

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship (TSF) Bulletin (US)* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_tsfbulletin-us.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin-us.php)



# BULLETIN

THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP

MAY-JUNE 1986

Vol. 9, No. 5 \$3.50

**EDITOR**

Vernon C. Grounds

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

William Mangrum

**ADVISORY EDITORS**

Clark H. Pinnock, McMaster Divinity College

Paul A. Mickey, Duke Divinity School

Mark Lau Branson, Fellowship Bible Institute

**ASSOCIATE EDITORS**

Ray S. Anderson, *Systematic Theology*

Fuller Theological Seminary

Stephen T. Davis, *Philosophy*

Claremont McKenna College

Donald Dayton, *News Analysis*

Northern Baptist Theological Seminary

Robert L. Hubbard, *Old Testament*

Denver Seminary

Scot McKnight, *New Testament*

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Stephen C. Mott, *Ethics*

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Grant R. Osborne, *New Testament*

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

David Lowes Watson, *Evangelism & Missions*

UMC Board of Discipleship

**PERSPECTIVES EDITORS**

Keith Bolton

Fuller Theological Seminary

Luis Cortes

Philadelphia Baptist Association

Thomas F. Stransky

Mt. Paul Novitiate

Sze-kar Wan

Harvard University

**FACULTY CONTRIBUTORS**

Bernard Adeney

New College, Berkeley

Donald Bloesch

University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

Geoffrey W. Bromiley

Fuller Theological Seminary

Richard Bube

Stanford University

Harvie M. Conn

Westminster Theological Seminary

Charles Ellenbaum

College of DuPage

Vernard Eller

University of LaVerne

Elouise Renich Fraser

Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary

David Gill

New College, Berkeley

Larry Hurtado

University of Manitoba

Susanne Johnson

Perkins School of Theology

Richard Mouw

Fuller Theological Seminary

Richard Lovelace

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

PHEME PERKINS

Boston College

Bernard Ramm

American Baptist Seminary of the West

Gerald Sheppard

Union Theological Seminary

Charles R. Taber

Emmanuel School of Religion

Keith Yandell

University of Wisconsin

## COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE: A TRIBUTE TO KARL BARTH

Introducing This Issue	2
Vernon Grounds	
My Relation to Soren Kierkegaard	3
Karl Barth	
Barth As A Person and As A Theologian	4
Bernard Ramm	
The Legacy of Karl Barth	6
Donald Bloesch	
My Encounter with Karl Barth	10
Carl F.H. Henry	
A Letter of Thanks to Mozart	10
Karl Barth	
Is Karl Barth My Neighbor?	11
Elouise Renich Fraser	
"Re-Visioning America": Religion's Role in American Life	14
Joel Carpenter	
Antiphonal Readings For Summer	15
Steven Trotter	
Book Reviews and Comments	17
(Itemized on Back Cover)	
Readership Survey	35
Volume 9 Index	38

# My Relation to Soren Kierkegaard

by Karl Barth

In Karl Barth's acceptance speech on receiving the Sonning Prize from the University of Copenhagen, May 1963, he spoke about his relation to Soren Kierkegaard. This excerpt is taken from the *Kristeligt Dagblads Kronik*, 17, May 1963, and follows the Danish text. We are indebted to Dr. Louis Pojman for the translation which appeared in the Soren Kierkegaard Newsletter, No. 9.

The first book of Soren Kierkegaard I bought—it was in 1909—was *The Instant (Attack on Christendom)*. I suppose I read it at that time. However, it did not make a deep impression on me, because at that time I was intensely involved in the theology of Harnack, Hermann, and in "Die christliche Welt." In the following years I was involved in other things—namely with socialism—and therefore Kierkegaard had for a long time rest from me—and I from him! It was first in 1919 at that critical turning point in my life, between the first and second edition of my *Romerbrief*, that he seriously and on a better foundation entered into my world of thought. This encounter was the beginning of the extremely significant role he would come to play in my written work.

Some of us at that time belonged to the younger (theologians) who already around 1916 had attempted the first daring forward steps on the way that led to a theology which was better suited (than the 19th century and turn of the century theology) to make a place for "God" as he who stands sovereign and wholly alone above men and especially the religious man, and to procure for God the honor which is his. This is how we thought ourselves to have understood the God of the Bible. Nonetheless, it was only gradually that we really became clear about the tremendous consequences this emphasis of God as the basis and object of faith would lead to. It was first of all under the influence of Hermann Kutter that we reached forward to this standpoint. But even the first edition of my *Romerbrief* had still significant inadequacies in that regard. While the reformers of the 16th century still had not really entered into our discussion in these years around 1919-20, there were other authoritative voices from a little earlier time, which partly strengthened our own restlessness, and partly drove us to go further forward on the way. Among these older voices were, besides Dostoevsky and the older and younger Blumhardt (father and son), together with the remarkably strange Franz Overbeck, and besides Plato—yes, you heard correctly, Plato!—besides all of them there was, also, precisely Kierkegaard.

The thing about him which especially attracted us, delighted us and taught us something new, was his indefatigable, piercingly sharp critique, which placed God's infinitely qualitative difference over against all man-made speculation, confronted all attempts at a direct communication of the Christian (revelation), all aesthetic superficiality, with the gospel's demand and the necessity of arriving at a strictly personal decision, and who, in short, set this up against all sorts of innocuous renderings of the biblical message, up against all that which was too self-conceited, but also the too cheaply bought theological Christianity and ecclesiology with which we were surrounded and from which we ourselves were not liberated. In the second phase of our theological revolution, Kierkegaard became for us one of those from near and far, whose cock-crow proclaimed that a new day was actually breaking forth.

The second edition of my *Romerbrief* is a document of my part in clearly testifying to what someone has called "the Kierkegaard Renaissance." But for us—and therefore also for me—there had to come other days with new problems and new answers. I think, however, that I, through all the succeeding years and until today, have been faithful to the Kierkegaardian awakening call, as I heard it at that time. From that time and until now there was for me no way back to Hegel—not to speak of Bishop Mynster.

As has been pointed out from many sides, however, it has happened that I in my later books, writings, and preaching have steadily decreased my explicit references to Kierkegaard. While his special tone has certainly not been completely silenced in me, it has become drowned by other tones, so that it has become a strong undertone along with other tones. At the same time in which I in the battle-situation had given him my support, I had also in the first round overlooked certain characteristic peculiarities in Kierkegaard's historic presentation.

Must we constantly continue by again and again pointing to the oppositions, contradictions, and abysses which Kierkegaard so masterfully portrayed, and constantly ever more strictly formulated, the conditions which must be fulfilled in order to be able to think and live in faith, in hope, and in love, so that we make these factual and extremely necessary negations into the theologian's theme and allow the little flock, who will gladly be Christian and who reckon themselves to be Christian, ever again and again to taste the bitterness which *Training in Christianity* demands? Shall we do this—especially if what is at stake is the proclamation and exposition of God's message of joy for them, the gospel of God's free grace? It is remarkable how easily one himself becomes affected by the law which kills and makes disgusting, sad and heavy in spirit.

And further, how was it exactly, this relation to oneself with "this individual," on whose existence everything in Kierkegaard turns? Where with Kierkegaard is God's people, community, the Church? Where is the deacon's ministry and the task of mission? And where are man's social and political tasks? What meaning has it, that Kierkegaard, by his explanation of the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," was in agreement with Augustine and the Scholastics—and therefore against Luther and Calvin!—that besides neighborly love there must be a love for oneself? How curious that we who still belong among those, who are so strongly involved in Christendom in its relation to the social questions, were not immediately reflective precisely on this point in Kierkegaard with his thoroughgoing saved-individualism!

And so there is still a third thing: does not Kierkegaard's whole theoretical basic formulation reveal a new anthropocentric systematic and to a high degree an opposition to that which we are working from? That a new existence-philosophy—Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre—certainly by looking away from the fact that Kierkegaard would be a Christian thinker and also that he in his own way was that—is it not understandable and with the above mentioned reservations also legitimate that they could tie themselves to him? But to create a theology, which in a decisive sense builds upon Kierkegaard and essentially lives from him, would only be possible if one had not read Schleiermacher with suitable devotion and therefore had not been sufficiently warned against all promises of

his program and of an existentialist program. There, where this warning had not been heard, one took up afresh the experiment with a subjectivity, which as such accounts itself to be truth. It was an experiment with resting in oneself and with a self-moved faith, and therefore, and precisely in this form, also a faith which had neither a ground nor an object. Hence, there has arisen in the middle of our century and under the existence-dialectical signature of Kierkegaardianism a regular theological reaction. That this development from Kierkegaard was possible must cause us to have third thoughts which had not yet arisen in the beginning, forty years ago.

And now we must sum all this up. Kierkegaard was still definitely more tied to the 19th century than we realized at that time. One could perhaps also, by underscoring the historic, place the question whether Kierkegaard's view (*seine Lehre*) was not the highest, most consistent and most thoroughly reflected perfection of that pietism which in the 18th century together with rationalism laid the foundation for the Christianity and ecclesiology of the pious-oriented man which Kierkegaard so passionately fought, and which we forty years ago under the invocation of Kierkegaard's name again undertook to fight? But we could not attack the foundation itself,

the whole anthropocentric Christian thought process as such from Kierkegaard, because he himself had not attacked it—yes, even more, because he, on the contrary, in a forceful and refined way and to a high degree had strengthened it.

From the perspective of this later understanding I am and I remain grateful to Kierkegaard for the immunity I received at that time through him, and I am and remain also full of deep respect for his life's noble tragedy and for the unusual intellectual clarity which is in his works. I consider Kierkegaard to be a teacher, through whose school every theology in every case must at one time go. Woe to everyone who neglects that school! But one must not remain sitting there—and still less, turn back there. Kierkegaard's "teaching" is, as he himself has said, "a little spice to the food," but not itself the food, which is the task of every proper theology to give the church and mankind.

The gospel is (1) the glad message of God's *Yes* to men. It is (2) the message which the community must bring further to the whole world. It is (3) the message from above. It is these three points which I learned in other schools, in addition to what I had learned from Kierkegaard's school, after meeting with Kierkegaard.

## Barth As A Person and As A Theologian

by Bernard Ramm

### Barth As A Person

When I started to teach theology at the beginning of my academic career, I turned to those old American standbys: Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge (whose *Outlines of Theology* I in turn outlined in my days at the University of Washington), Augustus Strong, and G. T. Shedd (whom I really liked the best). I had heard of Brunner and Barth and the term "neo-orthodoxy," but that was the limit of my knowledge.

In my seminary education we kept hearing these names and others. A few of us were disappointed with the lack of knowledge of Barth and his theology among our own professors. Accordingly, we made an appointment with an evangelical theologian (whom I shall not name) and trusted that he would give us some idea of Barth's theology and its meaning for evangelicals. After the theologian had rambled around for twenty or thirty minutes, he stopped his talking and asked us a question: "Are you thoroughly confused?" We all admitted that we were. Then he said, "I have really explained Barth."

My reaction to that remark was extremely negative. It seemed to me both unethical and theologically irresponsible. A theologian with such an international reputation—already being classed with Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher—could not have been fairly treated in this manner.

The second time I was exposed to Barth is associated with the public library of the city of Los Angeles, famous for its holdings in religion, even though a state institution. Here I found the first volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* translated into English with a great exertion of energy by G. T. Thomson.

I was stultified when I tried to read it. Two things in particular puzzled me. I had a general idea of what a church

father was and could recognize names like Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine. Apart from that, my knowledge of the fathers and their theology was virtually nil. Here was a text in theology filled with references to the fathers and cited in their original Greek or Latin texts. This seemed to me to border on omniscience.

The other matter that puzzled me was his use of familiar terms like Word, Word of God, revelation, etc., but with meanings that were very different from my understanding of them. The result was that much which I read was meaningless. That ended my encounter with Barth for some time.

Meanwhile the great monographs of Brunner were being translated (much to the credit of Olive Wyon of Oxford). Long before I had any substantial knowledge of Barth I was fairly well versed in the theology of Brunner.

After World War II, when the process began of systematically translating Barth into English as his successive volumes were released in German, I started my own program of systematically reading the translations. Due to my highly Americanized version of evangelical theology I found much that I could not grasp; but undiscouraged, I kept reading the volumes.

When I received a grant for a year's study abroad there was no question in my mind but that I should go to Basel where Barth was still lecturing. So my wife and I and our two children sailed the Atlantic on the U.S.S. America and finally ended up in a cozy apartment in Basel not far from the university.

Students ask me much more frequently about Barth as a person than they do about his theology. My knowledge of Barth as a person is based on hearing his lectures, sitting in on his seminars, attending his special English-speaking seminars, and visiting his home on visitation hours, which were from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday afternoons.

The first point I make to my students is that Barth was then

---

*Bernard Ramm is Professor of Theology at the American Baptist Seminary of the West.*