

of the Sunday Schools. Nearly every person interviewed had nostalgic and grateful memories of their attendance. Sarah Williams is sure that such high attendance of children of non-churchgoing families is a case of 'religion by deputy'. It was not simply to get the children out of the way, but a demonstration of values which the parents held. Would a study as rich as this be possible for the years 1939-1999?

TONY CROSS

CHARLOTTE VON KIRSCHBAUM AND KARL BARTH: A STUDY IN BIOGRAPHY AND THE HISTORY OF THEOLOGY by Suzanne Selinger *Penn State University Press, distributed by The Eurospan Group, 1998. Pp. ix+206. £35.95 hbk; £15.95 pbk.*

Karl Barth (1886-1968) first met Charlotte von Kirschbaum (1899-1975) in 1924. He had recently moved from being a pastor in Switzerland to being a professor in Germany. The second edition of his famous commentary on the *Ad Romanos* (1922) had made him famous in theological circles. Lollo (as she was known) was a nurse; she had not been to university, was interested in theology and thinking of becoming a (Lutheran) deaconess. Barth had been married since 1913, unhappily almost from the start.

By 1926 Lollo was Barth's secretary, assistant and constant companion. Both his and her family were hostile to the relationship, indeed it alienated her from her family for the rest of her life. In 1933 Barth wrote to his wife asking for a divorce; she refused, which meant under the German laws of the time that he could take the matter no further. Von Kirschbaum became a member of Barth's household — 'Tante Lollo' to his children. When students and colleagues called, his wife would open the front door while she would be waiting to greet them at the top of the stairs to take them into the great man's study. Until her mental breakdown in the early 'sixties (something like Alzheimer's) and final removal to a nursing home, she was indispensable to Barth's teaching and writing. He was getting old anyway, of course; but it seems likely that he could have completed a bit more of the *Church Dogmatics* if she had been able to help him. He visited her every Sunday until his death, singing chorales to her since by then she was almost unable to communicate. His son-in-law continued the Sunday visits and his widow came occasionally. Von Kirschbaum's remains were buried in the Barth family tomb.

It is a puzzling, moving, even rather terrible story. Whether they were ever lovers, Selinger thinks, we can never know: Barth did nothing to dispel the gossip. In many ways, as Selinger shows, he controlled and exploited her; in many ways she dominated his life. As his intellectual partner almost from the outset, she was included in the discussions with the theologians who came to see him. Some

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became her friends: Helmut Gollwitzer, one of Barth's most celebrated students, preached at her funeral. Barth's students revered her.

While it is clear that the *Church Dogmatics* would not exist in its present form, if at all, but for her collaboration, Selinger is sceptical about suggestions that she actually wrote a lot of it herself. Her own writings recently appeared in translation: *The Question of Woman*, edited with an introduction by Eleanor Jackson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996). Selinger, described as a Barthian and a feminist on the cover, compares what von Kirschbaum writes about the male-female relationship as the site of the image of God with what Barth writes and brings out the differences as well as the likely interdependencies. Barth's remarks about marital fidelity, the difficulties of marriage, adultery, etc., become even more painful; his (and her) insistence on the Song of Songs as the supreme celebration in Scripture of what it is to be human, in the mutual love of man and woman, becomes even more powerful. A well documented study (though with a poor index), Selinger's book takes up a central theme in theological anthropology, treated by Barth and von Kirschbaum in interesting ways, though readers are more likely to be interested in the extent of the collaboration, and in this very remarkable woman.

FERGUS KERR OP

THE VENERABLE BEDE by **Benedicta Ward SLG** *Geoffrey Chapman*, London. 1998. Pp. iv + 160, £10.99 hbk.

This excellent book is a welcome re-issue of that first published in 1990; it contains an up-dated bibliography and some additions to the chapter on the cult of Bede. Its six well and clearly-written chapters examine Bede's life and times, his writings and his enduring influence on later generations.

Bede's best known works are the *Ecclesiastical History* and his writings on the saints, but he had a very wide range of interests, and wrote on time, mathematics, language, history, hagiography, the Fathers and Scripture. These were not separate areas of interest for him, but parts of a wider whole. The unifying link in all that he wrote is his understanding of Scripture. The value of Scripture for Bede is discussed by Dr Ward in her important chapter on Bede and the Bible; here she discusses not only the contents of Bede's scriptural writings, but how Scripture lay at the heart of his understanding of salvation history, of God's working in the world. His writings on Scripture are among the least known and read, but for him they were the basis of his understanding of reality, of God's creation; the text of Scripture was for him the 'bread of life.' His writings, in whatever field, were always a commentary on the Scriptures, had always a