

2. History of Religions School (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*)--this school is often reckoned to have begun with the work of Otto Pfleiderer (*Primitive Christianity*, 1887). The comparative religions approach to Christianity reflects the impact of the vast amounts of material from antiquity uncovered by nineteenth century scholars combined with ideas of evolutionary progression received from Darwin.

The most radical thinkers of this group--note especially Richard Reitzenstein (1861-1931) and Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920)--tended to see Christianity as a syncretistic religion which combined various religious and philosophical ideas from a wide variety of sources in the ancient world. In particular, we note here that Reitzenstein and Bousset both affirmed that Christianity was indebted to Gnostic myths for its interpretation of Jesus. The idea of Gnostic backgrounds was taken up by Rudolph Bultmann and his students and continues to inform many more radical approaches to the present day. A good introduction to this problem is found in Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Eerdmans, 1971).

3. Karl Barth (1886-1968) and the Dialectical Theology

The twentieth century saw a major revolt against certain directions taken by nineteenth century theology, particularly its optimism about the progress of the human race. This revolt was initiated by the publication of Barth's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1918), which "fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians." In this and subsequent works Barth returned to a basically Reformation theology with a strong emphasis on human depravity and the absolute need for God's grace.

In regard to Scripture Barth attempted to cut a new way between the old orthodox view that the Bible was the very Word of God and the liberal view that the Bible was merely the word of man. For Barth the Bible was the witness to the Word. The true Word was God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The importance of the Bible (and for Barth it was very important) was that it served to point us to Christ and was the means whereby that revelation might be made present to us today.

Barth was critical of the historicizing exegesis of liberalism. Such interpretation was more concerned with the critical history behind the text or with the preliminary critical analysis of the text than with the word itself. In his preface to the second edition of *Romans* (1921) Barth wrote:

My complaint is that recent commentators confine themselves to an interpretation of the text which seems to me to be no commentary at all, but merely the first step towards a commentary. Recent commentaries contain no more than a reconstruction of the text, a rendering of the Greek words and phrases by their precise equivalents, a pumber of additional notes in which archaeological and philological material is gathered together, and a more or less plausible arrangement of the subject-matter in such a manner that it may be made historically and psychologically intelligible from the standpoint of pure pragmatism. Jülicher and Lietzmann know far better than I do how