

Karl Barth is famous for, among many things, denying that Christianity is a religion--a denial contexting, much later, his denial of pedobaptism. I say "contexting": his opposition to baptizing babies was only an indirect implicate of his denial that Christianity is a religion....This thinksheet, in denying that Christianity is a religion, only somewhat overlaps Barth's argumentation.

SIDE NOTE: With my rebel personality, primordial Christianity (as a reaction) is a good fit, and settled Christianity (as a religion) is a bad fit. A borderline case: toilet-trained to institution, but not house-broken.

1. In my study today (26Mar84), a man confessed distress over his church's preaching of biblical inerrancy: "I love my church, and I conceal my conviction that inerrancy is a nutty idea. But I feel awful just going along with something I sometimes feel I should fight." I: "Who hasn't this problem who has both a mind and a conscience? There are no perfect congregations, and no congregation perfectly fits any member. Besides, there's more motivation in 'going along' than just 'getting along' for yourself. And again: All life in society involves compromise and negotiation. And all responsible theological thought involves dynamic dialog between the present reality of the Church and churches, on the one hand, and the Great Tradition and one's particular native-or-chosen tradition, on the other." (I've condensed the conversation: I didn't dump all that on him at once!) Me, changing from an antipedobaptist to a pedobaptist church was such a compromise.
2. The NT is necessarily antisemitic in the sense of Judaism-rejecting (not Jew-hating: Christianity is a message from heaven, Jew-hating is a message from hell). Why? Because Judaism is a religion (so you can be born a Jew, and so ritually confirmed at puberty), and Christianity is a reaction to that religion (so you can't be born a Christian--so, logically, at birth you can't be "baptized"--any more than at birth you could have presented yourself for baptism to Jn. Baptist or the Qumran community).
3. Simplistic? Yes, for "Christendom"'s not so neat; it's a blessed/cursed confusion on "initiation" (or "the rite of entry"). Blessed, because the religion/reaction dynamic has been and is powerfully productive theologically and sociologically; cursed, because it's psychologically diastrous and has been so intellectually muddy as to encourage both superstitious nonthought and also downright dishonesty. (The parallels in the world's great religions: Buddhism and Islam.)
4. Latter-day Christians are experimenting toward clarity and psychosocial updating. In 1982, e.g., The Pilgrim Press published Wm. O. Roberts, Jr.'s INITIATION TO ADULTHOOD: AN ANCIENT RITE OF PASSAGE IN CONTEMPORARY FORM. Like much WCC material of several decades ago (to which the book does not refer), it reaches back behind "baptism" and "confirmation" (both, enbattled terms) to the early-Christian and anthropological term "initiation" (meaning, in anthropology, puberty rites). Nor does it refer (a smaller oversight!) to my written efforts, two decades ago, to split "confirmation" into a puberty rite (= "junior c.", completing pedobaptism--the two, time-split, recognizing Christianity as a "religion" with bio-base) and an adult rite (= "senior c.", completing "initiation" into the faith community and celebrating the "reaction" dimension, viz., our faith community as decisional, "For Adults Only"). Rejecting both "conversion" and "confirmation," Roberts (in 1st Ch. of Christ, Middletown, CN) has mixed his own distinctive mud pie. Not that I want to be hard on this pastor: UCC materials tilt toward hormones (early adolescence) but demand adult-mature intellectual and decisional abilities--thus missing both audiences! (In 1962, our UCC study committee on initiation decided to hit both audiences, splitting the literature into junior and senior confirmations--but publication did not follow.)