

The Manse,
Crossgates,
Fife,
Scotland.

4th June, 1930.

● Dear Professor Barth,

It has been in my mind to write to you for a long time but I have always been prevented by pressure of work or other causes. I think I should have managed to write sooner if I could have written in English but, though I find it easy to read German, it is a considerable effort to write it when one is not in Germany and speaking the language every day. I feel sure, however, that you will by this time have little difficulty in understanding this letter.

Will you please permit me to offer you my very hearty congratulations on your recent appointment to the University of Bonn? I read the first notice of it in an English newspaper. I was greatly delighted to see that you

had been transferred to one of the
Rhine land Universities and I hope that
you will all enjoy the new life there.
And then please accept my further con-
gratulations on your Doctor of Divinity
Degree from Glasgow University. My
only regret is that it was not my own
old University, Edinburgh, which thought
first of giving you this honour!
I can assure you that your coming
visit to Scotland is awaited with
the keenest interest and I feel
certain that you will enjoy your stay
over here.

You will doubtless have heard
from Professor Mackintosh by this time
that a group of ministers, of whom I
am one, are very anxious to meet
you in Glasgow. I may say that there
is a constantly growing interest in
your work in this country but that
men's understanding of what you are
doing at is hampered by lack of
material. There is so far only one
of your books translated into English
and many readers of your "The Word of
God and the Word of man" are frankly
puzzled by it. Brunner has recently

done a tremendous service by publishing a number of lectures in English under the title "The Theology of Crisis." It seems to me to be an admirable book as an introduction to the subject. You must therefore expect to find a good deal of misunderstanding due simply to the fact that so many men cannot read German.

If you are able to meet the group of ministers above referred to you will be asked I expect to explain your view of the relation between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith, and you will also probably be asked if you attach any importance to the bodily Resurrection of Christ regarded as an historical fact, that is to say whether, in theory if not in practice, the Resurrection could be brought into that succession of events which can be dealt with by means of historical categories. It is not the question whether the Resurrection could be proved on existing historical data but whether it could have been demonstrated on any conceivable historical data. If you were to say that, if the historian cannot

prove, neither can he disprove the Resurrection, how would you deal with the objection that it is at least conceivable that Jesus' body was stolen away or disposed of in some other way and that historical proof of this might be brought forward. If we assert our faith in the Resurrection, must we not at the same time assert our faith that historical proof could not ~~be~~ possibly be brought forward to show that the body ~~was~~ was disposed of in some ordinary manner? And if so, is this not to bring the fact of the Resurrection in some way into the sphere of historical events? I hope you will be able to clear up this point as I feel sure that ~~one~~ the essential point of this question constitutes one of the chief difficulties which men over here feel.

You may also be asked to explain your view of Sanctification. It was the remark of a famous Edinburgh preacher that those who hold that Romans 7²⁴ refers to Paul's pre-Christian period do not know their own hearts. But I doubt if that is the common view over here. Religious thought has been

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greatly influenced by the Wesleyan attitude and I imagine that it is commonly held that sanctification - the word is not much used now - is the gradual or speedy ethicising of character under the influence of the spirit of Jesus conceived of as the personality of Jesus. Take these words e.g. from a well-known English book "The Fact of Christ" by Carnegie Simpson of Cambridge:

"Jesus exerted a marvellous spiritual influence by His personality during His life; but, as that earthly life was drawing to its close, we do not find Him contemplating the withdrawal or diminution of that influence. The very contrary. He promised its persistence and even its augmentation. That very spirit with which He had baptised men, and which it only too inevitably seemed must pass with His earthly presence, is the very thing which, most impressively, He declared would be given more than ever", and so on.

Now, I imagine you would admit this empirical influence of the personality of Christ while denying

that it is what is meant by Sanctification. Brunner: "The Theology of Crisis" H. 109-110 makes the admission: "To believe means to partake in the victory which Christ has won over sin and death. This is the paradox of their (i.e. the saints') existence. It is all important that we keep before us the difference between the empirical relation to the world of sin and the believer's relation to the Kingdom of God. Let us be warned against the confusion of the two. For faith, the real is not the empirical but the invisible world of God. The believer only has access to it.

"This does not mean that faith has no effect within the empirical world or within man. On the contrary, it has most spectacular effects. It shows itself in a new life, so different from that which others live that even the pagans cannot help wondering at and admiring in. It becomes evident in the manifold gifts of the Spirit. It works upon the empirical world so as to effect great changes in the historical process. But all these changes, however

great, do not result in the Kingdom of God. They are the reflection of it, but not the Kingdom itself. They are relative, imperfect, dubious, a mixture of the old and new. They are not the victory over the world, for the best Christians are sinners and become ill and die; but they are signs and anticipations of a victory, won in the realm of the invisible world, a victory that some time will become, but is not now, visible. Therefore one cannot speak of an evolution of the Kingdom of God. One may speak of the extension of the Christian community or Church; one may also say that the influence of faith and the Spirit upon the empirical world is growing in an individual or in a certain group or in a certain time. But in such expansion or growth there is not the least analogy to evolution. For evolution is continuous; this movement is not. Evolution is growth from within but this growth is from without. Evolution is always immanent; the Kingdom, from the beginning to the end, is transcendent, for faith rests alone on that which God does. Evolution is

direct; the growth of one thing means the lessening of some other. But this movement of the Kingdom is indirect; the growth of the wheat is accompanied by the growth of the tares. Therefore the end of this paradoxical development is not a net-gain, but a crisis-judgment".

D. you find yourself in agreement with this statement of Brunner? I can say with considerable confidence that the usual attitude in this country is to lay practically all the emphasis on these empirical effects and to speak of the growth of the Kingdom of God in the world, and the task of the Church is conceived of as that of helping to bring in the Kingdom of God. This is especially true of the Student Christian Movement (corresponding to D. C. S. V.). I wonder if you would explain what value you attach to the empirical moral effects produced by the Gospel. What is the exact relationship of our efforts to ~~these~~ improve human relationships in industry, society, the international sphere, etc.? For example Brunner states (p. xvi): "It is supremely

5th right for mankind to make its stand against tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcohol, against imperialism and the spirit of acquisitiveness. These monsters must be met — and in that battle what man may hope to be a spectator? What relation do our activities in that direction bear to our life of obedience (gehorsam) under grace? It is commonly said today that the world is attracted as perhaps never before by the moral beauty of the character of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels; e.g. this is said to be remarkably true of modern India. What would you say about this?

Further I think you will be questioned on your view of Faith (Glaube). The paradoxical character which you assign to it puzzles people generally.

Then will you allow me to ask a question on my own account? It is with reference to your category of the Eschatological. In our practical life as Christians must there not be a certain necessary overstepping of the limits of our existential situation (Überschreiten der Grenzen unseres

existentiellen Zuständen) in order that, for example, we should be able to pray at all or obey Conscience as opposed to authority? Do you not admit this overstepping in the case of preaching when you allow that, although man is deeper in the order of grace (Gnade) i.e. in dem Existentiellen, than in the order of Creation (Schöpfungsordnung) or in the order of Redemption (Erlösung), yet the preacher can address men as Sons of God without qualification, whereas the theologian must always move in the circle which carries him through the three orders unceasingly. If this overstepping is permitted in preaching why not in life? I am chiefly concerned with the attitude of the Christian towards authority, esp. the authority of the Church. How do you define the limit to his submission to authority, if there is a limit?

Please forgive me for writing you this long and detailed letter. But I thought it might be some little guide to you in coming into a Scottish theological environment. No doubt my

friend, Mr John Henderson, who conveyed your greetings to me lately, will have given you a great deal of information.

Mr Henderson may or may not have told you that I am settled down in a small church in a coal-mining district on the other side of the Firth from Edinburgh not very far from Dumfries. It is almost a year since I came here and I am extremely happy in my new work, though in many respects it is uphill. Last September too I got married.

I have no idea how long you will be able to stay in Scotland and I know that your time will be very fully occupied. But, should you have the time to spare my wife and I extend to you a very hearty invitation to visit us and, if you are able, to spend the night with us. We are within quite easy reach of Edinburgh. I am greatly looking forward to meeting you again. Looking back on my theological course I can see quite clearly that no part of it was more profitable than my four months in Münster.

Please give my hearty greetings to

From Professor Barth and your
family and accept them also for
myself.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Norman W. Porteous.
