

With many  
thanks for time with  
you in July, 1955.  
J. D. Smart

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## EDUARD THURNEYSSEN: PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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BY JAMES D. SMART

IT has been a loss to the Church in America that during the past forty years the theological writings of Eduard Thurneysen have remained almost unknown. During the nineteen-thirties two books of sermons by Barth and Thurneysen were published in English translation, but, so far as most readers were concerned, they were sermons by Barth, and the fact that no indication was given of the authorship of the separate sermons kept the distinctive voice of Thurneysen from being adequately recognized. Thus even where Thurneysen's name is known, he is considered merely as a shadow of Barth, little more than an echo of the great theologian. Yet for the Protestant Church of our day, the work of Thurneysen represents a significant achievement. For forty-seven years he has been a pastor and preacher who has worked with the utmost thoroughness at the central tasks of the Church's theology. Immersed in the duties of the pastorate he has wrestled with the problems which have met him there, tracing each of them back to its theological roots and revealing for himself and for us the full dimensions of the critical issues of faith which confront us in the practical work of the ministry. He has been in the fullest sense a minister-theologian. He could, had he so desired, have become a professor of theology many years ago, and during recent years he has combined a part-time professorship in homiletics with his office as senior minister in the Reformed Cathedral in Basel. But he has chosen to remain a pastor, and the distinctiveness of his contribution to theology is that he approaches each question from the standpoint of the pastor, while bringing to it the full equipment of a highly competent theologian.

One of the greatest needs of our American Churches is a higher measure of theological competence in the ministry so that, on the one hand, the discussion of the Church's problems may be carried more often to a deeper level where the ultimate issues would become evident, and on the other hand, that theological discussion may be

come less the exclusive concern of seminary professors and more frequently an activity of the parish minister. If such a development is desirable in our midst, Eduard Thurneysen is a man from whom we can draw guidance and inspiration.

## I

There is no one who is better able to estimate the stature of Thurneysen than his friend and colleague, Karl Barth. More than twenty years ago he set down his impressions in a letter which was intended to serve as a preface to a projected English edition of Thurneysen's essays and addresses. After describing how his friend began to work at theology under the pressure of the actual problems of the ministry, he continued: "To understand these addresses of Eduard Thurneysen and to understand that the Church is the basis, starting point, and subject of theology are one and the same thing. This founding of theology upon the Church and the bringing of it into such close relationship to the work of the minister is a characteristic of the whole theological renaissance which during the past fifteen years (1919-1934) has been taking place in Switzerland and Germany and spreading from there to other European countries. But let it not be forgotten that Eduard Thurneysen was perhaps the very first of all to recognize the necessity for a Church-theology in this sense. I myself must confess that I received from him the stimulus to work in this direction. Moreover it must be admitted that, among all who have distinguished themselves in this new theology, there is hardly anyone who embodies it so characteristically in himself as a movement of the Church and for the Church as does Eduard Thurneysen." Barth describes him in his office of minister: "Standing upon the immovable basis of the mystery of the Christian congregation, he discharges the duties of his office, always watchful and receptive, comforting and warning, rousing and quieting, guiding and yet at the same time himself seeking out new ways, brooding over the Christian of today, or better still, over the man of today, that with him and for him he may live his life. In Eduard Thurneysen the Church is an actuality. By the very nature of his existence he forces the hearer or reader who understands him aright to come to grips in his thought not only with him but also with the fact of the Church (and with something yet more than the fact of the Church)."

Barth's portrait of him is more intimate as he describes a man whose life is concentrated in a 'candour.' We see this in his scholarship. Any philosophical, or moral, or theological question is certain to rouse in him a certain element of truth which he has looked for. He possesses the habit of learning from each work of knowledge come alive in his mind which we shall never find in his brows and smile a scornful smile. The practical are pleased to stand before a front of high-sounding ranting enthusiastic insincerity and in the ministry, he is not so blessed with insight and indeed his whole life is Noah's ark into which we went out again trusting in heaven and earth. We were with people in such a way that the greatest influence upon him is the pastor, Christoph Blumhardt, Troeltsch, who in his own time was one of the theologians. The intellectual ancestors do not seem to be *est ineffabile*, a favorite expression enough for me to say.

were I not to say that he had a secret correspondence to human voices, he seeks to

"I myself must confess that I received from him the stimulus to work in this direction." other not only in the but also in the more than forty years of close relationship a series of letters which he wrote to Thurneysen between 1880 and 1890.

Barth's portrait of his friend as minister and theologian becomes more intimate as he describes the quality of the man. "The word which concentrates in itself all my personal impressions of him is 'candour.' We see this first of all in a certain Socratic quality of his scholarship. Any proposition or point of view in the religious, philosophical, or moral sphere, if it is decently presented to him, is certain to rouse in him a keen interest and he will discover in it a certain element of truth, a 'consideration' which is not to be overlooked. He possesses the rare talent of learning from others, indeed of learning from each what is worth learning and of letting this new knowledge come alive in himself. . . . There is one position in which we shall never find him; it will always cause him to knit his brows and smile a scornful smile—where men in the name of being practical are pleased to hide their unexamined assumptions behind a front of high-sounding watchwords. When he comes upon this ranting enthusiastic insincerity which is so common in the Church and in the ministry, he can say No! as emphatically as we others who are not so blessed with his Johannine nature. . . . His study-room, and indeed his whole outlook upon the Church and world, is like Noah's ark into which went every kind of animal and, being saved, went out again trusting in the promise of the rainbow which joined heaven and earth. We may ask where he learned the art of dealing with people in such a way as this. Those who exercised the greatest influence upon him in his youth and student days were the great pastor, Christoph Blumhardt the younger in Bad Boll, and Ernst Troeltsch, who in his own way was the most understanding among the theologians. The mention, however, of these his spiritual and intellectual ancestors does not begin to explain him. *Individuum est ineffabile*, a favorite phrase of his own. But even that is not enough for me to say. I would be omitting the chief thing of all were I not to say that his openness toward all things human has a secret correspondence to the openness with which, apart from all human voices, he seeks to hearken to the Holy Scriptures."

"I myself must confess that I received from him the stimulus to work in this direction." What these two theologians meant to each other not only in the beginnings of their work but through more than forty years of close association is evident as never before in two series of letters which have now been published, letters of Barth to Thurneysen between 1914 and 1922 contributed with an intro-

duction by the latter to the volume *Antwort* (Answer) in honor of Barth's seventieth birthday, and, more recently, letters by both men to each other between 1921 and 1925 contributed with an explanatory note by Barth to the volume *Gottesdienst—Menschendienst* (The Service of God—The Service of Man) in honor of Thurneysen's seventieth birthday. This correspondence gives us a graphic picture of a relation of mutual dependence in which so intimate a flow of thought and life was maintained, the work of each being immediately taken up into the work of the other, that it would have been very difficult for either to say what elements in his theology originated with himself and not with the other.

The two were neighbors in their first parishes in the Aargau in Switzerland from 1913 to 1920, though their villages were separated by mountains and valleys. Barth had settled in Safenwil in 1911 and Thurneysen in Leutwil in 1913. There were visits back and forth, but these were too infrequent to satisfy the need for constant interchange of thought; so letters and postcards had to fill the gaps between. "We had the imperative need," says Thurneysen, "to discuss with each other in real brotherhood everything that was happening in Church, world, and Kingdom of God." They sent to each other for criticism the sermons which they had preached, and consulted with each other concerning sermons in prospect. They mapped out programs of Biblical and theological study parallel with each other, and constantly compared notes on the discoveries they were making. The manuscript of Barth's *Romans* went chapter by chapter to Thurneysen for criticism and suggestion as it was being written, and Thurneysen's addresses were submitted to Barth's scrutiny. As early as 1916 they were discussing the possibility of publishing jointly a volume of sermons, and when this was finally accomplished in the following year, they gave no indication of separate authorship since all the sermons were in a very real sense the fruits of a ministry which they held in common.

The present documents, for all their fullness, do not give us a satisfactory answer how these two men came into such remarkable theological and personal oneness with each other that through the years each could, without any loss of integrity, take almost complete responsibility for the conclusions of the other. They were conscious of sharing what they called at first a common theological "vision," which made their approach to all questions distinctively different

from anything that was to be found in existing schools of theology. They were not at all sure where this "vision" might eventually take them, but they knew that they were unconditionally at its command and must follow where it led. It is clear that the "vision" has to do with their new understanding of revelation in Scripture, as God himself actually making himself known and coming to man as the God that he is. It makes them wrestle with Scripture with a new earnestness, working through not only historical-critical commentaries but also earlier ones, particularly those of the Reformers, to learn where in the past the Church has really heard God speaking in Scripture. It makes them draw the line sharply between what they are saying and what other theologians of their time are saying, so that their words give sharp offense. But always it is the integrity of their "vision" that they feel compelled to protect even though it means dividing themselves sharply from others who would like to count themselves their close companions in theology. But how these two came to share their common "vision" is not yet wholly clear. The testimony of Barth is that it was Thurneysen's vision before it was his. Perhaps Thurneysen would say the same of Barth. Each is certain only of the greatness of his debt to the other.

The two sets of letters provide many intimate glimpses behind the scenes between the years 1914 and 1925 during which a new era in theology was in the making. The opening letter by Barth, dated Sept. 4, 1914, touches on two points that were to be of great significance later. First is a comment on the way in which German theologians in general, and Martin Rade, editor of the liberal paper, *Die Christliche Welt*, in particular, have lost their heads in wartime and substituted a German war-theology for their previous Christian convictions. Elsewhere Barth has said that it was when he saw the names of his most respected teachers subscribed to a war-manifesto that he began to set their whole theology radically in question, and to search for a new and less readily adaptable basis for the Church's message. In the same letter is a comment on Thurneysen's interpretation of the wrath of God in one of his sermons. "The manner in which you make the 'wrath of God' positively fruitful is enlightening. The formula: 'God wills that war should not be' is perhaps misleading. God wills that egotism should not be. But he wills that egotism should reveal itself in war and become its own judgment. This judging will of God is therefore nothing other than

love: the revelation of the divine righteousness. I myself would relate the wrath of God more strongly to the Godless existence and interpret social injustice and war as symptoms or consequences of the latter."

Both men were deeply concerned with social problems during these years, participating in the Christian Socialist movement alongside Hermann Kutter of Zurich, and also in the workers' Social Democratic party. In December, 1914, Barth was finding difficulties in addressing Social Democratic meetings, since it seemed on the one hand to be in danger of merely providing religious support for a party program, and on the other hand to be laying upon the Social Democrats burdens to which they were not equal. Nevertheless, in February he reported that he was now a member of the party. His reasons for the step are interesting. He desired to show that his concern with last things, or eschatology, in his Sunday preaching did not leave him up in the clouds far above the present evil world, but rather was the expression of a faith that impelled him to work and suffer with his fellowmen. In September, 1917, we see him interrupting his labors on Romans 5 to support the cause of fifty-five factory workers in Safenwil who were trying to organize a labor union. They were threatened with dismissal by their employer, who was not pleased to find he had to deal not only with them but also with the local pastor. Barth spoke with him "like Moses with Pharaoh" and was told by the man that he was the worst enemy he had had in all his life. With Barth's support the union eventually established itself, but the pastor's position in his congregation was not easy. There were many in Safenwil who would have preferred a less socially and politically minded pastor. Always, however, this participation in social movements and concerns was that of Christian pastors and theologians who were jealous of their calling and office and determined at no point to betray them. They were fully aware of the vulnerability of their situation.

Already in 1915 Barth and Thurneysen were conscious of the magnitude of the theological venture on which they were embarked. They did not know where it was to take them in the future, but of one thing they were sure: that the Scriptures had come open to them in a new way and that Gospel, Church, and world had a meaning for them that they did not have in any of the contemporary theologies. When they expressed their convictions among their fellow-ministers

they gave offense, for they were denying what all men affirmed. They knew that a battle lay before them in which they would have to state their gospel in the face of major theologians, and in preparation for that day they had carefully-constructed plans of study which they carried out in close association. They were not eager to hasten the battle; they felt too unready. The basic work of each was Biblical exposition of the most thorough kind but at the same time intensive studies in both theology and philosophy. In June, 1916, Barth was launching into an exploration of Kant's works as though he were getting ready for an examination. During the visit of a travelling evangelist to Safenwil he read the history of pietism diligently each day and visited the meetings with equal diligence each evening, that he might study a living example of a modern development of pietism at close hand. Thurneysen's letters for these years have not been published; so we are able to see his studies only as they are reflected in Barth's letters. It is interesting that Barth in 1916 expected the decisive conflict with the theologians to come in 1926! They needed ten years to prepare; however, they had only three, for with the publication of *Romans* in 1919 the battle was joined.

The fact that in 1914 the main lines of the theological direction taken by Barth and Thurneysen were already established interferes seriously with the facile explanation of their theology as a product of the despair engendered by the War of 1914-1918. The decisive influences had already been exerted, and the central all-determining vision was already present at the very beginning of the War. What the War did was to smash the illusions of these two men that their contribution to theology was to be only a humble footnote to the great existing theologies. They became aware of the vast gulf between a really Biblical theology and all other forms of theology. They were awed by the magnitude of the task to which they had set their hands, so much greater and more perilous than they had ever dreamed.

## II

Since we are concerned to see the distinctive work of Thurneysen, the first publication which concerns us is a small 77-page book on Dostoyevsky that appeared in 1921. A volume of sermons had come out in 1917 which heralded a new approach to Scripture in preach-

ing, the preacher brooding over a text of Scripture and over the life of man in the twentieth century world until suddenly a spark flashed between the two and there was a conflagration that made all things appear different from what they were before. The Bible was taken in earnest not just as the record of past revelations which may in some way be related to present problems, but as the source of an actual revelation of God in which God may be expected to come to his people in judgment and in mercy in the Church and world of today. The sermons show us the primary joint concern of the two men—the recovery by the Church of eyes and ears with which to become aware of the living reality of God as he was known to the prophets and apostles and must be known by his people in every age if they are not to destroy themselves in utter blindness. But in the sermons it is not possible to distinguish the work of Thurneysen from that of Barth. The Dostoyevsky booklet, however, lets Thurneysen appear in the full maturity of his theological development and reveals also some characteristics of his writing which would make him more readily comprehensible to an American public than Barth. Barth is so aware of the possibility of being misunderstood that he conditions each statement first against misinterpretations on the right and then against misinterpretations on the left, with the consequence that the whole appears tortured and so involved that even theologians become lost at times in the complications and fail to grasp the importance of the distinctions. But Thurneysen's style is more straight-forward, with a simplicity and vividness of statement that make it eminently readable, and in this work on Dostoyevsky his thought is richly illustrated by material from the novels.

Dostoyevsky interests Thurneysen not as a psychologist or metaphysician or social philosopher but primarily as a theologian. The novelist had an uncanny penetration into the nature of the late nineteenth century man, cutting through the veneer of his civilization and holding up a mirror to him in which he could see himself in the radical contradictions of his existence. His power to disturb his readers lay in his knowledge of man, his recognition of the mysterious depths of man's being, and his freedom from the illusions with which men ordinarily conceal those depths from themselves. Dostoyevsky probed ruthlessly into the problem of man, and at its bottom he discovered rebellion against the limitations of humanity, the infinite pretensions of the human self, the determination of



man to be God. Thus Thurneysen finds the greatness of Dostoyevsky in his recognition that God is God and man is man, a knowledge that was lost in the main to nineteenth and early twentieth century man. From this same source came Dostoyevsky's devastating critique of Western civilization and of the Church. Western civilization he saw as the attempt of a deluded humanity to build a tower of Babel up to heaven, to master heaven itself with its cultural achievement, a project which could end only in confusion and destruction. And the Church he saw as a human attempt to silence in man the outcry for God and to still the passionate hunger for God that has ever made him seek his life from a source beyond all things human. What man cannot endure is that a question mark should be set against his entire existence, that God should not somehow be in his possession. Man without God is man without a future and without meaning in any of the external or internal events of his life, but also a man who by his very nature must break out in some way or other in revolt against such an existence. Hence the succession of strange characters in the world of Dostoyevsky's novels, strange like Saul and David and Judas and Simon Peter in the Bible, but only as long as we do not let them come too close to us, for all of them are revelations of the man who cannot set himself free from God. But, beyond this, Thurneysen shows that the novelist knew also the possibility of resurrection, so that his last word is not of a humanity that drives itself mad in its hunger for God, as the life story of many of his characters would seem to suggest, but rather sounds the Biblical note of hope and promise—that a humanity which has recovered an awareness of its limitations and of its true center that is always beyond itself in God, will indeed inherit the earth. It is not difficult to see why the Russian novelist was of such interest for Thurneysen. Here was the very essence of that unique knowledge of God and man that Thurneysen and Barth had been rediscovering in the Scriptures.

A second joint-volume of sermons was published in 1924, and then in 1926 a small book on Christoph Blumhardt, who exerted a powerful influence on both men and may be as responsible as any human being can be said to be for their unique "vision." This book is valuable not just for what it tells us of Blumhardt, a man whose singular Christian witness is well worth our attention, but also for what it tells us of Thurneysen. Many of the characteristics

of Blumhardt were to be incorporated in a new and different way in the mind and spirit of Thurneysen.

There were two Blumhardts, Johann Christoph, a pastor in Möttlingen in Swabia from 1838 to 1852, who, through a remarkable experience with a young woman in his congregation, became convinced of the present living power of Christ to set men free from the evils that imprison them, and, as more and more people swarmed about him seeking help, was led to establish a community at Bad Boll (1852-1880); and his son, Christoph, who carried forward the work begun by his father (1869-1919). Although the father had his origins in pietism, both he and the son left it behind them as they focused all expectation upon what God himself would do, and taught men to put no trust in any pious practices of their own. They found in pietism an unhealthy concern with man's relation to God, in contrast to the Scriptures in which the entire concern is with God's relation to man. They shrank from attempting to convert men lest the men should be converted to them and their point of view rather than to God. They repudiated every tendency that would encourage men in an individualistic concentration upon their own salvation rather than upon the coming of God's Kingdom on earth, and the son was to show his concrete participation in the dilemmas of human society by becoming a member of the Social Democratic party and serving for six years (1900-1906) as their representative in the Württemberg Parliament.

Neither of the Blumhardts was a great thinker, and neither was to leave behind any significant theological writings. Apart from letters and a devotional book their contribution to religious literature is nil. Yet in them there was a recognition of the reality of God and an ability to speak of God as the living God that he is, a recognition unique in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In short they possessed in simplicity what even the greatest theologians had in a large measure lost. They lived in constant expectation that God would show himself in their midst as the same God whose mighty acts for the salvation of man are recorded in the Scriptures. Faith was for them a waiting upon God, but it was not a waiting with folded hands. There was a passionate urgency in their waiting as they took into their own souls the agonizing problems of their fellowmen. And always there was an absolute confidence in the coming triumph of Christ. The kingdom of God was

not a remote possibility; they lived moment by moment in eagerness for its coming, believing that its coming upon earth was the only answer to human need. But they were also intensely aware of the tragic reality of the power of evil upon earth, the power that crucified Jesus Christ and through all history entangled men in its toils to their destruction. Evil was a power to be fought, for there could never be any easy victory, but it had to be fought by the Christian in the knowledge that God's decisive victory in Christ had cost the death of his son and that each new victory could be won only at a cost. Increasingly the younger Blumhardt set his emphasis upon the necessity that man should die unto self so that Christ might live and conquer in him. He refused to be the founder of a religious movement lest it should put him at the center rather than God. All human pretensions had to perish, that God might be all and that the power and the glory might belong to God alone. There was severe criticism of the existing Church in Blumhardt's sermons, for he was convinced that often religion was the severest obstacle in the way of the coming of the Kingdom. Religion could be the ultimate in human pretension, the attempt of man to storm heaven itself, the means of human self-justification whereby man resists most stubbornly God's claim upon him that he should die to live.

### III

Many important developments were to issue from Bad Boll. The religious socialist movement under the leadership of Kutter and Ragaz was one such development. But it is perhaps in Thurneysen that the Blumhardt spirit lives on most fully. The "vision" that was to determine his work and also that of Barth was none other than the Blumhardt vision of the living God, God who acts here and now in the power of his Spirit. The endeavor of these two men can be described as the attempt to think through all the problems of the Church's theology, taking with complete seriousness that the God of whom theology speaks is a God who is living and acting in relation to us at the very moment that we speak. We think of him, speak of him, and write of him not as an object of our thought that is at our disposal, but as a person who confronts us in all the reality of his being and whose mind concerning us determines all things in our existence. Also, like Blumhardt, Thurneysen represents a liberation of evangelical theology from entanglement with pietism, and

as we have already seen, he was to express his social concern in very emphatic ways, ways not too congenial to an individualistic Church. A further influence is to be seen in Thurneysen's lifelong participation in a unique kind of pastoral counselling in which the problems of men and women were brought in the most immediate way under the light of God's revelation, and yet at the same time the counsellor made the fullest and most intelligent use of the insights of modern psychology and psychiatry in order to understand the people who sought his help. In fact there is hardly any aspect of Christoph Blumhardt that does not reappear in some way in Thurneysen—his unwillingness to be a party-man with party-loyalty determining his standpoint; the joyfulness of his faith, in spite of the most realistic assessment of the power of evil in the life of man, because of the confidence that the risen Lord has conquered and will conquer; the distrust of all religion, even in its higher forms, because of the recognition that it may be used as a defense against God's ultimate claim upon us. But by Thurneysen all of these elements are taken up and embodied in the Church's theology, and their implications are worked out not just in theory but in the daily practice of the Church's ministry.

In 1927 Thurneysen's essays and addresses were published under the title *Das Wort Gottes und die Kirche* (The Word of God and the Church). They are not popular addresses of a pastor who is endeavoring in a practical way to be helpful to his fellow-ministers, a product only too well-known in the field of practical theology. They are illustrations of how a pastor who is also a theologian takes one by one the most urgent problems of the Church and of the ministry, and, probing to the bottom of each, lays bare the very roots of the predicament and the nature of the issue which calls for decision. The first chapter on "The Nature of the Reformation" is not primarily an historical study, though it has many significant things to say about the historical events of four hundred years ago, but is rather an examination of our twentieth century concern: what it is that justifies the continued existence of a Protestant Church. The second chapter, on the authority of Scripture, contains an analysis of the problem and a statement of the case for the recognition of the absolutely unique character of the revelation of the Scriptures while at the same time validating the rights of critical scholarship. Thirty years later we are experiencing a flood of volumes in English on this

subject, none of them attaining the clarity or theological comprehensiveness of this single chapter. In the next two chapters Thurneysen returns to the subject of the Church, probing still more deeply into the validity of the claims that are made for it and seeking to establish its nature, its destiny, and its authority. These are followed by a consideration of the problem of Church and state which, although the analysis is based upon the confrontation of Church and state in the European scene, is remarkably pertinent to issues which are likely to prove inescapable in our American situation. Religious education receives a chapter, and so also does socialism in its relation to Christianity. The concluding chapter fittingly deals with "the task of theology," defining theology as a critical function of the Church rather than an academic discipline and therefore one of the essential functions of a responsible ministry. The only one of Thurneysen's major concerns that fails to come to expression in this book is the work of pastoral counselling, and had an English translation appeared, it was his intention to add a chapter on "Justification by Faith and the Work of a Pastor," an essay which showed with great decisiveness the importance of the doctrinal presuppositions and content of pastoral counselling.

In 1946 Thurneysen published a major volume on this latter subject, *Die Lehre von der Seelsorge* (The Doctrine of the Care of Souls), a book which is undoubtedly his most important contribution to theology and one which provides a critical theological approach to the whole field of pastoral counselling, something which is sadly lacking in the English and American literature of this department of theology. Out of the wealth of his vast experience in counselling, combined with his wide knowledge of theology and his acute awareness of theological issues, he has sought to show what our approach must be to the problems of individuals if it is determined in the most thoroughgoing way by the nature of the Gospel and the nature of the Church of which we are ministers. The idea is widespread in many circles where there is great interest today in counselling that doctrinal distinctions have no significance in this area, and that psychological training is much more important to the minister as counsellor than any Biblical or theological training. Thurneysen demonstrates with great clarity from the history of pastoral care that the approach of the counsellor and the outcome of counselling are determined in large measure by the theological presuppositions. The Roman Church

with a doctrine of sins which interprets them as blemishes upon an otherwise good and sound person (so long as the person has been cleansed from original sin by baptism) must have one approach to the liberation of man from these blemishes; but a Reformed Church, with a doctrine of sin which insists that the total person is corrupted by sin and that even the slightest sins are manifestations of a more basic alienation of the person from God, must have a very different approach if the person in his total existence is to know liberation from the destroying power of sin.

It is impossible to take into account all of Thurneysen's writings. The list in the birthday volume fills eighteen pages, many of the items, however, being sermons or brief articles published in papers and magazines. Those which have been described are perhaps the most important and the most useful in illustrating the unusual character of this man's ministry.

#### IV

The letters of Thurneysen and Barth, to which reference has already been made, demonstrate the truth of Barth's evaluation of his friend as "more Johannine in nature" than himself. Barth was more sensitive to differences in colleagues than Thurneysen. After the earliest meetings with Gogarten and the joy of discovering an able Lutheran theologian who had been travelling a course roughly parallel to their own, it was Barth who became troubled about some elements in Gogarten's theological attitude, and it was Thurneysen who struggled to hold together the triumvirate that had launched the magazine *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Between the Times). In the religious socialist movement Barth was much less patient than Thurneysen with the criticisms that Hermann Kutter directed at the new theology. From a very early date both of them were unhappy when Brunner was represented as spokesman of a general theological movement which included them.

The letters are interesting and valuable for the light which they throw upon these relationships. Contact with Gogarten was established in 1920 as a consequence of an article published by Gogarten in *Die Christliche Welt*. The article was entitled "Between the Times," which was soon to be chosen as the name of their theological journal. After Gogarten had visited Barth in October, 1920, Barth wrote Thurneysen, "This is a dreadnought on our side and against

our opponents." Both were impressed by Gogarten's competence, but they were somewhat dismayed by his self-confidence and eagerness for theological battle. Also it troubled Thurneysen that although he and Barth had read Gogarten's books with interest and profit, Gogarten did not feel it necessary to read Barth's *Romans*. His attitude was that he knew what it had to say without reading it. Barth found in him early a tendency to apply speculative philosophy to the solution of theological problems, and "heaven only knows where that may yet lead." Thurneysen was concerned at the lack of any real eschatology in Gogarten's theology. It was to take a full ten years for each to discover the full extent of the disagreement.

Brunner has often been pictured as one who was an intimate colleague of Barth in the early days of the development, only to be harshly repudiated by him at a later stage. The first mention of Brunner in the letters is in February, 1924, a comment by Thurneysen that Brunner's habit of speaking as though he spoke not only for himself but also for a school labeled "theologians of crisis" would do neither himself nor anyone else any good. About the same time Barth published a review article in *Zwischen den Zeiten* on Brunner's book on Schleiermacher, *Die Mystik und das Wort*, in which he criticized Brunner for demolishing this great theologian without first understanding his providential significance in the history of theology and of the Church. The basic difference with Brunner from the beginning was that, whereas Brunner assumed that the essential nature of the Gospel had now been rediscovered and the task of theology was to draw out its implications in such a way that the forces hostile to a true faith would be overthrown, Barth and Thurneysen had no such confidence but rather saw the continuing dilemma of the Church in its confusion about its Gospel and the continuing task of theology in the endeavor to distinguish truth from falsehood in the theological assumptions on which the Church bases its message, its actions, and the entire structure of its life.

All is not always so grim in the letters. There are many delightful human touches—the snowball fight between Barth and the members of his confirmation class which greatly improved the tone of the class; the statement of Barth early in his experience as professor that as long as he kept talking, he could maintain the illusion that he knew something, but as soon as he was silent, the horrible gaps in his knowledge rose up to dismay him; the lament of Thurneysen two

days after Barth's departure for Göttingen at the dreariness of separation; and the expression of a nostalgia for the good old days before they were known to anyone except to their own villagers and to the dwellers on the road between the villages who saw them hurrying to and fro. It was perhaps because Thurneysen had counselled gentleness with opponents that in an early letter from Göttingen Barth reported that he was learning to be gentle even with those who attacked him most vigorously. He had a rule he was following: *in necessariis* no retreat; *in dubiis* pay no heed; *in omnibus* don't let the pipe go out. It is Barth who brings humor into the situation, and those who read his massive volumes of *Dogmatics* with care know how the page from time to time can sparkle with humor; but it is Thurneysen who brings always a gentleness into the situation, a gentleness that has the same source as Barth's humor, the awareness of the littleness of man and the greatness of God.

We tend today to be obsessed with the complexity of the ministry. Many despair of any one man discharging competently the varied tasks of preaching, teaching, directing an educational program, counselling, administering. They feel that the situation calls for specialization. But perhaps that is merely because they have lost sight of what the ministry of Jesus Christ really is and have lost the courage to say firmly what belongs and what does not belong in such a ministry. Eduard Thurneysen has added to those functions another, that of the conscientious Church-theologian, and it is in his theology that he has found the unity of his ministry. In fact, his theology in all its parts has had just this one purpose—to bring all things into subjection to Jesus Christ and so into their true freedom and fulfillment.