

KBSNA sessions to be held at AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Chicago, November 18-19

MEMBERSHIP IN THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY

Readers of the Newsletter (and anyone else who is interested) are invited to join the Karl Barth Society of North America.

To become a member of the Barth Society, send your name, address, and annual dues of \$10.00 to:

Professor Russell Palmer
Dept. of Philosophy and Religion
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Omaha, NE 68182-0265

Members whose dues were last paid prior to October 1993 are urged to send in their annual renewal.

A preview of Bruce McCormack's paper

The Von Balthasar Thesis and the Myth of the Neo-Orthodox Barth

For over 40 years now, scholarly interpretation of Karl Barth's development between the second edition of *Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics* has been massively controlled by the paradigm first set forth by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his book *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (E.T. *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Ignatius Press, 1992).

According to this paradigm, Barth's development is most aptly described in terms of a "turn from dialectic to analogy" -- a turn which von Balthasar associated with Barth's little book on Anselm (1931).

Bruce McCormack's paper will explore what he regards as the insuperable difficulties which surround this paradigm. It will then outline a new paradigm for interpreting the development in question, and will conclude with a few observations on the relation of the von Balthasar thesis to the Anglo-American misreading of Barth as a "Neo-orthodox" theologian.

Bruce L. McCormack is the Frederick and Margaret L. Weyerhaeuser Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is the author of a soon-to-be-published book on *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*. His presentation at the Barth conference in St. Paul last June is summarized elsewhere in this issue.

For the sixth year in a row, the Karl Barth Society will sponsor a program just prior to the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in November.

At this year's meeting in Chicago, the Barth Society program will again include a second session on Saturday morning in addition to the Friday afternoon meeting.

The Barth sessions are listed as AM15 and AM42 in the "Additional Meetings" section of the AAR/SBL program book (pp. 164, 167).

The first session on *Friday afternoon, November 18*, will run from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. It will be held in the Astoria Room on the third floor of the Chicago Hilton & Towers.

At 2:30 Charles Cosgrove (Northern Baptist Seminary) will make a presentation on the topic "*The Church with and for Israel: The History of a Theological Novum before and after Barth.*"

At 4:00 Bruce McCormack (Princeton Seminary) will speak on "*The von Balthasar Thesis and the Myth of the Neo-orthodox Barth.*"

The *Saturday morning* session on *November 19*, in Conference Room 4M on the fourth floor of the Hilton, will begin at 9:00 with a presentation by Paul Molnar (St. John's University), entitled "*Toward a Contemporary Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: Karl Barth and the Present Discussion.*"

The rest of the time on Saturday morning (10:30 to 12:00) will be devoted to small group discussions of work in progress.

All interested persons who have works in progress -- efforts to carry forward the sort of theology represented by Barth as well as studies on Barth himself -- are encouraged to bring several copies of their draft material. These will be distributed at the Friday meeting and discussed in small groups on Saturday.

A preview of Charles Cosgrove's paperA preview of Paul Molnar's paper

**The Church *with* and *for* Israel:
The History of a Theological Novum
before and after Barth**

At a recent Princeton symposium on the church and Israel, Paul Van Buren had this to say about Karl Barth:

What [Barth] wrote about the Jewish people horrifies many of us today, but his radical break with the past cannot be denied: against the weight of the whole tradition, Barth insisted that the Jewish people today are Israel, as Jews themselves have always said....For all his shortcomings, Barth taught us to say "the Church and Israel" and thus contributed importantly in ushering us into what may become the third great period of the Church's history, one that may come to be called that of *the Church with and for Israel*. (PTSB Suppl. Issue no. 1 [1990], p. 7)

Are there no precursors to Barth? That seems to be the general opinion (so also F.-W. Marquardt [*Die Entdeckung des Judentums...*], who speaks of Barth's theology of Israel as "ein absolutes novum").

This opinion is open to doubt, however, and from seemingly unlikely quarters. Barth himself knew and used a tradition that, in its own distinctive way, had already established for itself that the Jewish people are irrevocably God's people and as such are central to Christian theology.

In the exegetical section of his *Church Dogmatics* where Barth treats "the Church and Israel" by commenting on Romans 11 (CD II/2, §34, 4), Barth lists no other secondary bibliography for Romans 11 except an "extremely useful" study by E. F. Ströter (CD II/2, p. 267). Ströter was a Fundamentalist and a Dispensationalist, a leading figure in the late 19th century prophecy conference movement in America and active in like circles in Germany during the last two decades of his life. Despite the volumes that have appeared on Barth's theology of Israel, no study of Barth so much as mentions Ströter, and Ströter's book is now very rare, nearly unknown.

The purpose of Prof. Cosgrove's paper is to revisit the history of the new view of Paul by according Dispensationalism its proper place in that history. Giving special attention to Ströter's work, he compares Dispensationalist commentary on Romans 9-11 to the later exegesis of Barth, Stendahl, and those who have followed their lead.

Charles Cosgrove is Associate Professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Toward a Contemporary Doctrine
of the Immanent Trinity:
Karl Barth and the Present Discussion**

In a paper to be presented on November 19, Paul Molnar will explore Barth's doctrine of the immanent Trinity in relation to several other options.

Most sorely needed today, says Molnar, is a doctrine of the immanent Trinity which reinforces God's sovereignty as the basis of Christian certitude regarding knowledge of God and the Christian life. Such a doctrine will speak of creation, reconciliation, and redemption, without succumbing to monism, dualism, or agnosticism.

Molnar notes that most theologians today are suspicious of such a doctrine because they believe it has led to "wild and empty conceptual acrobatics" (Rahner) having nothing to do with the experience of ordinary Christians.

What could the inner life of the Trinity (or knowledge of that life) have to do with us in our earthly life? Kant dismissed the doctrine as irrelevant because it served no practical purpose. For Gordon Kaufman, the question of God's sovereignty is fundamentally irrelevant to contemporary theologians who need a concept of God which will help relativize and humanize society.

The contemporary assumption seems to be that theology serves human purposes and needs, and must be judged by the goals we humans have set for it. Accordingly, a number of current works reduce the trinitarian God to humanity's attempts to save the world, to create community within and outside the Christian Church, or make the immanent Trinity dependent on history in such a way that it becomes a product of history.

Molnar suggests, on the other hand, that a doctrine of the immanent Trinity could be an effective means of avoiding pantheism, dualism, and agnosticism today. He holds that such a doctrine becomes irrelevant only when it is detached from revelation (Christ) and allowed to function as a principle grounded in and defined by the Christian experience of faith.

The paper will discuss Karl Rahner's axiom concerning the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity, which has shaped the thinking of Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jüngel in important ways.

Among the questions to be considered are: How does Rahner's understanding of God and our relations with God affect his view of the immanent Trinity? How do Rahner and Barth perceive and describe God's freedom? What precisely are the roles of experience, analogy, and faith in the theological enterprise?

A major feature of this paper is to show that, while Rahner and Barth agree that God's self-communication is vital, there is a fundamental difference over how to understand God's sovereignty that shapes their views of the God-world relation. According to Molnar, Barth's doctrine of the immanent Trinity effectively prevents any reversal between the experience of faith and the knowledge of faith, while Rahner's transcendental method effectively issues in just such a reversal.

Molnar contends that theology today, especially trinitarian theology, is as much threatened by a self-designed irrelevance as it was when Barth first objected that the Bible was not written to answer our questions to God but to speak of God's address to us, because the doctrine of the Trinity has been so fully reduced to anthropology via the principle of relationality as defined and limited by human experience.

Paul D. Molnar (Ph.D. Fordham) is Professor of Theology at St. John's University, Jamaica, N.Y., where he has taught since 1985. He is a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America and the College Theology Society as well as the AAR.

Persons interested in Prof. Molnar's presentation may wish to refer to two of his articles: "The Functions of the Immanent Trinity in the Theology of Karl Barth: Implications for Today," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1989) 42:367-99, and "The Function of the Trinity in Moltmann's Ecological Doctrine of Creation," *Theological Studies* (1990), 51:673-97.

Markus Barth, 1915-1994

Markus Barth, son of Karl Barth and an accomplished New Testament scholar, died on July 1, 1994 at the age of 79. We feature two remembrances of Markus Barth, one written by David Demson, long-time Secretary of the KBSNA who teaches at Emmanuel College, Toronto, and the other a letter to him from Charles Dickinson, an independent scholar who divides his time between Paris and the U.S.

I have sometimes been credited with beginning the Karl Barth Society of North America. This is incorrect. First, several people were involved in arranging the first conference and first meeting of the KBSNA in Toronto in 1972, not the least of whom was Martin Rumscheidt.

Second, the idea of the Society was hatched in the brain of Markus Barth. He envisaged a society which would have three purposes: (1) To gather a collection of works by and about Karl Barth and also works which influenced or concerned him, i.e. a collection which would facilitate the study of Barth; (2) to support the publication of the *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe*; (3) to hold conferences about Barth's theology and its reach.

Markus' intention was not that the Society would promote Barthianism. Rather, it was his conviction that his father had proffered in his writings many perspectives in dogmatics, the history of doctrine, biblical exposition, and even politics that had not yet received the kind of attention that the care in their construction merited. The Society's purpose was to draw attention to what had not yet been sufficiently attended to.

The joyful spirit of the early years of the Society was, in large measure, a gift engendered by Markus' participation. Few who attended the first KBSNA colloquium will have forgotten the marvelous spirit of humour in which he commented on the (then hot) controversy surrounding the publication of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt's book, *Theologie und Sozialismus*. And after Markus returned to Switzerland to take up the New Testament professorship in Basel, he kept up his interest in the KBSNA, demanding news of it from me and asking what he could do to help.

Over the years, as a friend and also in relation to the work of the KBSNA, I visited with Markus often -- first in Chicago, then in Pittsburgh, then in Basel. I never left him without feeling deeply cheered theologically and personally. I remember particularly one occasion when he and Rose Marie were staying with me in Toronto. Emil and Rose Fackenheim came over for conversation, which continued well into the morning hours simply because in such engaged conversation no one could be conscious of clock or watch.

I was in Switzerland when Professor Thurneysen died. Markus telephoned to tell me the time and place of the funeral service. When I told him I did not have a suit with me, he told me I could not go to the service. Even the memory of his prohibitions prompts me to smile.

DAVID E. DEMSON

Dear David:

I am sure you are aware that, preceded by his wife Rosmarie on 1 Sept. 1993, in Basel on 1 July 1994 died the New Testament scholar Professor Markus Barth, son of Karl Barth.

Born 6 Oct. 1915 in Switzerland, studying in Switzerland and at the "Kirchliche Hochschule" of the Confessing Church in Berlin, he received his doctorate in Germany (Göttingen, I think), was pastor at Bubendorf near Basel, then taught New Testament at Dubuque Theological Seminary, at the University of Chicago (where I knew him 1962-3), at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (whither I followed him in 1963), and ended his career as Oscar Cullmann's successor at the University of Basel. He would have been my *Doktorvater*, except that I switched back to systematic theology after all.

His works which come immediately to mind are *Der Augenzeuge* (presented as his doctoral dissertation,

and earning him the wrath of Käsemann, the form critics and Bultmannians); *Das Herrenmahl* (a short work on the Lord's Supper which has been translated into French, and should be into English); *Die Taufe -- ein Sakrament?* (his answer: an emphatic NO!); *Acquittal by Resurrection*; *Conversation with the Bible*; and his two-volume Anchor Bible commentary on Ephesians (where one trusts his exegesis is not vitiated by his retrograde attribution of the letter to Paul).

He was to have written the Anchor Bible commentary on Colossians as well, but handed the job on to another. Also I know that he wrote hundreds of pages of unpublished commentary on Galatians; and probably on Hebrews and John as well.

I wonder if it might not be in order for the Karl Barth Society of North America to consider very seriously some kind of commemoration of the life and work of Markus Barth: at the very least perhaps a memorial volume of essays, with *curriculum vitae* and complete bibliography.

In addition, I wonder if it might interest the KBSNA -- particularly in your Canadian context -- to inquire into the possibilities of publishing the already-made French translation of *Das Herrenmahl*, as well as of course an eventually possible English translation.

CHARLES C. DICKINSON III

"God's Freedom and Ours" theme of conference on Barth at Luther Seminary

Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. was the site for the sixth in a biennial series of conferences focusing on the theology of Karl Barth and its relevance for the mission of the church today. The theme of the conference, held June 20-22, 1994, was "God's Freedom and Ours." It was sponsored by the ELCA Institute for Mission in the U.S.A., directed by Wayne Stumme, in cooperation with Luther Seminary.

Gerhard Forde

The opening presentation was by Gerhard Forde (LNTS) on "God's Freedom for Us -- Some Reflections on Karl Barth's Vision of Freedom." Characterizing Barth's entire theology as a theology of freedom, Forde said Barth aims to catch a vision of the freedom of God who is free for us in Jesus Christ and sets us free to be for him.

Barth claims that God is free for us only in Jesus Christ (outside of Jesus, God is an abstraction -- an idol), and we can be free for God only in Jesus Christ. Thus human freedom is grounded in the freedom of God.

While hailing Barth's effort as a massive and ingenious attempt to bring the freedom of God to expression, Forde wondered whether it really works. "Does Barth try too hard to bring the freedom of God to heel?" Citing Luther's advice to pay attention to the revealed God and leave the hidden God alone, Forde expressed his Lutheran reservation about the possibility of taming "the hidden God" (the God not preached).

At the same time he hailed Barth as our best apologist for the faith, since the sheer attractiveness of the gospel is its best defense.

Bruce McCormack

Bruce McCormack (Princeton Seminary) began his presentation by acknowledging the Reformed debt to Lutherans for taking the initiative six times in hosting Barth conferences, while his own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), seems not all that convinced it wants to be Reformed, let alone Barthian!

McCormack's topic was "Radical Autonomy or Communicative Freedom," with the subtitle "Divine Election and Human Freedom in the Theology of Karl Barth."

Although Barth's tendency to believe he had broken with all that came before him was genuine and sincere, McCormack said, we can now see that this assessment was exaggerated and one-sided. Barth's break with modern thought was not as complete as he and his contemporaries believed. There were points where he had to reject much of what modern theology stood for, but his dialectical theology would have been unthinkable without his on-going commitment to a number of modern theology's central convictions.

In terms of the problem of self, subjectivity, autonomy, and freedom, McCormack contended that the corrections Barth introduced into the modern understanding of what it means to be a subject did not constitute a complete break with it. On the contrary, Barth built on the modern understanding even as he reoriented it by placing it in a new framework.

McCormack commented on Trutz Rendtorf's thesis that Barth's championing of the freedom of God results in the destruction of the freedom and reality of the creature: God is the only true reality; everything else is shadow.

McCormack agreed with Herbert Ansinger that Rendtorf misjudges Barth's intention. Instead of setting human freedom over against divine freedom as alternatives, Barth sees human freedom grounded in the freedom of God. Rendtorf's notion of autonomy as a self-positing subjectivity that wants to be independent of others is really equivalent to Barth's definition of sin.

By contrast, McCormack adopted Ansinger's term "communicative freedom" to designate Barth's understanding of real freedom. Barth does not

repudiate the the modern view of the self as a self-determining subject. He in fact valued the determination of the self by itself for others (both God and human beings). Barth instead seeks to reorient the modern idea of self-determination by shifting it away from its sinful misuse and bringing it into subjection to an understanding of freedom that is communicative. Thus God's autonomy does not suppress the freedom of others.

McCormack suggested that Rentdorf erred by focusing on Barth's second *Romans*, the polemical style of which makes it susceptible to misinterpretation. Though the first edition is less well known, it is more clearly written, and in McCormack's opinion the continuity between the two editions far outweighs the discontinuity. Indeed, he holds, the basic understanding of divine autonomy set forth in *Romans*¹ continued to inform Barth's mature theology.

Turning to the *Church Dogmatics*, McCormack called the doctrine of election in II/2 the "apex" of the *Dogmatics*, with everything prior to it fulfilled there and everything subsequent to it an unfolding of insights set forth there. He characterized it as Barth's finest theological achievement and his most important contribution to Christian theology.

The novel element in Barth's doctrine of election is the consistency with which he made it the constitutive ground of his doctrine of God, McCormack said. For Barth, God is not only the *subject* but also the primary *object* of election. The radicality of Barth's doctrine of election and of the divine ontology that flows from it lies in the fact that God's being is self-determined being. In election, God determined to be God in a highly concrete way, with a highly concrete goal and character.

The content of this decision, according to Barth, is that God determined not to be God without the human race. God determined to be a God who is graciously inclined towards humankind. This primal decision excludes temporality, in the sense that there never was a time when God had not already made this decision.

McCormack then showed how this way of understanding God's being as self-determined being constitutes a rejection of the classical Reformed view of predestination. According to the latter, Christ is only an afterthought. Therefore the incarnation does not define the being of God. If we ask who the God is who elects some and rejects others, the answer is that we cannot know. God is hidden. Moreover, if there is another higher mode of existence in God prior to the decision to provide a Mediator, then God could not enter into time to suffer and die without ceasing to be that unknown and unknowable God.

Turning to the freedom of the human creature, McCormack discussed the self-determination of the creature given in faith according to *CD IV/1*, §63. He argued that God's freedom does not exclude the

freedom and self-determination of the creature. When God breaks into our closed circle of self-centeredness, we respond as the self-determining creatures we were made to be.

Finally, in dealing with the means by which humanity is exalted (*CD IV/2*, §64), McCormack argued that it is not alien to humanity to be obedient to God. On the contrary, we are genuinely human in the deepest sense when we live by God's grace. To be truly human is to be obedient.

In conclusion, McCormack recapitulated his claim that Barth shared the distinctively modern preoccupation with the problem of freedom and self-determination. It was not Barth's intent to reject that concern but to reorient it.

To understand Barth, he insisted, we must see him with one foot always firmly planted on 19th century soil. Before we talk about the future of Barth's theology, we must understand who Karl Barth was and what he represented in his own time.

Walter Bouman

Walter Bouman (Trinity Lutheran Seminary) presented an analysis of the suffering of God in relation to God's freedom and the problem of evil. The question he raised was whether the suffering of God is an expression of God's freedom or a contradiction of it.

After a review of the history of Christian thought on the impassibility of God, Bouman gave a survey of various 20th century theologies that emphasize the suffering of God.

In that context he then described Karl Barth's teaching on providence and evil in *Church Dogmatics III/3*. Bouman observed that Barth's doctrine of providence emphasizes the resurrection rather than the cross, and that for Barth God does not suffer but reveals, so that revelation gives us a new understanding of evil as something that has only a semblance of power.

Martin Rumscheidt

Martin Rumscheidt (Atlantic School of Theology) spoke on "The Christian's Freedom for Bondage." He traced the steps in Barth's opposition to the Nazis and the German Christians, leading up to an account of the address Barth delivered on the eve of Reformation Day, 1933, on "Reformation as Decision."

Rumscheidt objected to Helmut Thielicke's interpretation of Barth's statement in *Theologische Existenz heute* (June 1933) that the task of the church was to do theology "as if nothing had happened." Thielicke contended that Barth was signaling an intention to withdraw from political activity and just go back to the study. Instead, Rumscheidt argued, the statement should be read to mean that the highly touted event of the German Christians is theologically a "nothing" -- in the sense of the prophetic critique of idolatry, where the idols of the nations are nothing.

To turn all of that into a theologically compelling event would be idolatry, and theology is not to enter into idolatry.

In the second part of his presentation, Rumscheidt gave an account of Barth's address on "Reformation as Decision" (which apparently has not been translated into English). For Barth, the decisive decision is the one already made by God. The corresponding human decision is an acknowledgement of God's decision, leading to a commitment that leaves behind the place where many options remain open. This was the position of the Reformers. Such a commitment is irreversible, since the Christian cannot have faith and at the same time regard oneself as free not to have faith some other time.

In Barth's view, modern Protestant theology thinks from a standpoint above two options, of which Christian faith is but one. In this stance, one has not given up the faith, but one has retained one's freedom before it. Liberalism in the church, then, regards the choice of Christian faith as one of our human options. One still has time for them, or perhaps will again. The key remains oneself and one's options.

Katherine Sonderegger

Katherine Sonderegger (Middlebury College), known for her book on Barth's doctrine of Israel, presented a comparative analysis of Karl Barth and John Henry Newman on the life of faith. Borrowing philosophical categories, she characterized Barth as a "compatibilist" and Newman as an "incompatibilist" on the question of freedom and determinism.

According to Sonderegger, Barth does not ask Christians to choose between our freedom and God's, between our autonomy and divine sovereignty. Barth offers a pattern which does not rest on the "terrible choice" between God's agency and ours.

Instead, Barth offers a pattern forged on the shape of Christ, the one who is free in obedience and Lord even in his servanthood. This portrait of creaturely freedom is modeled on Christ's true humanity, his freedom for God, with reference to the history of the covenant people which foreshadows the humanity Christ assumes and saves.

In referring to Barth and Newman roughly as "compatibilist" and "incompatibilist" respectively, Sonderegger noted that both were deeply cultured theologians who wore their philosophical learning lightly. Though Barth is often considered non-philosophical, Sonderegger insisted that he was in fact an acute and careful philosophical mind, as seen in the "masterful" discussions of various philosophers in the excurses of the *Church Dogmatics*.

She also called attention to the difficulty in attaching such philosophical categories as "compatibilism" and "incompatibilism" to theology, since such categories describe creature-creature relations, not God-creature relations.

Sonderegger described Barth's recasting of creaturely freedom in terms of obedience to God. We are free not to choose but to obey. Our freedom is not neutral but is freedom for God. What we moderns prize as our freedom to choose is, for Barth, our disobedient willfulness and denial of God. It cannot be that we are free to sin. It must not be, and yet sin is a reality. In Barth's mind this is a metaphysical contradiction, a profound theological riddle that is insoluble. The solution to this mystery does not belong to this life.

In her own comments on the problem, Sonderegger suggested that *creation* offers a better way of thinking about it than *causality*. God creates freedom, and, she argued, we need not limit that freedom to the singular and "deeply Lutheran" form Barth has offered -- i.e. that freedom is only obedience toward God.

Rather, she called for a fuller portrait of our freedom before God, to include the fact that, as creatures, we are free for obedience, but also free for disobedience. As fallen and rebellious creatures, we are free, too, to be sustained and delivered even in our ungodliness.

Timothy Lull

Timothy Lull (Pacific Lutheran Seminary) discussed Barth's concept of freedom in the church, relating it to three contemporary issues.

One issue was biblical interpretation. Lull expressed anxiety concerning whether the church today sees Scripture as an obstacle to be deconstructed or as a source of renewal for our life. Drawing from Barth's discussion of the relation between authority and freedom in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and in *Church Dogmatics I/2*, §21, Lull expounded what Barth says about freedom for the interpretation of Scripture, including freedom for historical reconstruction, freedom for the use of philosophy in theology, and the freedom to claim one's own interpretation as an authentic witness to the Word.

The second issue Lull identified was how to respond to those who test the boundaries of the church's theology. For light on this question Lull turned to Barth's essay on *The Gift of Freedom*, where he develops the ethics of theology itself in terms of the ethos of the free theologian. Lull related the five marks Barth sets forth to the current situation.

In the third place (briefly) Lull cited the confusion in the church today about the role of experience (or "spirituality") in theology. He called attention to Barth's discussion of the liberation of the Christian in *Church Dogmatics IV/3*, §71, 6, where Barth acknowledges the Christian's freedom to take experience seriously (if it meets certain criteria).

In conclusion, Lull voiced his concern about those who use Barth as a club or shield against others who do not seem orthodox enough to suit them, and suggested that Barth's discussions of freedom in the

church as summarized above make it clear that such efforts are a misuse of Barth.

John Webster

John Webster (Wycliffe College, Toronto) posed the question: What can a Christian theology of human freedom learn from Karl Barth?

He observed that "freedom" is not an independent theme in the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth's most explicit discussions of freedom occur in the context of his treatment of other topics (e.g. the Holy Spirit, vocation). For Barth, human freedom has *corollary* rather than axiomatic status. Where else can we learn that human freedom exists, and what it is, than in confrontation with God's own freedom (the source and measure of all freedom)?

Barth understands the freedom of God as God's inexhaustible capacity to be God for us, and human freedom as joyful and active consent to the mystery of grace.

Webster described Barth's treatment of freedom as having three features:

1. What Barth says about freedom is **multi-layered**. Barth's discussion is dialectical rather than unilinear. In *The Gift of Freedom*, Barth makes theological, anthropological, and ethical statements about freedom: divine freedom is directed toward human liberation; human freedom is placed within the formative action of God; and the encounter between God and humanity is imperatival in character. Here theology, anthropology, and ethics are all part of one package. Webster professed not to be eager to effect a resolution of Barth's seemingly awkward juxtaposition of different kinds of claims.

2. Barth's account of freedom is **descriptive** rather than theoretical. The compatibility between assertions about God's freedom and assertions about our freedom is not demonstrated by constructing a better set of abstract terms for the problem than those found in ordinary Christian language. Attention must be paid to Barth's *actualism*, *contextualism*, and *particularism*, with reference to the history of the covenant.

3. Barth's understanding of freedom is **spiritual**, not objectifiable. Freedom is non-theorizable in abstraction from its actual occurrence. A vantage point of neutrality is excluded. The questions need to be asked along biblical and Christian lines.

Given these characteristics, Webster observed, the task of reading Barth on these issues is more complex than is often thought.

For Barth, our self-determination is subject to determination by God. But, according to Webster, that divine determination is not the suppression of human freedom, but its **specification**. As freedom in limitation, our self-determination is "specified," not obliterated.

Webster pointed out that we must pay attention to Barth's serious adjustments to the traditional doctrine of God. By describing God as the one who freely loves (*CD II/1*), Barth makes it clear that divine freedom is not the freedom of abstract isolation. We cannot speak of God's freedom apart from the history of God's dealings with humanity. Barth sees human freedom as ingredient within the freedom of God. Indeed, for Barth, theocentrism and anthropocentrism are not merely compatible; in many ways they are the same thing!

If we do not take seriously this distinctive understanding of the nature of God's freedom, Barth's insistence on self-determination as basic to human beings will seem incoherent.

Webster insisted that the critics' interpretation of the freedom of God as God's "absolute subjectivity" (which shifts into abstraction) simply does not fit what Barth says in *II/2*, *III/3*, and *IV/4* of the *Dogmatics*.

Barth opposes an excessive emphasis on human subjectivity (so that the saving work of Christ would need extending or completing by a human response), but he also seeks to defend the reality of human freedom and self-determination against any diminishment or exclusion of the subjective realm.

Barth insists that God does not crush us but establishes us as free subjects. Freedom means that we are most truly ourselves when we act in correspondence with what we have been made in Jesus Christ.

Webster concluded with a discussion of the ethical ramifications of Barth's view of freedom in the area of political action, based on the ethics of reconciliation in the posthumously published lectures that would have constituted *Church Dogmatics IV/4*.

Webster's exegesis of Barth is rich and detailed. In the editor's judgment, the publication of this and other papers presented at the conference would be a real service.

Forde II

The conference concluded with a second presentation by Gerhard Forde, speaking this time on "Our Freedom for God."

For Barth, because God is free for us in Jesus Christ, we on our part are free for God (also in Jesus Christ). Barth's claim is that Jesus (and only Jesus) can set us free for God. Forde asked whether that is actually so: "Does it really work?"

Forde gave Barth credit for attempting to remove the inner inconsistency of Protestant theology by working out the consequences of *sola gratia* soteriology for the understanding of creation and fall. He seeks to reconstruct the whole from the vantage point of the grace given in Jesus Christ. Barth's doctrine of election displaces the "free will defense" as the fundamental structure of dogmatics. Humans, having

been encountered by grace, see themselves as created to be encountered by grace.

Forde wondered, however, if this entails acceptance of the *felix culpa* (the idea of the fortunate fall).

Forde suggested that Barth may expect too much of dogmatics, by looking to dogmatics to do what only proclamation and sacrament can do. He suspected that the logic of Barth's position goes too far, leading to the acceptance of the *felix culpa*, universalism, and the denial of the reality of anything outside of grace.

According to Forde, Barth ends up with a paradoxical standoff between grace and faith. His final resolution is not the death of the old self but more like a Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

Quoting George Hunsinger's suggestion (in *How to Read Karl Barth*) of a "Chalcedonian pattern" for understanding the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, Forde expressed "the uneasiness of a hardened Lutheran" about the use of a dogmatic theory to solve the problem, and wondered why Hunsinger looks to Chalcedon rather than to Calvary. In Forde's view, it is the cross and the preaching of it, not a theology about it, that ends bondage and gives freedom.

Still, Forde admired what he called the audacity of Karl Barth in making the dogmatics do too much, as opposed to holding back (with the free will defense and its petty moralism). Going too far theologically, he concluded, is better than not going far enough!

What Should We Do?

A Radio Talk by Karl Barth (1952)

"What should we do?" That is an important question. Its answer would require more than a quarter hour, to say something understandable to all and not superficial. A lot depends on who "we" who are asking are. What do they mean when they say the word "do"? As well as if it is clear to those asking that the small word "should" refers in every case to a commandment, that then under certain circumstances could contradict what they wish, desire, and like.

Yet now I gather that those raising this question for Radio Basel originally mean something very specific: "What can I, listener so-and-so, contribute to world peace?" And I think that I can say a few short, clear, and perhaps practical words to this.

First, to be sure, is something really sobering: our thoughts and intentions concerning this matter must be as good as possible -- the big men in Washington and in the Kremlin who will decide about war and peace (hopefully over a better peace than the one which we now have) will not be asking us for our advice. Our first and perhaps our most important contribution to world peace as well must consist in our

prayer to God, that God instill wisdom, understanding, and deep sympathy for the people who trust in their leadership in the hearts of these men, and those who listen to them.

Yet it is also the case here that those who will not act properly cannot properly pray either. And so it is also gratifying that apparently many today ask what they should do as their contribution to world peace in their particular community in response to the commandments given to them.

Actually there is really something that we all should do and certainly also can do. The big men of whom I spoke are no less dependent on their people than they are on them. One hears often today that people want peace and not war. If this were the case, then these big men would notice this, consider it in their decisions, and arrange for the establishment of world peace. People have the governments they earn, and receive from them in return what they wish to have and be themselves. Yet it does not appear so certain to me that people -- and you and I also belong to them, dear listeners -- really want peace and not war; so earnestly at least that the governments notice it and govern accordingly. What should and can we -- you and I -- do in this direction?

I think above all, we should not be so afraid of the evil intentions of the other! Naturally one can be afraid in today's world. Yet one can still do something that one should not do. Today whoever is afraid wants war. The other notices this -- whether his intentions are good or evil -- becomes fearful and also wants war. Whoever does not want war should, because we still have a bad and real peace, be certain of his own stance and be of good courage every day. Everyone who is like this and does not behave as if the world were about to fall out of the sky, as if dear Lord were about to die, and as if the other is about to eat us at any moment, is doing something for world peace.

Secondly: whoever does not fear must be and remain a human being, who sees with their own eyes, and hears with their own ears, and decides to think with their own mind. It should not matter to them, if they are in the minority or even sometimes completely alone. They cannot permit themselves to become, through propaganda, a product of the masses. It is the organized and mobilized masses who are always and everywhere the actual danger to world peace. Their cry is, as loud as it can be, a lie, and therefore a secret cry for war. Persons are needed who know how to act unperturbed by the cries from the Right and Left. It is because there are so few free persons that peace is endangered.

Thirdly: whoever is not afraid, and is a free and peaceful human being, is someone who is open to the sorrow and needs of one's fellow human beings, and for the question of how one could perhaps stand by them a little. The fellow human being is important

and not myself with my principles. The danger of war threatens always from the fact that many people have swallowed some rule. This is the reason that so many run about with sour faces and try to make life difficult for each other. Away with such rules. Whoever cannot sigh with another and laugh at oneself a little for another is a warmonger, even if one is the greatest friend of peace.

My quarter hour is over. There is much more to say in the same tone. No one may lay their hands in their lap! It begins, for everyone, at the right place, namely with themselves. When the big men who rule the world see that we, the people, really want peace, then they will not lead us into a third world war. I would like to add something else now: in addition a great and deep fear of God is needed in order that we really desire peace and that our modest contribution to world peace is made.

KARL BARTH

Radio Basel 1952

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Translated by Paul D. Matheny

CORRESPONDENCE

Franziska Zellweger-Barth

Karl Barth's only daughter, Franziska Zellweger-Barth, died in January. The last two times I was in Basel, I stayed with Franziska and her husband Max. They were as gracious and kind as any couple I have ever known. Max is still alive, but his eyesight is very poor. You are probably aware of the nice little book that he wrote called *My Father-in-Law*, published by Pickwick Publications about five or six years ago.

I. JOHN HESSELINK
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Mich.

Too many deaths

We've had too many important deaths this year. Following Helmut Gollwitzer and Rose Marie Barth in mid-1993, Franziska Zellweger-Barth, Markus Barth, Paul Lehmann, and Robert Hood have died in late 1993 or 1994. (At least those are the ones I am aware of.) I think a lot of Barthians would like to spend some time listening to or contributing to memories of these people. Could some time be worked into this year's program? I'd guess that many of the younger members would not be as interested, so an informal meeting might be a good idea.

SUZANNE SELINGER
Drew University
Madison, N.J.

Call for manuscripts

Professor Donald McKim of Memphis Theological Seminary suggested that I ask you to include the enclosed notice in the next issue of the Karl Barth Society Newsletter [see below]. Manuscripts on Barth would be most welcome! Your readers and I would appreciate your help in spreading word of the series.

CYNTHIA L. THOMPSON
Senior Editor, Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville

Columbia Series in Reformed Theology

The Columbia Series in Reformed Theology would welcome submissions of book-length studies completed in 1995-1997 on major ideas, thinkers, and themes of the entire Reformed tradition, from the 16th century to today. Theological, systematic, and historical works with an application to current theological conversations and church life are sought. Submissions under 300 manuscript pages should be sent to CSRT editor, Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202.

Bonhoeffer translation project

I am enclosing information concerning the Bonhoeffer translation project [see below]. We need support. If you could advertise this in the Newsletter I would be grateful. There is certainly no reason why a similar project should not be undertaken by the Barth Society. There is certainly a need for a critical edition of Barth's works in English.

PAUL D. MATHENY
Westhampton Christian Church
Roanoke, Virginia

An invitation to join The Friends of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Translation Project

Ever since works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer became available in English in a fragmentary form after World War II, they have been eagerly read by scholars and by a wide general audience.

Those who first prepared Bonhoeffer's works for publication hardly expected the interest that his thought has sustained over four decades. An English-language critical edition of Bonhoeffer's works is sorely needed that will present his ideas in clear and consistent translations and provide the background for a new generation of readers to understand his social and intellectual achievement.

The 16-volume series will be published by Fortress Press. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. (Philadelphia Lutheran Seminary) is the general editor. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to 7301 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia PA 19119-1794.

John Hesselink has pointed out that the name of Nigel Biggar, author of a recent book on Barth's ethics, was misspelled in the Spring 1994 issue of the Newsletter. The Editor regrets the error, although it was really John's fault because of his illegible handwriting! Fortunately, his latest letter (containing the correction) was typewritten!

News from the KBSNA Executive Board

The KBSNA Executive convened on June 21, 1994, in Roseville, Minn. Those present were David Demson (General Secretary), Bruce Marshall, Russell Palmer, Martin Rumscheidt, and John Webster.

1. Steven Crocco (Pittsburgh Seminary) and Scott Rodin (Eastern Baptist Seminary) were nominated to be members of the Executive on the basis of their activity as reported in the Spring 1994 issue of the Newsletter.
2. The next conference of the Society is to be held in June 1995 in the Chicago area at Elmhurst College. It was decided to recommend to Ron Goetz and Don Dayton, the conference organizers, that the topic of the conference be "The Theology of Paul Lehmann."
3. It was decided that the June 1996 conference of the Society be held in conjunction with the next biennial Barth conference sponsored by the Institute for Mission in the U.S.A. and Luther Seminary in St. Paul. A KBSNA colloquium would follow the Lutheran conference, utilizing some of the conference speakers with a seminar format.
4. Bill Klempa (Presbyterian College, Montreal) has suggested an International Barth Conference to be held in the year 2000. Some possibilities were discussed.
5. The future of the Barth archive project was discussed.
6. The Secretary reported that he had been asked whether the KBSNA would be willing to endorse manuscripts for publication. The Executive decided that this was not an activity for the Society to undertake.
7. There was some discussion of a point raised by Bruce Marshall (St. Olaf College). He reported that some persons with an interest in Barth are disinclined to participate in the KBSNA because of what they consider its "Barth scholasticism." It was unclear whether these persons consider all study of Barth's theology (expository and/or critical) to be unacceptably scholastic, and if so what alternative direction they would recommend. Certainly the theological task is not limited to studying Barth, but isn't there a place for the kind of work being done by people like Bruce McCormack and John Webster (as summarized elsewhere in this issue)? Further discussion of the matter is anticipated.

KARL BARTH SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
 Department of Philosophy and Religion
 University of Nebraska at Omaha
 Omaha, NE 68182-0265

