

First Presbyterian Church

106 E. GOODWIN AVE.

WILLIAM T. RIVIERE

VICTORIA, TEXAS 24 Jan 1934

Dr. Karl Barth
Bonn, Germany

Dear Sir:

I learn with regret that your courage and sincerity have just deprived you of that honorable university^{chair} which you have been filling so well. The deprivation, of course, merely adds to your world-wide influence (e.g. as noted in my young friend Mr Holmes Rolston's first pages) or in the frequent allusions in all sorts of American religious publications. A man like yourself, who receives rays of light from beyond the clouds, needs no reminder of Epictetus' leg or of Paul's contentment. But a line of appreciation from an overseas admirer, from a pastor who reads you with pleasure, irritation, and profit, who thru your writings has been introduced to that fascinating man Kierkegaard, and whose friends accuse him of Barthianism when he plans a sermon to lead up to Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," may not be too unwelcome.

At this distance it may be unfair for a small-town pastor to have definite opinions about internal affairs in Germany. But this is largely a German community; and I shall never forget the joy of an aged Lutheran countrywoman at learning that her daughter-in-law's Presbyterianism was made respectable for her, the old lady, who had been brought up in the Reformed church in Hesse. My closest and dearest colleague here is a Lutheran pastor who claims to be a genuine Anglo-Saxon because he was born in Hanover (whence the Saxons) and lived in Schleswig (Anglia). But there is no question in my mind that state control of the church is a step backward, and that antisemitism in church is the denial of Christianity: some Jew over here has just remarked that Germany was the country where Jews were the least semitic and most nearly assimilated. We honor you for your courageous stand. And we realize that is easier for us to praise than for you to perform.

Having said so much, I dare add that I am engaged in final revision, for the April "Bibliotheca Sacra," of a paper on the philosophical background in which your theology sprang forth, intended largely as an introduction for the more orthodox groups over here, especially the Darby-Scofield-Gaebelein-Chafer premillennialists. A copy will be sent to you, of course, in due time. I may even venture to mail you a copy of an earlier draft. The popular American philosophies are so unphilosophical, and American conditions are so little understood by, e.g., a man like Lowrie (who has lived so long in Italy that he misspells Latin words to look like Italian, and who belongs to a denomination that cannot raise a native ministry, getting 41% from British possessions and many others from other churches), that a great effort at translation is necessary. I tried one, on the knife-edge produced by the collision of the two parts of a paradox.

Respectfully,

W. T. Riviere

I often wonder whether Thoreau's "Conscience"
Chait, marked "Kommen til mig" did not influence
Kierkegaard much as the German did for the Pastor
helped you from your thought.