



Confessional Theology?: A Critical Analysis of the Theology of Karl Barth and Its Significance for the Belhar Confession

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Christian confessions are usually seen as statements of faith which has no relationship with politics. The result is a tendency to view these documents as theological but not political. This study discusses this misconception but adds that although these documents are not to be perceived as political per se, that they can nonetheless not ignore the political contexts from which they emerge. Two confessional documents are discussed to illustrate the point, viz the 'Barmen Theological Declaration' (1934) in Nazi-Germany as well as the Belhar Confession (1986) during apartheid South Africa. The findings of the study is that the theology of Karl Barth and therefore the 'Belhar Confession' establishes and unavoidable link between christian confessions and politics. The word 'confession' is used here in relation to Barth's interpretation of our responsibility to speak about God because of the fact that we are christian and also our inability to speak about God as if God is known in God's entire to our. Seen in this way, confessional theology is opposed to tendencies that gives the impression that we are able to speak about God as if we know god in God's entirety. Five characteristics in the theology of Barth are investigated. These characteristics illustrate the degree to which theology is related to politics. It also point out the fact that politics was never a marginal factor in the theological reflections of Barth. The study suggests that the theology of Barth remains relevant because it interprets the Word in a manner that does not ignore the contexts in which this interpretation of the Word takes place. The study furthermore suggests that the entire theology of Barth can be construed as confessional theology. It arrives at this end and makes very clear that confessional theology differs fundamentally from 'confessionalism', but that confessional theology always calls for those who espouse it to embody that which is confessed. To uphold the characteristics of confessional theology in the theology of Barth, it is agreed that his theology continued to play significant roles in different theological contexts. It is because of this view that it is argued that the theology of Barth had a great influence on the Belhar Confession. The debate around the Belhar Confession brings further important questions about the theological situation in South Africa today. In the end it is suggested that confessional theology is a significant theological method which can safeguard theology from the claws of 'theologised politics'. Confessional theology can thus make a significant contribution to the current theological debates in democratic South Africa.

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