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ROUGH TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH
PROFESSOR KARL BARTH, MAY 1st

(Held at the offices of Professor Barth's publishers, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 383 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York, May 1, 1962, 11:15 a.m.)

Guest of Honor: Professor Karl Barth

Chairman: Arthur A. Cohen, Director, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Religious Department

MR. COHEN: (after welcoming the guests)
Professor Barth has come to the United States for the first time in his life. He is the guest of honor of the Princeton Theological Seminary, at their 150th Anniversary. He is accompanied at the meeting here today by "his own theological faculty," his two sons, Markus, Professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School -- New Testament, and Christoph -- Old Testament -- who has come from Indonesia for this reunion with his father. Professor Karl Barth's assistant during several decades, Miss von Kirschbaum, is also in the audience.

The meeting today also serves to inaugurate officially Holt, Rinehart and Winston's new Religious Department. Karl Barth's Princeton lectures, expanded and revised, will be the Department's first book on a promising new list. Its title -- Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, to be published in January.

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QUESTION: What is your attitude on nuclear testing?

KARL BARTH: I do not like nuclear testing at all; not if the Russians do it, and not if the West practices it.

QUESTION: What are your feelings on "the Church, the Synagogue, and the State of Israel?"

KARL BARTH: (In reply, Professor Barth told an anecdote of the great Prussian king, Frederick II, who was known to have been an atheist and who allegedly said, when asked whether there was any living proof of God's existence, "Yes, there is one: namely, the Jews.")
And now we have the State of Israel, which is an affirmation of this proof.

- QUESTION: What is your reaction to Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism of your writings as "irrelevant to American theology?" Further, as "infinitely imaginative and irresponsible?"
- KARL BARTH: It would be a pity if it were so. I don't think I teach irresponsibility. What I try to teach is responsibility, toward God simply.
- QUESTION: You have been called the greatest theologian of the 20th century. How do you feel about this statement?
- KARL BARTH: My reaction? I do not like it at all. Who will be the judge? I know my name has now become quite famous, particularly, it seems, in America. But attention passes on to another object very quickly here. Who will speak of me next month, and in a year, who knows?
- I have also been called a giant. Just look at me; I am only a simple, normal human being.
- QUESTION: What is your opinion of the position of religion behind the Iron Curtain?
- KARL BARTH: The position of Christians behind the Iron Curtain is in some ways more difficult than ours; in some ways it is also easier.
- Where there is so much oppression, the great issues of Christianity become clearer, and I have heard some of my theological friends on the other side of the Curtain express the view that they would not like to exchange their lot for a better life in the free West because "now we know what it means to be a Christian..."
- QUESTION: What are your thoughts on Christianity in an affluent society, as opposed to behind the Iron Curtain?
- KARL BARTH: Here, where we can speak freely, it is an easy thing to have (Christianity). But Christianity is not an easy thing, since Christ has been nailed to the Cross. Here we are not challenged enough to become martyrs.
- QUESTION: Have you found your teachings to be of value to children?
- KARL BARTH: I cannot judge the relevance of my teachings respecting children's education. Ask the teachers who have read my writings. It is for them to decide what use they can make of my books in teaching children. I cannot be my own judge.

QUESTION: What is your opinion of the Eichmann Trial?

KARL BARTH: I feel it is a good thing that it all came out into the open, that Hitler's atrocities were made known to the world. It would be a fact of relevance for the whole world if it were decided in Israel that the sentence will not be carried out.

QUESTION: What is your attitude on the Vatican Ecumenical Council?

KARL BARTH: I am not the Pope. Nobody knows exactly what he has in mind. There are different opinions. It is always good if Christians meet. Why should they not do so? But the outcome -- I am not a prophet. I believe that even the most important Catholic thinkers do not know something exact about this matter. So, I am cautious. There is no clear goal. Is the issue a universal Society of Churches, or a kind of new Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, or is it only on certain liturgical teachings, or whether there will be a new dogma perhaps? All things are possible.

QUESTION: What would you like to see?

KARL BARTH: If I were the Pope, I would try to give a proclamation for all Churches and would help to give the people a simple truth, a message, a gospel. But the Pope has not asked me about my opinion.

QUESTION: What problems have Catholics raised in their conversations with you?

KARL BARTH: I have many Roman Catholic friends, and they tell me that even they do not know more about this. Perhaps somebody here is Catholic and can enlighten us.

QUESTION: To come back to an earlier question, would you further discuss Christianity in an affluent society? Did I understand you right, were you saying that Christians behind the Iron Curtain are better Christians than we are here?

KARL BARTH: I did not say better. Better -- that is a judgment that cannot be made.

QUESTION: What is your stand on Church and State?

KARL BARTH: I think that they should be separate. Especially for the Church, it is better not to be involved in political arrangements. My idea is a free church within a free state.

QUESTION: Will you see the President?

KARL BARTH: I don't think he needs to listen to me.

QUESTION: In view of the fact that you insist upon the relation of dogmatics and ethics, how could you assume a position of apparent neutrality toward the East-West conflict in which ethical questions are certainly involved?

KARL BARTH: Theology speaks of the Grace of God. If you take this meaning seriously, it means gratitude. Gratitude means obedience. Obedience means the same for every man in his own country.

Neutrality -- I have never spoken of neutrality, but I have spoken of the need to understand one another better than we do now. We should not think in terms of systems, as we do now, but we should think in human terms. Behind the Iron Curtain, there are human beings, not Russian automats. If I look upon the situation of today, it seems to me that, if we had more people who refuse to think in terms of systems, but, instead, in terms of humanity, an approach to what is commonly called peace could be made on a broad basis. I have not joined in the general chorus. It seems to me that, if a whole population cries out, my little voice is not needed.

QUESTION: What about Niebuhr's criticism of your silence in the face of the Hungarian suppression and uprising in 1956?

KARL BARTH: I was silent because there was such an uproar in the whole world. I don't need to join in this general uproar. (Ich brauche nicht.) I have good friends in Hungary, also among those who have joined in the revolution. What could I do for them? Certainly nothing by crying out. But, if I have been silent, I have been able to free two of my friends from prison. The Hungarian authorities listened to me, just because I had not cried out against them. In my opinion, it was more important that I could help save two lives than join in the general outcry.

QUESTION: Niebuhr criticized your not speaking out against Communism (in Hungary), but you took a stand against Hitlerism. Could you explain?

KARL BARTH: That was another case. I was directly involved. I was up against the Nazis. I lived in Germany and in Switzerland. Hitler was an adversary to fight. I could help by fighting, and I fought. It was a practical issue where I had to take my stand, and I did.

...in the case of the Eastern world, the Communist world as such, crying does not help. Obedience does not mean that it has no application to a system. Obedience is to God, and, applied to men, it means: how can I help somebody?

QUESTION: What about your attitude toward America? Is it true that you have said that you approve of American history, but not of our way of life?

KARL BARTH: It is not true. The American way of life is a human way of life.

QUESTION: What are your impressions of America?

KARL BARTH: This is my first visit. I have been here for only three weeks. I have made up my mind, when I came here: "I will be silent. I will open my eyes and my ears. I will have no prejudices, no preformed ideas. I will be silent." I have my impressions. I don't think it is necessary to explain them to you. They are not yet ripe. Perhaps they will never be. This country is so vast, a whole world. How can I, in six or seven weeks, say something certain about America?

MR. COHEN: You mean you will not return to Europe and write a book about us?

QUESTION: Is music a part of your theology, or is it a matter apart?

KARL BARTH: I have written about Mozart, and, if you read my book, you will have an answer. Mozart's music, for me, is a kind of parable of the Kingdom, but that is not a dogma. I am less dogmatic than you think.

QUESTION: Despite Niebuhr's view that your teachings are bad for America, do you have a special message for America?

KARL BARTH: Generally speaking, the problem is the same everywhere. We have forgotten the simplest and most important thing. Christianity has become an affair of ideology or of religion. Christianity is no religion. We no longer listen to a message from God. That should be re-learned here and everywhere. If we did, we would be more able and willing to speak out about the affairs of the world's politics. Now we lack the courage to say what should be said.

(Professor Barth then asked the Chairman's permission to "ask a question.")

I am interested in prisons. Sometimes, I preach to prisoners. I, therefore, asked for permission to visit an American prison. I will not give you its name. It was called a "cell-house." But they were not even cells; they were cages. Tiny cages for two human beings, without a

view, without a bath, without floor space. It was a terrible shock for me to see these conditions. Prisons in Switzerland are a paradise compared to this. These small cages were, for me, the sight of Dante's Inferno on Earth.

Now my question: I was informed that the price of a trip to the moon and return, including a stay of 8 to 10 days up there, would be about 13 billion dollars. The cost of building a prison is approximately \$10,000 per inmate. For the cost of one such moon-shot, a prison could be build to encompass about twice the entire American population. Why not spend a fraction of the moon-shot's cost on humane prisons? Why are the churches silent? Roman Catholics, the Protestants and the Synagogue, all should raise their voices against this condition. This is in contradiction to the wonderful message on your Statue of Liberty. We dare not condemn the Russians for their inhumanity as long as such conditions prevail in the West.

DR. DANIEL
POLING (Editor
of The Christian
Herald):

(From the audience) The prison you saw is an exception. We have better prisons everywhere in the country, also around New York. What you say is not typical.

QUESTION:

To return to your message to America...

KARL BARTH:

I have given the same lectures here in America as I did in Basle. There is nothing special to add for Americans. Except the prisons.

QUESTION:

How many more books do you intend to write?

KARL BARTH:

I am no prophet. At present, the pressure of teaching is very great. When it relaxes, and if I can carry out my plans, I would want to write at least two more volumes of my Dogmatik.

I hope I have given no offense.
