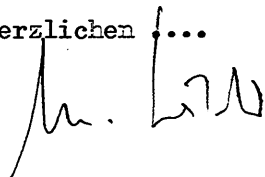


Lieber Herr Stoevesandt
Hier Primärliteratur in Uebers., von der Sie
vermutlich keine Kenntnis haben.

Woher Herr Hunsinger wohl den Originaltext
beschafft hat? Wir haben in unserer Bibliothek
den Bd. 1911 des "Freien Aargauer" nämlich
n i c h t ! Dieser Bd. und nur dieser fehlt bei
uns nämlich seit vermutlich Jahrzehnten.

Alles, was K'B' 1911 im Freien Aargauer
geschrieben hat, neu zu edieren, wäre vermutlich
auch für die Barth-Stiftung zu überlegen.
Mein Rat: Bewahren Sie die Manuskripte
der Aufsätze im FA 1911 besonders sorgfältig auf!!

Mit herzlichen



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- 3. Dez. 1977

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Karl Barth and Radical Politics

Edited and Translated by
GEORGE HUNSINGER

LB Standort: N 140.778



THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
PHILADELPHIA

(1976)

3/11/77

The picture which emerges from Marquardt's work is that Barth, from his earliest essays to his final volumes of dogmatics, desired above all else to work out a viable theological solution to the problem of theory and praxis—including political praxis. It was, in fact, the *political* question of theory and praxis which ultimately precipitated Barth's break with liberalism—not merely the theoretical inconsistencies of liberal theology which disturbed him so much in themselves. A look at the chronology of Barth's development in its political context will substantiate this claim.

GEORGE HUNSINGER

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Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice (1911)

KARL BARTH



I am happy to be able to speak to you about *Jesus*, especially because the initiative for it has come from your side. The best and greatest thing that I can bring to you as a pastor will always be Jesus Christ and a portion of the powers which have gone out from his person into history and life. I take it as a sign of the mutual understanding between us that you for your part have come to me with a request for this best and greatest thing. I can say to you, however, that the other half of our theme lies just as much on my heart: *the movement for social justice*. A well-known theologian and author has recently argued that these two ought not to be joined together as they are in our topic: "Jesus Christ *and* the movement for social justice," for that makes it sound as if they are really two different realities which must first be connected more or less artificially. Both are seen as one and the same: Jesus *is* the movement for social justice, and the movement for social justice *is* Jesus in the present. I can adopt this view in good conscience if I reserve the right to show more precisely in what sense I do so. The real contents of the person of Jesus can in fact be summed up by the words: "movement for social justice." Moreover,



"Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung," Vortrag gehalten im Arbeiterverein Safenwil am 17 Dez. 1911, in *Der Freie Aargauer, Offizielles Organ der Arbeiterpartei des Kantons Aargau*, 6. Jahrgang, Nos. 153–156, December 23, 26, 28, 30, 1911.

order to be a person at all. "But to those who are being saved the word of the cross is the power of God." I find something of this power of God in social democracy's idea of organization. I also find it elsewhere, but here I find it more clearly and purely, and here I find it in the way in which it must be worked out in *our* time.

And now, in conclusion, allow me a few personal words which I would like to say to you as a pastor of this community.

First, to those friends present who up to now have related themselves to socialism in an indifferent, reserved, or *hostile* way: At this moment you are perhaps feeling somewhat disappointed and upset, so that it would not be inconceivable that one or another might go out from here and report: "He said that the socialists are right." I would be sorry if anyone said that. I repeat once again: I have spoken about what socialists *want*, not about the manner in which they *act* to attain it. *About what they want, I say: That is what Jesus wanted, too.* About the manner in which they *act* to attain it, I could not say the same thing. It would be easy for me to come up with a broad critique about the manner in which the socialists act to attain it. But I fail to see what good such an easy exercise would accomplish. Therefore, I have not said that the socialists are right! Nonetheless, I do not want to say that you nonsocialists should now go home comforted and reassured. If you feel upset, then that is good. If you have the feeling that "Oh, no, Christianity is a hard and dangerous matter if one gets to the roots of it," then you have rightly understood me—or, rather, not me, but *Jesus*. For I did not want to tell you my view, but the view of Jesus as I have found it in the Gospels. Consider, then, whether as followers of Jesus you ought not to bring more understanding, more goodwill, more *participation* in the movement for social justice in our time than you have up to now.

And now to my *socialist* friends who are present: I have said that Jesus wanted what you want, that he wanted to help those who are least, that he wanted to establish the kingdom of God upon this earth, that he wanted to abolish self-seeking property, that he wanted to make persons into comrades. Your concerns are in line with the concerns of Jesus. *Real* socialism is real Christianity in our time. That may fill you with pride and satisfaction about your concerns. But I hope you have also heard the rebuke implied in the distinction I have

made between Jesus and yourselves! He wanted what you want—as you *act* to attain it. There you have the difference between Jesus and yourselves. He wanted what you want, but he *acted* in the way you have heard. That is generally the difference between Jesus and the rest of us, that among us the greatest part is program, whereas for Jesus program and performance were one. Therefore, Jesus says to you quite simply that you should carry out your program, that you should *enact* what you *want*. Then you will be Christians and true human beings. Leave the superficiality and the hatred, the spirit of mammon and the self-seeking, which also exists among your ranks, behind: They do *not* belong to your concerns. Let the faithfulness and energy, the sense of community and the courage for sacrifice found in Jesus be effective among you, in your whole life; then you will be true socialists.

However, the unrest and the sharpening of conscience which Jesus in this hour has hopefully brought to us all should not be the last word in this beautiful Christmas season. I think we all have the impression that Jesus was someone quite different than we are. His image stands strangely great and high above us all, socialists and nonsocialists. Precisely for that reason he has something to say to us. Precisely for that reason he can be something for us. Precisely for that reason we touch the living God himself when we touch the hem of his garment. And if we now let our gaze rest upon him, as he goes from century to century in ever-new revelations of his glory, then something is fulfilled in us of the ancient word of promise which could also be written of the movement for social justice in our day: "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*"

POSTSCRIPT (*An exchange of letters: A Swiss entrepreneur vs. Karl Barth*)

Open Letter to Mr. Karl Barth, Pastor in Safenwil
Safenwil, February 1, 1912

Dear Pastor:

Yesterday I became aware of the lecture that you gave on December 17, 1911, within the confines of the Safenwil labor union. In a long rabble-rousing speech, garnished with an incredible number of

educated person in general, one *may* require that he express himself in public only about matters which he has fully mastered. From a pastor in particular, however, one *can* require that he adopt a mediating role and that he not seek, with means that fly in the face of all healthy human understanding, to sow discord between employer and employee.

The majority of listeners were not able to analyze the internal value of your speech. They thus took what was said at face value. You know that, and you count on it; that is the strange part of the whole story.

One more thing. If you ever again have the desire to vent your intractable rage about capitalism, then do not implicate industry. For capitalism and industry are two entirely different things. I would have given you credit for knowing that.

Respectfully yours,
W. Hüssy

From: *Zofinger Tagblatt*
February 3, 1912

Answer to the Open Letter of Mr. W. Hüssy in Aarburg
Safenwil, February 6, 1912

Dear Sir:

My December lecture to the Safenwil labor union prompted you on February 1 to go on the warpath against me and to sling something at me. I am letting you know that you failed to hit your target. And because at the same time you have told me with such a refreshing clarity what you think of me, you will certainly not take offense if despite the prevailing coolness, I enter the fray in my shirt sleeves rather than my frock coat and reply with equal clarity.

First of all, for a prelude, you level the charge against me, as groundless as it is crude, that in a calculated way I offered something to my listeners "at face value" which was really something else and that just that is "the strange part part of the whole story." Herr Hüssy, to those kinds of *insults* pulled out of thin air, I will make no reply; they are among the arrows which missed the mark, but hit the archer. You call my lecture a "rabble-rousing speech" with the pur-

pose of "sowing discord between employer and employee." In reality I spoke completely objectively about capitalism as such and meticulously avoided every personal reference to specific capitalists. Through your "open letter" you linked yourself and your name with the general interest; you have thus given a point to my lecture which it was not supposed to have. I regret this, but you carry the *full* responsibility for it. I did not bid you to feel affected and to let everybody know about it.

You hold out before me the few years by which you are older than I, and on that basis admonish and instruct me in the tone of a schoolmaster. With this you make yourself look ridiculous, for your "open letter" inspires me and others with no great respect for your seasoned wisdom. You advise me, in my capacity as a pastor, that I should "adopt a mediating role." Indeed, just as you understand it, right? That would be convenient. With your permission, however, as a pastor I am faced with a different program regarding which I owe you no accounting. You can state with amazing certainty that the majority of my listeners did not understand my lecture, and you even specify exactly what they managed to retain. I would admire you for your sagacity, but I must reply that you at any rate, Herr Hüsey, have understood *nothing at all* in my lecture. I seriously doubt whether you read the whole thing. The number of "religious quotations" was far too great, and you found it far too difficult ("too philosophical and sophistical," as you would say). You nowhere touch upon the basic ideas of my lecture, but from everything that I said only a few sentences about private property made any impression on you. To be sure, you have even misunderstood these; but they apparently struck the red terror into your breast, as if we wanted to start the great "redistribution" tomorrow. And *on the strength of that* you took up your pen.

That was the prelude. Now comes the main piece. I said that "private property as a means of production must fall," and this upset you. You construed it as follows: "The property of the independent earner must be confiscated and distributed." Herr Hüsey, may I lend or mention to you a few good books from which you could obtain information about the essence of modern socialist theory? Or must I let my reply expand into a treatise on the matter? I can only say

wealth in his pocket and go home to have a good time. Haven't you noticed that what you so crudely call the "distribution of the net profits" is precisely the *final goal* of socialist thought and not something "for now"? Haven't you noticed that this concerns the salient difference between capitalism and socialism? The net profits of the common work of the entrepreneur and the worker now become the private property of the former, because he is the private owner of the means of production. That is the essence of the capitalist economic system. (You know quite well that all *industry is organized capitalistically*; and when you charge at the end that I have confused the difference between capitalism and industry, you are engaged, objectively, in a totally pointless splitting of hairs.) Socialism fights against this economic system, and rightly so, because the net profits which become part of the private wealth of the entrepreneur are by no means equivalent to his contribution to the common production. The business management, which as a rule is in his hands, is the ultimate, and therefore certainly an extremely important, aspect of the production process. But it is only one aspect among many. It is incredible when you want us to swallow the assertion that the worker has "not in the least" contributed to the net profits. Even a child can see that an industrial enterprise would have neither net profits nor profits in general without the participation of the worker. Why does he receive only a wage from the entrepreneur instead of a share in the profits? There is no other reason than the fact that the means of production are the private property of the entrepreneur and that the worker must therefore be glad to receive at least a wage for his work. This inequality and dependence is precisely the injustice that we don't want. At this point you raise the long-known objection that the net profits from the good years must compensate for the losses of the bad years in business. Indeed, do you really believe that after the nationalization of the production processes, the net profits would then be distributed without remainder among the managers and workers so that there would no longer be reserve capital, as there commonly is even now in all state operations? But even apart from that, this objection is simply a clever deception and does not amount to a reason. Or would you seriously contend that the capitalization of the net profits is useful and necessary simply to compensate for bad business years?

My dear Herr Hüßy, that would be believed in *Safenwil* by no one!

In conclusion, a word about your tired *expression* that there is a difference between theory and praxis. (Even you yourself wouldn't have the boldness to designate this commonplace as a thought?) Thereby you want to say that praxis should be as unencumbered as possible by theory. Coming from you, this wish is quite intelligible. What you mean by praxis is *private profit*; what I mean by theory is *justice*. You are quite shrewd to remove private profit as far as possible from justice and to explain away certain unfortunate Bible sayings as "ancient and thus today no longer pertinent." But we intend to wait and see whose light will burn longer, that of your shrewdness, which separates theory from praxis, or that of socialism and the Bible, which replaces private profit with justice.

You can keep on writing "open letters" to me, Herr Hüßy, if you feel the urge to do so; but you can depend on the fact that such efforts will not stop the march of things in the world—in the long run not even in the region of Zofingen. The outcome of the recent parliamentary elections in Germany might have reminded you of what is "pertinent today," to use your term. May I give you a piece of advice? It would simply be not to cling to your present reactionary position so stubbornly that you can no longer come out of it. You are indeed older than I am, as you observe, but certainly still young enough to develop better judgments. I sincerely wish that for you.

Respectfully yours,

Karl Barth, pastor

From: *Zofinger Tagblatt*
February 9, 1912



schluss!