

9, Whitehouse Terrace,
Edinburgh.

30th October, 1936.

Herrn Professor Dr. Karl Barth,
Siebengebirgestr. 18,
Bonn-am-Rhein, Germany.

Dear Professor Barth,

I very much regret the long delay in communicating with you further about the valuable paper which you have been so kind as to contribute to the proposed volume on Revelation.

The principal reason for this delay has been the lamented death of my colleague, Professor H.R. Mackintosh, who had the primary responsibility for the editorial work on the volume. I was asked in the summer of this year to take his place, but owing to the holiday period it was not possible for me until last month to confer with the small group who have been invited to give editorial advice in regard to the volume. A whole day was then given to the consideration of the plans of the volume and I am now in a position to write to you on the subject.

We do not feel satisfied that, in their present form, the papers fulfil the purpose of the volume as set forth in the memorandum originally sent to you. It may be desirable to recall to memory certain passages in that memorandum.

"A volume of this nature may be of service and help both to the younger churches in the mission field and also to the large number of clergy and laity in the churches of the West who are deeply exercised in mind by the life and death struggle in which the Christian Church is engaged with the secularised thought and society of our time.

"The volume is thus meant to be a contribution towards the task and witness of the Church militant in its conflict

with the pagan tendencies of the age. In many quarters there is little appreciation of the vital nature of the challenge presented by modern thought and practice, not only in its philosophical and ethical system, but also in the claims of the totalitarian state, and in the suppression of personal values by the industrial order. It is not proposed that the volume should attempt to deal explicitly with these various doctrines. It is intended rather to be a positive statement of the Christian understanding of revelation. But the papers should be consciously directed to the needs and perplexities of men today, even though there may be little express reference to the modern situation.

"Since it is hoped that the volume may be widely read by intelligent laymen, the subject should be presented as far as possible in non-technical language and in a form that non-theological readers will understand."

The work which is being done in preparation for the Conference at Oxford next year on the subject of Church, Community and State is at every point making it plain that the central issue in the controversies of today is the question of Revelation. Those who are responsible for the preparation for the Oxford Conference, as well as those who are preparing for the Conference in 1938 in the Far East, are looking to this volume to help them in the severe conflict between Christian faith and the new and old paganism in the West and in the East. We are of opinion that the contributions to this volume might be directed more clearly and effectively towards the clarifying of these issues than they are in their present form.

Mr. T.S. Eliot has consented to contribute an introductory chapter to the volume in which he will pose the problem as it presents itself to modern thought. The aim of the other contributions to the volume will be to state in as convincing a way as possible the Christian answer to this problem. A copy of Mr. Eliot's paper will be sent to you as soon as it is available.

In the meantime I enclose a few pages containing an extract from one of the draft papers written in preparation for the Oxford Conference which states the kind of issues with which we should like the volume on revelation to deal.

The central questions to which, in our view, the papers

should address themselves are the following:-

1. In what sense do you understand 'revelation'?
2. Where in your view is it to be found - in Christ,
in the Bible, in other religions, in history,
in nature?
3. On what grounds is its authority to be accepted?

To achieve the ends in view the papers will, in our judgment, require a good deal of revision. The experience in connection with the several volumes that are being prepared for the Conference at Oxford has shown that to produce a really good volume, which includes contributions representing different Christian traditions, the work has to be carried out in two stages. The first is to obtain from the contributors preliminary drafts of their papers. It is only when the material is available in this form, and submitted to a small number of persons for comment, that the best plan for achieving the purpose of the volume can be clearly seen. Our justification in asking those who are giving their generous help to undertake the labour of a revision of their original contributions lies in the transcendent importance of the question with which the papers deal for the Christian Church throughout the world in the struggle in which it is engaged.

In order that the volume may be issued at a reasonable price and secure a wide circulation, it is desirable that none of the contributions should much exceed a length of ten thousand words. It is therefore hoped that the writers, in revising their papers, should not appreciably increase their length.

It is hoped that all the contributions in their revised form may be back in my hands by the end of January, 1937.

I am writing in the above sense to all the contributors to the volume. Perhaps you will permit me now to make a few remarks of a more particular kind with reference to your own contribution. I should not venture, I think, to make these remarks if they represented merely my own impressions, but actually they have been suggested by the conversation and correspondence I have had with those who have been sharing the

responsibility of editorial advice. We feel that your contribution comes nearer than most of the others to the model we originally had in mind, and really answers the questions the book was intended to answer. Yet there are some points that I would wish to raise with you.

Page 4: "Eben diese völlige Neuheit seiner Erscheinung ~~kennzeichnet~~ die Offenbarung als Offenbarung im ursprünglichen, echten und strengen Sinn des Begriffs". But could you not say something more in defence of this view, which is assumed and implicitly throughout the paper, that in the strict sense nothing can be revealed unless it is completely new? This does not by any means seem obvious, and the audience we are in this book addressing would not find it obvious.

Page 13: "Wohl ist der Glaube und so auch die Erkenntnis des Glaubens ein freier Akt menschlicher Wahl und Entscheidung, ein Werk unseres Herzens, Willens und Verstandes. . . Gewiss glaube ich in freier Wahl und Entscheidung..." This sounds like Pragmatism and "the Will to Believe". I know well that you are very far from intending it in a pragmatist sense, but I confess that the expression puzzles me. I should say that I cannot help believing what I believe, that I have no will in the matter, but can only believe what strikes me as true.

Page 16-17: "Am Anfang des Lebens Jesu steht das Wunderzeichen seiner jungfräulichen Geburt. Und es steht am Ende seines Lebens das Wunderzeichen des leeren Grabes.... Auch diese Zeichen können übersehen werden. Unglaube ist möglich trotz dieser zu uns gegebenen Wunderzeichen und vielleicht gerade angesichts dieser Wunderzeichen!" But the difficulty felt by so many of our contemporaries is that, with the best will in the world, they are unable to believe that these miracles actually happened; they honestly suspect that they are legendary. Cannot you offer some word of help and light to the poor modern man at this point?

I would also venture to make two remarks of a more general character. First, I would point out that, though you have something to say in the paper about the supposed revelation of God in nature, art etc., you say nothing about the revelation in other religions. Yet this is a far more important and serious question. It is a question that is likely to be very much in the mind of the laity who read the book. The modern man knows so much about other religions, while the man of the sixteenth or seventeenth century knew hardly anything - Luther had never even heard of Buddha. Moreover, our missionaries are very eager to have an answer to this question; and it was

on a suggestion from a missionary quarter that this book was first undertaken. What are we to say when confronted by the claim of the other religions that they too have had a revelation? Can you give us a word of help here?

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Finally, we have asked ourselves whether you could not have pity on the poor layman by using a less theological terminology in certain places. Is it, possible, without losing any of the richness of the content of your paper, to express it in a language that the layman can understand?

With these remarks, I must leave it to you to decide whether there is any revision of your paper which you feel able to undertake, between now and January, especially in the light of the papers by the other contributors which have been sent to you.

With kindest remembrances, and in eager expectation of seeing and hearing you during your coming visit to Scotland.

I am,

Yours most sincerely,

John Baillie