancocks's love for Barth also shows in her faithfulness to his language. The use of German terms throughout the book gives her account a colorful and authentic style. Occasional unfortunate glitches in German grammar and spelling don't slight this flavor. The book aims for effect, for a certain impact on the reader, and it aims well. One is left with a stark impression rather than being subsequently convinced of a certain point. The extensive historical "introduction" prepares the reader's "point of contact," enables us to listen well to the Word proclaimed here. This homiletic tone of voice is not a mistake: Hancock's openly reveals her own agenda. She concludes, "Surely Karl Barth's efforts to teach young people to preach in a time of political, ecclesiastical, academic, rhetorical, and homiletical turmoil have continuing relevance for everyone who walks into a seminary classroom or steps into a pulpit today" (327). Barth can speak to us today as we, too, "know something of what a partisan and media-saturated environment is like. We know something of economic turmoil. We know something of the pathos that rails against enemies, foreign and domestic. We know something of a church that longs for full pews and public influence" (327). A hundred years after the Great War, we might be reasonably sure that the "Spirit of 1914" will not be easily whipped up by theologians and preachers again. However, American civil religion and German subjectivist theories of religiosity might be even more legitimizing of a political status quo than any openly "Political Theology." In this sense, Hancock's study is of utmost importance while the church still seeks for its place in a public and political landscape within developments that are—in their own terms—sometimes not much less disconcerting than in the Weimar years.

Angela Dienhart Hancock is a historian and a systematic theologian, but at the heart of it, she is first and foremost a preacher. With her reading, she provides a detailed and faithful homily on the text of Barth's homiletic, calling her readers in turn to attention, reflection and action. Minor formal and methodical reservations should not distract from the fact that Hancock has provided a very rich and thorough, engaged and engaging account, ripe with scholarship and insight—and with an inspiring rapture with Barth. Her book will delight Barth scholars and theology students for years to come. It is to be hoped that the critical edition of Barth's homiletic lectures she asks for will be provided quite soon.

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