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BULLETIN

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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

once see this gratitude expressed in black and white?

But first, two preliminary matters. The first is that I am one of those Protestants of whom you are supposed to have once said that we probably could not properly understand the *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi*. Pardon me—you probably know better now. Still, I don't want to trouble you with theology on this point. Imagine, rather, that I was dreaming about you last week, specifically that I was supposed to give you an examination (why is a mystery to me) and that to my question what "Dogmatics" and "Dogma" might mean, I received no answer at all—despite my most friendly prompting and my hints about your masses, which I especially like! This saddened me (because, after all, I knew that under no circumstances would you be allowed to fail). Shall we just let this matter rest?

There is another much more difficult problem. I have read that even when you were still a child, only the praise of experts could please you. As you know, there are on this earth not only musicians but also musicologists. You yourself were both; I am neither. I do not play an instrument, and I haven't the vaguest idea of the theory of harmony or of the mysteries of counterpoint. I am genuinely afraid, especially of those musicologists whose books about you I am trying to decipher, since I am composing a festival address for your birthday. Moreover, when I read the conclusions of these scholars, I fear that if I were young and could undertake this study, I should clash with several of your most important academic interpreters, just as I did with my theological mentors forty years ago. But be that as it may, how can I under these circumstances thank you as an expert and, as such, satisfy you?

Still, to my relief I have also read that you sometimes played hours on end for very simple people, merely because you sensed that they enjoyed listening to you. This is the way I have always heard you and still do, with constantly renewed enjoyment of ear and heart. I do this so naively that I cannot even be sure which of the thirty-four periods into which Wyzewa and St. Foix have divided your life appeals to me most. One thing is certain: that around 1785 you began to be truly great. But surely you won't be offended if I confess that it

wasn't *Don Giovanni* and your later symphonies, not *The Magic Flute* and the *Requiem* that first captivated me. I was deeply moved already by the "Haffner" Serenade and the Eleventh Divertimento, etc.—even by *Bastien and Bastienne*. Thus you became fascinating and dear to me even before you were hailed as the forerunner of Beethoven! What I thank you for is simply this: Whenever I listen to you, I am transported to the threshold of a world which in sunlight and storm, by day and by night, is a good and ordered world. Then, as a human being of the twentieth century, I always find myself blessed with courage (not arrogance), with tempo (not an exaggerated tempo), with purity (not a wearisome purity), with peace (not a slothful peace). With an ear open to your musical dialectic, one can be young and become old, can work and rest, be content and sad: in short, one can live.

Of course, you now know better than I that for *this* more than even the best music is needed. Still, there is music which as a supplement, and quite incidentally, helps us toward that life, and other music which helps us less. Your music helps. Because it is part of my life experience—in 1956 I shall be seventy, whereas you would now be walking among us as a 200-year-old patriarch!—and because I believe that in its growing darkness our age needs your help—for these reasons I am grateful that you walked among us, that in the few short decades of your life you wanted only to make pure music and that in your music you are still vitally with us. Please believe me: many many ears and hearts, both learned and as simple as mine, still love to listen to you again and again—and not only in your anniversary year!

What the state of music is where you are now I can only faintly surmise. Once upon a time I formulated my notion in this way: it may be that when the angels go about their task of praising God, they play only Bach. I am sure, however, that when they are together *en famille*, they play Mozart and that then too our dear Lord listens with special pleasure. Well, the contrast may be wrong, and of course you know more about this than I. I mention it only as a figure of speech to suggest what I mean.

K. Barth

Is Karl Barth My Neighbor?

by Elouise Renich Fraser

Genuine encounter is always eventful. It is also unpredictable. It may yield life and health, or sickness and death. It may provoke fresh insight and a shared vision, or it may confirm old stereotypes and reinforce the invisibility and isolation of the other. What follows is both report and witness. It is a report of my encounter as a Christian feminist theologian with Karl Barth and his theology of male and female. It is a witness to my struggle to take Karl Barth seriously as my theological neighbor.

The encounter began six years ago. Karl Barth was a stranger from a far country. He spoke a strange language. He had grown up surrounded by strange customs. And, though he spoke frequently of my world, I knew he had never entered it. In my world, Karl Barth's words were terrifying. His language threatened to overpower me and consign me—along with all women—to eternal and theologically significant invisibility. His words did not promise life to me, but conveyed

the awful threat of inhuman survival. As a woman, I was primarily to be seen but not heard, to be ever present to help the man. I was to engage in this activity gladly, affirming my existence by refraining from choice in these matters. The entire task of my humanity was determined by my relationship to the man. To move outside this responsive, answering role was to deny my femaleness.

Barth's words were powerful. They seemed to emerge simultaneously and with unquestionable clarity from Scripture and from life itself, so that to deny the one was surely to deny the other. His words seemed to reflect the nature of reality itself, not just as theologically understood, but as humanly experienced. The priority of God was reflected in the priority of male over female. The priority of Yahweh over Israel and the priority of Jesus over his community were reflected in the priority of husband over wife. The relationship between husband and wife was the paradigm for all human relationships because it was the one relationship within which cohumanity could find its fullest expression. Divine initiative for the relationship between God and humanity was reflected in male

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initiative for the relationship between male and female. Humanity's response of gratitude toward God was reflected in the woman's response of submission to the man. The willing subordination of Jesus to God and to the church were reflected in the woman's natural subordination to the man. In short, the relationship between male and female was the visible sign of an invisible order; to live outside the sign was to participate in chaos.

Not being a foolish virgin, I did not enter this struggle unprepared. I brought my own weapons—my words. Words like "mutuality," "equal partnership" and "wholeness." My part in the struggle would be to reinterpret Barth—to show that *this* was really what Barth had been trying to say all along. The intrusion of order into his doctrine of humanity was actually an embarrassing but not irredeemable oversight. Had he said what he *really* meant, he would have used *my* words. "Mutual subordination" between "equal partners," leading to new heights of "personal wholeness" for both men and women, was the better way to characterize Barth's theology of male and female. Or so I thought. To my great consternation, Karl Barth's words refused to yield to my efforts. Cohumanity did *not* mean mutuality or equal reciprocity. It meant exactly what Karl Barth intended it to mean—male priority over females, in correspondence to divine priority over humanity.

missed by many feminist theologians because of its legitimation of male priority, so Scripture has been dismissed by some feminist theologians because of the way it too has been used to legitimate male priority. For many feminist theologians, Scripture is no longer a living book, but a depository of powerful words useful for pronouncing judgment on all feminists, or for inoculating believers against contamination by feminist propaganda. The question for me was: Could I own Scripture as a living book—one whose words conveyed life and hope to me in my everyday struggles as a woman? Furthermore, could this be done without twisting Scripture to my own advantage? Might there be a way to discover a strange, new world within the Bible? Barth had done this; perhaps I could, too.

A second need drove me as I encountered Karl Barth. This was the need for survival as a feminist theologian. My initial conviction had been that if Karl Barth survived this encounter, then I was surely doomed. One of us *had* to be wrong. But I had not counted on the fact that Karl Barth was already a survivor; I had not fully appreciated the fact that he had worked out his theological position while going against the stream. He had not simply written his theology; he had *lived* it. This suggested to me that although Barth affirmed traditional viewpoints regarding male priority, there might also be subversive

In Karl Barth I had heard some emphases which could begin to give concrete identity to my theological position. Chief among these was Barth's insistence on the priority of God.

This caused me great distress. For in the process of struggling with this stranger, I had found my admiration for him growing, even in the midst of great frustration and anger at the power of his words. I had begun to sense that my survival as a Christian feminist theologian was inextricably linked to Karl Barth's survival as a white male theologian. There were things about his theological reflection that answered to needs which I, as a feminist theologian, had brought with me to this encounter.

As an evangelical feminist, I needed to find my own particular voice within the broad spectrum of feminist theology. The agreement I have with my sisters regarding the urgency for inclusive theological reflection is total. We agree: the history of Christian theology demonstrates the habitual exclusion of women and women's experience at every point save one; that is, women have always *all* been expected to give willing and unquestioning affirmation to theological "truths" formulated by male theologians. So there is agreement regarding the need for genuine inclusiveness in Christian theological reflection. But feminist theologians do not speak from a monochromatic theological position.

In Karl Barth I had heard some emphases which could begin to give concrete identity to my theological position. Chief among these was Barth's insistence on the priority of God. Might it be possible to separate the priority of God from the priority of males? Did the initiative of God have to be tied to the initiative of the husband? Was there not a way of replacing male priority and the husband-wife model with a more inclusive way of thinking about human relationships? If I could combine the priority of God with an inclusive model for human relationships, I might begin to find my own particular evangelical feminist voice.

Another emphasis was Barth's insistence on making Scripture his primary point of reference for the theological significance of humanity. Just as Barth's theology has been dis-

missed by many feminist theologians because of its legitimation of male priority, so Scripture has been dismissed by some feminist theologians because of the way it too has been used to legitimate male priority. For many feminist theologians, Scripture is no longer a living book, but a depository of powerful words useful for pronouncing judgment on all feminists, or for inoculating believers against contamination by feminist propaganda. The question for me was: Could I own Scripture as a living book—one whose words conveyed life and hope to me in my everyday struggles as a woman? Furthermore, could this be done without twisting Scripture to my own advantage? Might there be a way to discover a strange, new world within the Bible? Barth had done this; perhaps I could, too.

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Listening attentively for subversive currents was not easy. The language of subordination resonated throughout the pages of Barth's doctrine of humanity, even when the subject was not male and female. All things, from heaven and earth to God's time and human time, reverberated with the same pattern of irreversible priority. The allusions back and forth wove an ever more complex and intricate whole. Not only were there patterns of irreversible priority through all nature, but they found their theological echoes in such irreversible patterns as justification and sanctification, or Gospel and Law. All things great and small combined to reflect the glory of God who initiates relationship with humanity.

Yet in the midst of this praise of irreversible order there were echoes of a quite different sort. Though faint in Barth's discussion of male and female, they were nonetheless unmistakable. Furthermore, they could be traced both backward to their source and forward into Barth's discussion of reconciliation. The clear, undeniable shape of the neighbor began to emerge. And Barth's infrequent but regular references to

the neighbor in his doctrine of humanity began to sound like a counter-melody to Barth's persistent reiteration of the givenness and theological necessity of patterns of irreversible priority. The woman in Genesis 2 was the man's closest and permanent neighbor. Jesus is our true neighbor. We are neighbors to Jesus and to each other. God is Neighbor. Moving beyond the doctrine of humanity, the sins of inhumanity are sins against the neighbor. And tracing Barth's model of the neighbor back to its source, the neighbor is the good Samaritan, the foreigner who breaks into my isolation and invisibility, witnessing to the fact that I am not alone in this world. Instead of a pattern of irreversible priority, there is in this exchange a pattern of irreversible binding as one person is bound to another in a concrete act of human compassion. Barth's model of the neighbor was the subversive current within his theology, and, I would suggest, within his life as well. There is order in this pattern, but it is the order demanded by human compassion, not the order dictated by predetermined roles.

same time an act of solidarity. The action of the neighbor reminds us both of our common desire for life as opposed to death. The neighbor takes up my cause by reminding me that I am not alone in the world; I have not been left in my invisibility and isolation on the side of the road. This exchange between my neighbor and me embodies the Gospel's logic of priority. That is, the priority of God is reflected not in the priority of males, but in the priority of the other. From beginning to end, the Gospel stories are profoundly other-oriented; Jesus' service—the service of the true neighbor—is always for others. To live according to this pattern of priority is first to open myself to the compassionate service of the neighbor. It is to allow myself to be seen in my concrete need, and then to have my eyes opened to the same need of others for visibility and solidarity. To live according to the priority of the other is for me to become a neighbor to others out of gratitude for the human service I have received. In these often fleeting and unpredictable encounters, we find reflected the image of God who has not left us in isolation and invisibility.

According to these new words, every human being is my neighbor, not just those friends I might expect to lend me aid in time of need.

Here, then, was the model needed for my survival—a model by which to make theological sense of my own life, a model by which to express an alternative vision of reality. But this is to anticipate the third need I brought to my encounter with Karl Barth. The need is not mine alone, but one I share with all Christian feminist theologians. We are in need of constructive and persuasive visions of what it means to be human. These must be visions capable of capturing the imagination of the heart, visions that invite people to live out of the life-transforming power to which the visions point. They must be visions which convey Christian identity to those who feel left out of the Christian story. They must be visions that challenge and disturb even as they produce life and health. They must work not simply at the cognitive and abstract level, but at the affective and concrete level as well. They must be as inclusive in their general accessibility and appeal as they are in their ideas and concepts. They must convey urgency and reflect the real-life struggles of women to be taken seriously as the visible and inescapable neighbors of men and of the institutional church. Only visions such as these will invite and even compel others engaged in the same struggles of life to seek their own Christian identities as human beings.

In Karl Barth's model of the neighbor, I have found the beginning point for such a vision. He has suggested to me a new set of powerful words. They are not the words I brought with me to the encounter. This new set of words seems to spring, as did Barth's, simultaneously from Scripture and from life itself. They are the gateway to a strange new world within the Bible and within life itself. The remarkable thing about these words is that they describe a reality in which all of us move every day. They are not alien to our common experience of life, though they will challenge and disturb that experience if we allow them to do their work.

According to these new words, every human being is my potential neighbor, not just those friends I might expect to lend me aid in time of need. Just as the good Samaritan was the hated foreigner, so the neighbor may well be someone with whom I would rather not be seen, someone whom I might have avoided under less needy circumstances. The aid given by the neighbor is an act of compassion which is at the

These new words gain much of their credibility from their inclusiveness. Unlike Barth's words, they appeal to widely recognizable patterns in everyday relationships, not to narrowly conceived patterns of relationship between male and female. The experience of having a neighbor is true to everyone's personal history, insofar as no one could exist from infancy without having at least one neighbor—someone to take up one's cause. The widespread, recognizable, everyday repetition of the pattern of one person taking up the cause of another is the greatest persuasive feature of the new model. The pattern may name what happens within long-term relationships, or it may accurately describe a passing encounter between strangers. In either case, the image of the Creator is reflected in this mundane reminder of that for which we were created and called—the task of being human.

The model of the neighbor offers a new way of thinking about human relationships. But it also opens the door to a new way of hearing Scripture. The pattern of having and being a neighbor becomes a way of redescribing what is going on within the diversity of Scripture. Individual stories, individual books, and the entire canon itself portray or can be related to the history of the compassionate neighbor. The compassionate neighbor is all those surprising "outsiders" who minister in various ways to the "insiders." (Are they really outsiders?) The compassionate neighbor is the marginalized "insider" who appears with regular frequency as a central figure at crucial turning points in the narratives of the Old and New Testaments. The compassionate neighbor is Jesus himself in his unexpected and scandalous public identification with those whom society would have preferred to isolate and keep invisible. The compassionate neighbor is God who refuses to leave humanity lying battered and half dead by the side of the road. The Neighbor is God who comes to us in Christ to pour oil and wine on our wounds, to carry us on a donkey to the innkeeper, and to pay the full price for the restoration of our humanity.

The last need which I brought to my encounter with Karl Barth was one of which I was but dimly aware. Only in the midst of struggling with Barth's words did I recognize the urgency of this need. I needed a theological method respon-

sive both to the complexity of Scripture and to the complexity of human life. In addition, given feminist theology's concern for inclusiveness at every point in theological reflection, it became imperative that this method be accessible to anyone desiring to live out of the encounter between Scripture and life. As I worked at following Barth's Christologically-based reflection, I could see that he was engaged in a form of narrative theology. That is, Barth always described and defined his concepts and ideas by maintaining their connection with the biblical narratives in which they appeared or from which they had been taken. The meanings of the concepts were unintelligible apart from their story contexts. For example, Barth explicitly refused to speak of man or woman in abstraction from biblical narratives which seemed to tell their respective and related stories.

The possibility of a feminist narrative theology meant more than a method I could name as my own. Above all, it was a way to dialogue with Barth on his own terms, a way to take him seriously while still challenging him at a foundational level. I found my need for Barth giving way at this point to his need for me. He needed me, not to rescue him from unwarranted accusations of being closed to dialogue, but to take him seriously as both of us struggled to bring all the complexity of our lives into dynamic encounter with all the complexity of Scripture. Here I found Barth deficient in a foundational sense; he had not taken seriously—in spite of his intentions to the contrary—that part of human life to which he, as a white male, was an outsider. This failure to listen to all of life was echoed in his failure to take seriously those parts of Scripture which seemed to him *not* to address male and female. Barth's constricted outlook on life was matched by a constricted appeal to Scripture. In each case, Barth saw only that with which he was already familiar. The rest remained invisible and thus insignificant to him—as did the woman in

his theology of male and female. It is ironic that in spite of his imaginative powers, displayed in their fullness on every page of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth failed to see the full complexity of human life as it is embodied in human relationships and presupposed in the pages of Scripture. By taking Scripture as the history of the compassionate neighbor, instead of the history of a covenant between unequal partners, every human relationship with God and with others suddenly became a significant part of the whole. The hope for full humanity was not reserved for those within a marriage between unequal partners, but was offered as the task and possibility for *all* God's creatures in *all* their relationships. The priority of God as the only source of divine grace was maintained, as was the priority of the other as the equally necessary source of human solidarity.

My encounter with Karl Barth continues. It has lost none of its unpredictability, none of its freshness, none of its struggle. But Karl Barth is visible to me in ways I never anticipated, and my world is not quite as isolated from his world as it was six years ago. We have come a long way together, and I am eager to get on with the next hundred years.

Happy birthday, Karl.

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“Re-Visioning America”: Religion's Role in American Life

by Joel Carpenter

Over the past two years, the Center for American Studies of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis has brought together scholars from a variety of academic disciplines and from institutions from across the nation to discuss religion's many roles in the American experience.

This series, titled “Re-Visioning America: Religion and the Life of the Nation,” was the brainchild of Rowland Sherrill, Professor of Religious Studies at IUPUI; and Jan Shipps, a historian who directs IUPUI's Center for American Studies. Grants from the Lilly Endowment and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities made possible the four symposia and one major conference.

Scholars and clergy at these meetings considered how the United States' collective national identity and public discussion of national purpose and mission have been baptized with religious meaning. Several themes surfaced: 1) the ways in which a variety of people and movements have tried to fabricate, mend, or reweave a religious vision of America; 2) the clash of competing sets of ideals for national life; 3) the variety

of angles of perspective and interpretive layers from which visioning or re-visioning can take place.

The first of the invitational symposia took place on March 1-3, 1984, and featured papers on “Crisis in the American Republic,” by Douglas Sturm of Bucknell University; “Christian Primitivism and the Life of the Nation,” by Richard T. Hughes of Abilene Christian University; and “Psychic Child, Real Child: Reflections on the Critical Spirituality of Robert Coles,” by Bruce A. Ronda of Skidmore College.

Meeting again on June 14-16, 1984, the core group of 30 scholars considered essays on “Religion and the Renewal of American Culture,” by John F. Wilson of Princeton University; “The View from the Outside,” by J. Gordon Melton of the Institute for the Study of American Religion; and “Religion in the Life of Eleanor Roosevelt,” by Amanda Porterfield of Syracuse University.

A third session convened on September 27-29 to discuss the issues prompted by papers presented by Richard L. Bushman of the University of Delaware on “Religion and the Self: Christianity and Gentility in Nineteenth-Century America”; Albert Raboteau of Princeton University on “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Tradition of Black Religious Protest”; and

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