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A Discussion of Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

Karl Barth

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An Up-to-Date, Unmodern Paraphrase

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KARL BARTH'S *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS*
IN ITS SECOND EDITION*

Rudolf Bultmann

THE FRAMING OF THE QUESTION

Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* may be characterized by one sentence, the phraseology of which he would disagree with, but which would still be valid in terms of the usage that has been prevalent in the present time: The book attempts to prove the independence and the absolute nature of religion. It thus takes its place, even though it is in the form of a commentary, in the same line with such works as Schleiermacher's *On Religion* and Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, with modern attempts to demonstrate a religious a priori, and finally with the Letter to the Romans itself, which, with its radical contrast of works and faith, basically has no other intention than this. However different all these attempts may be in detail, they seek to give verbal expression to the consciousness of the uniqueness and absoluteness of religion.

It is natural that such an undertaking is always determined by the times to the extent that the front line of the battle is constantly determined by the intellectual situation of the time, and the undertaking basically demands the author's coming to grips with the situation. As Paul fought for faith against the law of works, so Schleiermacher fought against the "Enlightenment," and Otto against a rationalizing and ethicizing concept of religion that had held wide sway in the school of Ritschl. And on what front is Barth fighting? Against the psychologizing and historicizing concept of religion, which not only plays or has played a role in the historical (so-called liberal) theology, but in theology and modern intellectual life in general. He is fighting against all cults of "experience" (wherein experience is understood as a psychic factor or a psychic action), against every concept which sees in religion an interesting phenomenon of culture, which wishes to understand religion in the context of psychic historical life. He is fighting also against many other things, but that fight gives his book its distinctive character.

To be sure, Barth does not speak of "religion" in this sense, for this expression is for him only the designation of a psychic historical re-

* From *Die Christliche Welt*, XXXVI (1922), issue 18, columns 320-323; issue 19, columns 330-334; issue 20, columns 358-361; and issue 21, columns 369-373.

ality. But we should not be concerned with a quarrel about words, and in order to come to grips with Barth we are glad to concede to him the use of his own terminology. The question would then go like this: In what does the essence of faith consist?

FAITH AND "EXPERIENCE"

"Nowhere is it [faith] identical with the historical and psychological empiricity of the religious experience" (p. 126).^{*} "Even your impression of revelation, your emotion, your experience, your enthusiasm, is flesh, is of this world" (p. 72). "When faith happens, the warmth of feeling, the power of conviction, the attained stage of conviction and morality, are always only auxiliary, this-worldly, and therefore unimportant signs of the actual occurrence . . . For this reason, faith is never identical with 'piety', even if it were the purest and finest" (pp. 39 f.). "What can become visible psychically and historically as the advantage of one man over another is only the 'person,' the form, the mask, the role assumed in a drama . . . It has its worth in itself, but does not signify an *eternal* distinction, nor one that extends beyond the crisis involving all that is perishable with the imperishable" (p. 63; cf. 108-110, 239). Faith is no "return to direct living" (p. 168), no "blessed, happy feeling" (p. 151). Religious excitement is, for example, different from the need for sleep only in degree (p. 235). The message of faith therefore does not serve for the satisfying of so-called religious needs (p. 37).

For psychological consideration, faith thus is not at all visible, it is a nothing (Barth: a "vacuum"); thus it is also not visible for historical science, inasmuch as the latter wishes to describe the evident reality of human life in time. There is no history of faith (p. 126). "All history of religion and of the church takes place entirely in the world" (p. 57). Faith is "only faith insofar as it does not lay claim to historical and psychic reality, but is inexpressible divine reality" (p. 58; cf. 85).

A religious a priori, a religious "drive," is always nothing but a part of the world, and has nothing to do with faith, if the latter really has to do with God. If this is not recognized, the theories arise in which "now the human or animal processes are elevated to experiences of God, now the being and work of God are 'experienced' as human or animal experience. That which is solid in this fog is the delusion that a unity or even the possibility of a compact between God and man could exist without the miracle (vertically from above), without the

* Quoted material is our translation. Page numbers refer to Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns from the 6th edition of *Der Römerbrief*.

annulling of all that is given, apart from the truth which lies beyond birth and death. Religious experience, at whatever stage it takes place, insofar as it claims to be more than a vacuum, to be content, possession, and enjoyment of God, is the shameless and unsuccessful anticipation of that which can be and become true only from the side of the unknown God. It is in its historicalness, reality, and concreteness always betrayal of God" (p. 50).

Thus far Barth is original (in the relative sense, which is all the word can have here) not in his thoughts, but in their clear and powerful formulation. Materially speaking, he stands throughout in the context of the modern polemic against "historicism" and "psychologism." I do not say this in order "to understand him historically," but in order to grasp the substance; much less do I say it to pass judgment on Barth, since the clarity and radicalism of Barth in each case reaches far beyond the usual polemics; much less since with him it is basically not a question of a modern fashionable trend, a reaction, a mere negation, but here speaks the self-confidence which has always belonged to living faith. No one in our time has proclaimed with this self-confidence the uniqueness and absoluteness of "religion" (of faith!) with more clarity than Wilhelm Herrmann, with whom Barth is in complete agreement.*

How little Barth may be taken simply as a symptom of modern moods is shown by his clear rejection of all mysticism. In this it is a question only of an apparent flight from the world; to be sure, it seeks to escape "historicism," but religion here remains nonetheless a psychic event, an "experience." In it a new work-righteousness takes the place of the old, where "being still before God himself (if, e.g., the sayings of Angelus Silesius were intended as psychological recipes, or should be read as such!)" is conceived of "as the most clever stroke of human piety, and remaining in the 'moment' (which is not a moment in which one can remain) as the highest extreme of human experience." "So there could appear as the triumph of Pharisaism, the New Pharisaism, more fearful than the former, and capable of achieving the result of being not merely 'self-righteous' but, in addition, humble! Human righteousness is capable of anything, of self-exaltation and self-extinction, when it is necessary (Buddhism, mysticism, pietism) . . . He who once boasts of himself, who once as a man wants to be in the right before men and before God, will boast even of the deepest sinking into the non-ego and non-being (where possible, of his unsureness and his

* What Herrmann called "experience" is not that against which Barth polemizes. And Herrmann's polemic against the philosophy and psychology of religion as opposed to mysticism was no less radical than that of Barth.

brokenness) and—as a man (only as a man!) stand there vindicating himself" (pp. 109 f.; cf. 59 f.). Faith is absolutely different from all myth and all mysticism. "It is not concerned with one of those exaltations, abasements, and enrichments of this world through the Beyond of an 'inner' or even 'higher' world, not with one of those cosmic, metaphysical doublings, triplings, or sevenfold multiplyings of the given condition of our life and existence, but with the ultimate and unique, because unsurpassable, contrast of life to death, of death to life, of being to non-being, of non-being to being. The life and existence in the Beyond is for it what can only be called, from the point of view of the life and existence in this world, death and non-being; and again, the life and existence in this world is what, from the viewpoint of the life and existence in the Beyond, can only be called death and non-existence" (p. 141). No "method" can lead to God (pp. 57, 110, 137). Grace is not to be grasped with the mystic attitude of passivity, else it would be a "human possibility" (p. 214).

What has been said yields two results. First, the renunciation of all pantheism, of all veneration of a god in nature, all belief in immanence, all attempts to grasp God in natural occurrences or in psychic and historical occurrences. God is neither a natural nor a psychic power (p. 36). "God as the highest affirmation of the being and the state of the world and of men: this is the unbearable, this is the non-god, despite the highest attributes with which we passionately bedeck it" (p. 40). Anyone who wants to attain to God—without first having heard God's No pronounced over him and the world—attains only to a Beyond that is in truth an improved this-world (p. 108; cf. 50, 82, 89 f.). "Only in that which restricts things in their independence and validity . . . only sub specie mortis does the splendor of the Creator shine in them" (p. 169). "We must lose the awe of pseudo-life which we are able to grasp, this awe through which we precisely do not become related to the divine secret of the cosmos" (p. 308). "To wish to grasp the world in its unity with God is either punishable religious arrogance or a final insight into that which is true beyond birth and death, insight from God" (p. 37). "Moreover it is sentimental liberal self-deception to think that from nature and history, from art, morality, science, or even religion, direct roads lead to the impossible possibility of God" (p. 337). Naturally all this does not lead to a metaphysical dualism; it is not a matter of a "balance between two situations," but of a "dialectic" contrast between God and the world, of a "duality which is established only in being transcended, and the transcendence of which is its establishment!" (p. 165; cf. 178, 188).

With this, the other matter becomes clear, that is, that any kind

of flight from the world is folly, that no asceticism, no self-chosen martyrdom determines the way to God (pp. 161, 324, 368, 63). The "resurrection" of which faith knows is "the negation of all this-worldly positions and negations" (p. 462). And even though we are standing "deeper in the No than in the Yes," if "the 'abasement' of our chance situation in life" has relatively more "witness value" than the heights (pp. 462-464), then we would still sink only deeper into sin if we wanted to flee from the world of our intellectual, historical life. Thus there can be no contempt for art and science! no cult of the "irrational"! no flight from religion and church as the evident historical spheres in which we move! All radicalism of anti-religious polemic is only sham radicalism (p. 241; cf. 221 f.). "No one should want to escape the ambiguous historical reality of religion—and care has been taken that no one can escape it. Grace is grace where the religious possibility, taken quite earnestly, and standing in full power and development, is sacrificed. Only there!" (p. 186; cf. 238). "For the true crisis in which religion finds itself consists in that it not only cannot be shaken off by man 'as long as he lives,' but also that it *should* not be shaken off, because it is so characteristic of man as man (of *this* man!); "precisely because in it the human possibilities are limited by the divine, and because we, in our consciousness that God is *not* here and that we cannot take a single *further* step, must stop and remain here with this human possibility in order that, beyond the boundary which it indicates, God may meet us" (p. 242).

Thus there is very little fashionable polemic here against "historicism" or "psychologism" or "rationalism," and therefore so little fanaticism or Gnosticism. It is the simple—Pauline—radicalism, which is clear about what faith means, and what grace means.

FAITH AS A MIRACLE

What then is the significance of the denial of the world that takes place in faith? This significance can be grasped only from the point of view of faith itself. It is only from it that the concept "world" can be inferred at all, a concept which can be understood in its radical significance only from the Beyond—we have here a dialectic antithesis!—so that no inner-worldly critique, no pessimism, can come close to it; but rather the difference between "pessimism" and "optimism" becomes a matter of total indifference (pp. 154, 309). "He who says humanity, says unredeemed humanity. He who says history, says finiteness and perishability. He who says I, says judgment" (p. 85). "World is what our whole existence as it now, conditioned by sin, becomes and is" (p. 168).

From such a position in relation to the world, faith in God arises. "The revealing of non-meaning is also the revelation of meaning" (p. 77). "The most primitive and the most advanced self-reflection of the human spirit will always be . . . found in the realization of our limitedness and in the looking out at that which limits us, which is the negation of our limitedness" (p. 45). "No relativity which in its lost-unlosable relationship does not point back to the absolute from which it really has its life, no appearance of death which is not the witness of our participation in the life of God, the witness of the relationship of *God to us* which is not broken by sin" (p. 170). "The recognition of complete bondage is also the recognition of freedom; revulsion at corruptibility is also the hope for incorruptibility" (p. 309). — How is this to be understood? It can very easily be misunderstood. Is it a matter of a simple logical inference by means of which we assume, out of the limitations of the world of which we are aware, the one who limits, that is, God? Is it a matter of our pronouncing a No to the world, in recognition of the questionable nature of our existence, and of now realizing that a No always exists only in relationship to a Yes, and of our now drawing the conclusion that this Yes is the non-world, is God? With the result, then, that we would have a sort of ontological proof of God, the inference drawn from the concept of his existence? It seems almost to be thus. "The place from which the whole closed circle as such is to be seen cannot lie inside the circle. The possibility of grasping what is humanly possible as such in its limitation is obviously . . . a totally unheard of new possibility. . . . With the question about the Whence of our knowledge of ourselves, characterized by the insight into our absolute sinfulness and mortality, we confront directly the existence of the new man who stands over against *this man*" (pp. 271 f.; cf. 91 f.).

A lack of clarity adheres to such formulations, as though faith were still a matter of a process of consciousness in which a first and a second element were distinguished: first the No, then the Yes. By means of a logical inference one comes from the first to the second. But this is not Barth's real meaning; for "even saying No, insight into the paradox of life, bowing under God's judgment, *are all not it,* even waiting on God, even the 'being broken,' even the attitude of the 'biblical man' *are not it,* insofar as they intend to be attitude, standpoint, method, system, matter" (p. 56). No, this negation of the world is no standpoint, but the experiencing of divine judgment. That No is not the presupposition in a logical inference; rather, if it is a *real* No, it contains the Yes in itself. It is also not a matter of a before and an after in the consciousness. In the *consciousness* of the one who believes (I

believe I am able to say this in Barth's meaning) the Yes can even be the primary element; to dispute this would be to fall back into psychologism. This can be so because the No that is spoken over the world is not the inner-worldly criticism of a defiant, resigned, or despairing pessimism (Schopenhauer, Spitteler), that is, a No that always proceeds only from man, who would like to have the world different from what it is, so that in truth it proceeds only from a human Yes. But the No which is decisive for faith is that which is spoken by God. "He who recognizes the limits of the world through a contradicting truth, the limits of his own self through a contradicting will, *he who therefore confesses he belongs to this contradiction and undertakes to base his life on it, he has faith*" (p. 39).

This contradiction is not a standpoint; it is a *crisis* into which we are placed by God. That man "awakens to the consciousness of this situation, that he is aware of the crisis and recognizes it as a divine crisis, that he in this crisis chooses the fear of the Lord, that he hears and understands the No of God, because it is God's No—that is his faith" (p. 123). "We must take upon ourselves the full paradoxicality of the situation of human life. If we come at all to a consciousness of ourselves and our situation in the world, this paradoxicality consists in our being led step by step by the holy demand of God which meets us in the recognized problematic of our existence to the final possibility in which we, looking, perishing, pleading, crying out of deep need, stretch out our arms toward the great unknown, toward the Yes which stands unperceivable over against the No in which we are imprisoned—and that we then must recognize that even such life, destruction, pleas, and cries do *not* justify, do *not* redeem, do *not* save, that by all this we have only confirmed and sealed the fact—that we are men" (p. 256). Man must stand "naked" before God (pp. 68, 111, 408 f.); only so can he be "judged, and thereby also made right" (p. 95).

Only so can it be truth and not a mere inference, even when it is presented in the form of one. "Only from redemption can man grasp that he is unredeemed. Only from righteousness, that he is a sinner. Only from life, that he is dead. It is only on *God* that man can be so shattered. If man were not free beyond *all* human possibilities, how would he be able to recognize the boundary, the significance, the reality, of the *highest* human possibility as imprisonment?" (p. 286; cf. 284, 363). The recognition of the crisis, the taking the crisis upon oneself, is faith, or is possible only in faith. "There is a claim to deliverance from the wrath of God, there where all claim is given up and beaten down by God himself, there where God's No is recognized as final, God's wrath as inescapable, God as God" (p. 76). "The barrier

is also the escape. The No that confronts us is God's No. What we are lacking is also that which helps us . . . That which negates all worldly wisdom is also its foundation. Precisely because God's No is complete, his Yes is also" (p. 38). "This No is therefore not the No of unbelief, which, while it strikes against God's wrath, does not strike through to the hidden truth of God, but only shatters itself on fate, matter, all, chance, *ananke*" (p. 43). Faith is bowing under the No of God. "Those who take on themselves the burden of the divine No are carried by the greater divine Yes. The weary and heavy-laden are refreshed. Those who do not avoid the contradiction are hidden in God. Those who uprightly let themselves be brought into a time of waiting recognize God's faithfulness in that they may, should, and can wait. Those who have respect for God and observe the distance live with God" (p. 41). Therefore "the final bowing under God's wrath is faith in his righteousness" (p. 78). Faith is the progress of the soul to the "King of the dark chamber" (Tagore).

Now it is clear what the often-repeated expression "Faith is a vacuum" means (e.g., p. 42, "The faith of man is the awe which is content with this No, the will for vacuum, the agitated waiting in negation"). It is, namely, not that faith is a vessel waiting to be filled, a human organ for the revelation of God, but that it is only a "crater" formed by the explosion of a shell, through which revelation makes itself observable within the realm of historical perceptibility (p. 29) and in which the message of faith presents itself (p. 36). The last remnant of psychic historical perceptibility, the last remnant of the character of work, is to be taken from faith through this negative designation. Admittedly the expression is not attractive and not even appropriate, because from the standpoint of historical perceptibility, faith not only cannot be perceived as a vacuum, but cannot be perceived at all. No, if faith is to be described in terms of our consciousness, it cannot be described otherwise than as obedience, as submission, as commitment (e.g., pp. 83, 88, 405 f.). We who believe stand in the place "where only God can support us . . . where all else except God himself, God alone, drops out of consideration," in the place that is no place at all, but only the moment when man is moved by God, the true God, who is the Creator of man and all that is human, his Redeemer, when man gives up to him all of himself and all that is human (p. 110). "To believe means to bow beneath the judgment, which inescapably points to the general situation between God and man" (p. 367).

But it is clear that this submission can be neither resignation, nor human despair, nor an inner attitude that can be achieved methodi-

faith = miracle

cally; faith can be understood only as a miracle, that is, it is not at all "understandable." "Faith is a miracle, or it is not faith" (p. 366); it is the "absolute, vertical miracle" (p. 60; cf. 59, 102). The knowledge which is gained in faith, the divine Yes in the divine No, is no perceptible possibility, but lies beyond the boundaries of humanity (p. 231). *Credo quia absurdum* (p. 112). Faith is the "breaking in of God himself" (p. 75). "In relation to man, God is always beyond, new, far, strange, superior, never within his reach nor in his possession; whoever says 'God,' always says 'miracle.' God indeed stands as the either-or before the soul of man; there is therefore a human choice or rejection, affirmation or negation, awakening or sleeping, understanding or mistaking, in reference to God. But what is possible, probable, perceptible, and conceivable is always only to reject, negate, be asleep to, and mistake God, not seeing what is not perceptible, not conceiving what is inconceivable—as surely as man has no organs to perceive a miracle, so certainly all human experience and understanding ends just there, where it begins—in God. Insofar as from man's side it comes to an affirmation and understanding of God, insofar as the psychic occurrence receives from God its direction toward God, its being conditioned by God, and takes on the form of faith, to that extent the impossible, the miracle, the paradox, occurs" (pp. 120 f.). Thus it is again only a figurative expression, an attempt to describe what is obscure in terms of what is perceptible, when faith is described as a venture, as a leap into the void (e.g., pp. 98, 99, 107, 149 f., 202). This venture is no "work," but it is taking on one's self the divine No, which in itself is already a miracle (p. 41).

From the point of view of God, faith can be described as a beginning, as creation (pp. 229, 499), but as a constantly new beginning, a new creation. "This walk is a continuous self-repeal, self-renunciation, an untiring, incorruptible *desire* to decline, renounce, descend, and die; a continuously renewed departure from naked, neutral humanity in all its poverty and questionableness" (p. 132). "Faith is therefore never something finished, given, assured; it is, from the point of view of psychology, again and again the leap into the uncertain, into the dark, into the empty air. Flesh and blood does not reveal *that* to us (Matt. 16:17); no one can say it to another, no one can say it to himself. What I heard yesterday, I must hear anew again today, and I shall have to hear it anew tomorrow; always the one who reveals is Jesus' Father in heaven, only he" (p. 98).

The new "I," the one who has been justified, is not "perceptible" as a psychic historical element, so that the one having faith would now be distinguished from the unbeliever to our knowledge and our con-

Grace of creation & redemption
Knowledge of it dialectic

sciousness. "'Our' righteousness is real and remains real only as God's righteousness" (p. 102). Perhaps faith is real precisely in such persons who stand outside of "religion"! "In their serene creatureliness and worldliness, in the simple, modest factualness of their actions, they are recognized by God, and they recognize him; they are not without insight into the transience of all that is human, not without a view of the silver rim of redemption and forgiveness which bounds the dark cloud of our existence, not without respect for that No, which separates the creation from the Creator, and for that Yes, which makes them creatures of the Creator. . . . Perhaps ultimate, terrible skepticism, complete inaccessibility for all that is 'higher,' complete incapacity to be impressed by anything at all—but perhaps precisely for that reason and in that way *real* brokenness, a mind for God, for God himself! Grumbling restlessness perhaps, protest and inner dissatisfaction that find fault with everything; but precisely therefore and therein the allusion to the peace of God, which is higher than all reason" (pp. 66 f.; cf. the frequent references to Dostoevsky's characters).

The one justified is "the inward, the imperceptible man, who is called into being through God's creative Word, the man, who *he is not*, who in the perishing of *this* man is renewed from day to day" (p. 126). "The grace of creation, like the grace of redemption, is nowhere present as a given condition among other given conditions. It is the imperceptible relation in which all given conditions stand, and knowledge of it is always and everywhere dialectic" (p. 135). That I am justified through faith is a paradox. "Not I is the subject, insofar as it, as subject, as that which it is, is absolutely in the Beyond, is the radically other in relation to what I am. And—I *am* this subject, insofar as what it does, its predicate, faith, consists just in the establishing of the identity between it and me" (p. 148). "The truth that we are new men, consists for us always and everywhere only in its starting point" (p. 150). We can never be certain that we believe, but only believe that we believe (p. 150). Once more, faith is not a "blessed, happy feeling" (p. 151), but brings man into the greatest inner unrest. Perhaps a word from Heinrich Hesse's *Demian* can make this faith that one believes clearer: "The life of every man is a way to himself, the attempt at a way, the suggestion of a path. No man has ever been entirely and completely himself. Yet each still strives to become it, one dully, another more lightly, each as he can."

In continually new expressions Barth describes the great paradox of faith, the identification of the perceptible with the imperceptible "I," of the unredeemed man with the justified. It is a paradox, an

"impossible possibility," for the justified person is "the imperceptible subject, newly constituted beyond all continuity with the psychologically perceptible human subject" (p. 158). "Therefore the fact which establishes the new man stands in contrast to all content of human life in basic superiority and priority. It was never the content of our life and never will be, because it is in its own essence the critical negation of all content of life" (p. 160; cf. 163 f., 198 f., 202, 205 f., 297). "Though it is a thousand times unavoidable that I, as the one that I am, in my perceptible being, knowledge, and activity, make myself guilty of sin; as the one who has received grace, placed in relation to that which I am not, to the new man, I cannot even reckon with the possibility of this which is unavoidable" (pp. 200 f.; cf. 207 f.). "We may then, as it is proper, *also* stand under the law—and yet stand much more under grace. We are then 'devout'—as if we were not so. We live—bypassing our experiences, or rather, passing through them" (p. 239; cf. 240, 284, 313 f.; esp. 291 f.).

FAITH AND CONSCIOUSNESS

It is clear that this radicalism, which does not shy away from paradox, or even from the appearance of blasphemy, is always seeking only to give expression to the fact that faith and justification are absolute miracles. But is not the paradox overdrawn? Is faith, when it is divorced from every psychic occurrence, when it is *beyond consciousness*, then anything at all real? Is not all talk of this faith only speculation and at that an absurd one? What is the meaning of the talk about my "ego" that is not my ego? What is the point of this faith of which I am not conscious and of which I can at most believe that I have it? Is not this alleged identity between my perceptible and imperceptible ego not in reality a speculation that is Gnostic or anthroposophic in nature? For these also talk of the relationship of my ego to higher worlds, relations that are really beyond my consciousness and in truth are matters of total indifference to me! — "Certainly, even faith always has its 'legal' side; it is also procedure and circumstance. But even on this, its legal, perceptible, psychic historical side, even as conceivable procedure and attainable situation, even as possible possibility, faith is clearly without its proper dynamic, and it establishes no certainty. It is 'emptied' . . . Faith establishes certainty insofar as it is the eternal step into total imperceptibility and is itself also imperceptible. Every perceptible procedure and situation, every temporal road, every describable method with its accompanying pragmatism, is also its negation" (p. 134).

This seems to be the answer to our questions. But it seems to me

Faith → must be a consciousness, a concrete existence.

—even though basically I believe I am one with Barth—that there is still some lack of clarity here. Certainly our justification is not an experience (in the Barthian meaning: as a psychic occurrence), not an occurrence in the consciousness. It is present with God, even without our knowing about it. And of it we can only say that we believe it. But that we can only believe that we believe is at least not the view of Paul, for whom faith is rather the conscious acceptance of the message of salvation, the conscious obedience under God's new saving ordinance. And that corresponds quite well with the subject matter. A faith beyond consciousness* is most certainly not the "impossible possibility," but in every sense an absurdity. Surely the sentence just quoted is right in that the proper dynamic of faith does not lie in its perceptibility as a conscious occurrence. But does it follow from this that faith is not the perception of that identity of the perceptible with the imperceptible subject?

Perhaps the lack of clarity lies in Barth's concept of the "perceptible." His polemic against faith as the content of consciousness rests on his understanding of consciousness always as only a psychic process, not as intellectual content, which in such a process becomes "perceptible." It is nevertheless remarkable that in the previously cited sentence (p. 134) scientific thought, moral will, artistic formulation, can be substituted everywhere for "faith" without the sentence's losing its meaning. For, in fact, the contents of our consciousness have meaning and validity apart from their being perceptible in the consciousness as a process (understandable psychically and historically), without their having for that reason an existence beyond consciousness. Thus faith does not lose its dynamic by being the content of consciousness; indeed it is faith only insofar as it is such. To be sure, however, consciousness is not understood here as a psychic process nor as reflection. For as little as the laws of this relationship are or must be conscious in scientific thought, in moral will, or in artistic formulation, so little is there necessarily present in believing a reflection on one's faith. Faith is throughout a peculiar definite quality of the contents of our consciousness. In Paul's meaning, it would be simple to distinguish between justification and faith; justification is God's pre- or supra-temporal deed; faith is the paradoxical fact of the appropriation of justification by man (*this* man) in his consciousness. (This concept of faith comes then very close to the Barthian concept "impact of revelation," an equally paradoxical, "impossible" concept.) Perhaps it is also possible to cast light on the problem of faith and conscious-

* Editor's note: Bultmann has written me that he would now replace here "consciousness" with "concrete existence." J. R.

ness by making it clear that faith is not without confession (cf. Rom. 10:9 ff.), and this confession does not need to be confession in thoughts or words, but can just as well find its expression in deeds, in the attitude of men. Even my trust of other men, my love, my gratitude, are not only "perceptive" occurrences, and do not have their significance in being psychic processes, and I do not need to "know" anything about them. They are however not at all outside my consciousness, and they are not without "confession."

As strongly as Barth (with full right!) has separated faith from every psychic process, as much as he (with full right!) stresses its nature as creation, its constantly "being at the beginning," so clearly must faith still be distinguished from the object of any speculation. Perhaps I possess all sorts of astral or other bodies of which I know nothing. They are to me a matter of total indifference, and a speculation which asserts the identity of my "perceptible" ego with such astral bodies either leaves me completely cold, or seems comic. My justification and my faith, however, are not some sort of pseudo other-worldly factors, but my faith is something definite and precise in my consciousness. And this then means that faith cannot be without confession, but what faith is as confession seems to me to be treated too briefly by Barth.

FAITH AND LOGOS

This is closely related to the fact that Barth strictly delimits faith in reference to *psychic historical* occurrences, but not in reference to our *mental life*, insofar as the latter is more than psychic processes, that is, in reference to the content of our mental life. This is shown again by that sentence on page 134, in which I would again like to substitute for faith, scientific knowledge (or moral will, artistic formulation). Scientific knowledge too always has its "legal" side (and is also psychologically understandable as a psychic occurrence); it too is procedure and situation.

But even on this legal, perceptible, psychic historical side, precisely as a conceivable procedure and attainable situation, precisely as a possible possibility, scientific knowledge is obviously without its peculiar dynamic; it does not form the basis of certainty. It is "emptied," that is, the difference between true and false is given up, since false knowledge, as a psychic act, is just as understandable as the true. In addition, we should consider what Barth says on pages 140 f. and 146 about the meaning of history. History as a perceptible process is, according to him, a mere struggle for existence (p. 77; cf. 86 f.). It receives meaning only from the imperceptible, non-historical, and supra-historical Logos. "Apart from this unhistorical element, the past

remains silent and the present deaf." Naturally! And this Logos is also known to the rational idealistic view of history, which regards history as "within the limits of humanity"; it too knows that only the unhistorical and the supra-historical can bring the present to hear and the past to speak; and yet it knows nothing of that "revelation," but moves completely within the "world." Thus it is then rather surprising in Barth when (pp. 467 f.) the ethos of grace is depicted entirely in terms of the idealistic (Kantian) ethic: "It is the transcendental (never appearing anywhere as 'purity!') purification of activity from all biological, emotional, erotic elements." "An action is ethical insofar as it, approved by the imperceptible one in all, is regarded as a control on the perceptible action of the many," therefore a paraphrase of the "categorical imperative" (whereby, moreover, Barth admits the contact with Kant). But how then is faith distinguished from the theoretical and practical Logos? What Barth says of the contrast of world and God is also largely applicable to the contrast of nature and intellectual life (culture), though both nature and culture, from God's point of view, are "world." It is not possible to do justice to the problem of culture by regarding it, as Barth does, simply as a product of nature. Basically, by so doing, a bit of the radicalism of the concept of faith is broken off, insofar as what is basically valid for culture, and cannot be regarded as nature (thereby eliminating culture), is said of God, and thereby God is made a part of the world. And the concept of world and man in the light of the dialectic opposition of No and Yes threatens to break down into transcendental philosophy. At this point Wilhelm Herrmann saw more sharply.

Culture

THE WAY TO FAITH

At another point, however, Barth marks progress beyond Herrmann, that is, in the question: How do I come to faith? In an address,* Heitmüller once made clear accurately and relevantly wherein Luther's progress over Paul consists, namely, in the question: How do I get a gracious God? Paul demands obedience for the message of faith, and the question of how I can be obedient does not come into view for him. Obedience consists in the acknowledgment of the proclaimed facts of salvation as the new saving ordinance of God. For Luther, as a true son of the church, this acknowledgment was self-evident, but he saw that obedience did not really consist in *that*, and that such obedience was dead if it were not at the same time the personal appropriation of the message, the inner submission to the revelation. Following Ritschl, Herrmann consistently advocated this

* Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Luthers Stellung in der Religionsgeschichte des Christentums* (Marburg: Elwert, 1917).

view with great emphasis. Obedience remains a "work" as long as it does not signify the inner conviction of revelation. It is not genuine as long as the reality of God does not show itself to be reality in my life. Obedience as an act of the will would be a "work"; real obedience can only be "free self-commitment" under the compelling and transforming (creative) impression of revelation. And for this reason, the question of how I come to faith, that is, how I succeed in subjecting myself to the revelation with inner veracity, assumes decisive significance.

Now, to be sure, Herrmann—not exclusively, but yet with strong emphasis—answered this question by reference to a psychologically understandable "experience," to a process, a psychic historical procedure, and in this he was not free from a trace of pietism. His answer consists in the well-known theory of rationaly grounded obedience under the moral law, of the despair which is the end of this road, of the intervention of the forgiving grace of God, revealed in Jesus, for which this is the preparation. To ask and to answer the question of the way to faith in this sense is false—Barth was right here. Even Herrmann's students were often not fully satisfied with this schema, which does not fit Paul at all.* And indeed this schema dulls the edge of the miracle of faith, or at least endangers it. In another sense, however, the question of how I come to faith has its necessary significance if faith is to be honorable, true obedience.

It is only evading the question to speak—as is now so popular—of subjugation to the "objective." For as surely as God is not the symbolization of subjective "experiences," but the objective, so surely can the "objective" be the reality before which I bow only when it becomes reality *for me.* It becomes this only when it destroys, kills my old self—the perceptible man. By wanting to use the talk about the "objective" to gain support for dogmas of old or new provenience, one makes faith into a work and God into an idol, and in truth, empties the objective of its character. And how many messages calling upon us to believe in them offer us the "objective"! How many messiahs are preached! Where is the objective to which I should bow? Thus there remains the question of how I come to faith. And to answer *here*—as is now often done—with the secret of predestination, is dodging the issue, not really a serious answer. For at this point the concept of predestination can be only speculation which is intended to explain something. The concept of predestination takes on meaning only in the moment of faith.

The question "Where is the objective to which I must bow?" must

* Cf. Wilhelm Heitmüller, "Die Bekehrung des Paulus," *ZThK*, XXVII, 1917 (Festgabe für Herrmann), pp. 136-152.

rather be stated as "Where is the objective to which I can bow?" And with this insight the question of how I come to faith gains its simple and clear meaning. It can only be answered by showing what faith means. For in that the meaning of that which is called faith is made clear; faith is protected from every misinterpretation as a psychic process and is severed from every "method." It becomes clear that the possibility of bowing becomes the necessity of bowing, and that the man who is confronted with the question "How do I come to faith?" can find his answer only by taking thought whether and where in his life he meets the reality which he can absolutely bow to and must bow to. Inner veracity is the only "way" to faith, veracity which does not avoid the ultimate question of the meaning of human existence, veracity which is ready to sacrifice its own self, which is ready for the path to the "King of the dark chamber." That veracity can never be made "perceptible," and the decision must be made by every man for himself. Others can only help him in that they try to say what faith means.

THE CHRIST

Or is there nonetheless a bit of reality which can enter the life of every man, and which is "perceptible" as the revelation of God? Herrmann would answer, Jesus! The inner life of Jesus, that which perceived from the Gospel tradition grasps the observer as reality, as the living embodiment of holiness and love, overcomes, transforms, redeems him. Barth rejects this answer, not only because he knows that New Testament research has generally led to the concession that we can know little, or almost nothing of the inner life of Jesus, but because Jesus as a man belongs to the psychic historical reality, to the "world," and we cannot be helped by such psychic historical perceptibility. Barth's answer rather runs, "The Christ is the revelation of God." And here I confess that I simply do not understand him. Here I can discover only contradictions.

According to Barth there is a line at which the two planes of God and the world intersect. (Can this be spoken of in earnest, when the contrast between God and the world is a purely dialectic one? But let us first hear Barth further!) "The point of the line of intersection, where it is to be seen and is seen, is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the 'historical' Jesus, 'descended from David according to the flesh.' 'Jesus' as a historical designation signifies the point of the break between the world which is known to us and an unknown one. At this point of the world that is known to us, time, things, and men are not superior to other times, things, and men, but yet they are superior insofar as they

delimit that point which lets the hidden line of intersection between time and eternity, things and origin, man and God, become visible. Therefore the years 1 to 30 are a time of revelation, a time of discovery" (p. 29). To be sure, every other time can also become a time of revelation and discovery, but that is a possibility which is given only by that basic time of revelation (p. 29). For here we really meet, at one point of time, the truth of another order, of a divine answer (p. 96).

And to what extent does the divine world now become perceptible in Jesus? "The life of Jesus . . . is complete obedience to the will of the true God. As a sinner he joins the sinful. He places himself totally under the judgment under which the world stands. He places himself where God can be present only as the question about God. He takes the form of a servant. He goes to the cross, to death . . . 'Therefore God has highly exalted him,' etc. (p. 97). We see here a paraphrase of Philippians 2:6 ff., the Pauline Christ myth, and nothing of the life of Jesus, of the historical Jesus. These sentences take on meaning only if one already has a definite opinion of their subject (of this "he"); this, however, cannot be gained from psychic historical perceptibility, for it is interpreted by the latter. To what extent therefore is revelation contained in the life of Jesus? Other statements of Barth may be compared here (e.g., pp. 105 ff., 178, 202 f., 276 ff., 327 f.). They all come to the same thing.

Alongside this are statements such as that in the life and death of Jesus as an act of obedience, it is not an individual, a personality, one person, that is illustrated, but the individual, the personality, the person (p. 182). "Neither the personality of Jesus nor the Christ concept, neither his Sermon on the Mount nor his healing of the sick, neither his trust in God nor his brotherly love, neither his call to repentance nor his message of forgiveness, neither his struggle against traditional religion nor his exhortation to follow him in poverty, neither the social nor the individual, neither the indirect nor the eschatological side of his gospel" constitutes the meaning of the "Christ," but only his death on the cross, in the light of which all those possibilities appear as merely human; the death in which the "imperceptible" life becomes "perceptible"; his death, which means dying *for us*, "insofar as in this death the imperceptible God becomes perceptible for us" (pp. 159 f.; cf. 202 f.). So in the Son of God we recognize ourselves again, and see in him the existential nature of the new man who is alive in God (p. 282), and are ourselves "sons of God" (p. 296). As "I myself am the one crucified, who appears to me in the mirror image of the death of Christ" (p. 198), so "we believe in our identity with the

Resurrection
Historical Jesus ignored → a symbol → verbum visibile

imperceptible new man who appears beyond the death of the cross" (p. 202). Thus also, Jesus' resurrection is "no event of historical extent beside the other events of his life and death, but the 'unhistoric' relationship of his whole historic life to its origin in God" (p. 195). If the resurrection were itself in any sense a fact of history, then no assertion however strong, and no deliberation however refined, would be able to prevent it from appearing to be drawn into that see-saw of Yes and No, of life and death, of God and man, which is characteristic of the historical superficiality" (p. 204).

Good. But cannot this also be said of the "life of Jesus" in general? And what meaning would it then have to speak of the years 1 to 30 as the time of revelation? Is not the "historical Jesus" in truth completely ignored? "Jesus Christ, however, is the new man beyond the humanly possible man, especially the pious man. He is the abrogation of *this* man in his totality. He is the man who has come from death into life. He is—not I, my existential I, I as I am in God, in the freedom of God" (p. 269). I can understand all this only to mean that the historical Jesus has become a symbol. This does not mean he has become an idea (Barth rightly rejects this, p. 160), and neither does it mean an illuminating or aesthetically fascinating illustration of a general truth (of reason), but a symbol as living, present power—not the power of any sort of magic, but simply as verbum visibile (cf. Barth, p. 529; Jesus Christ authentically "interprets" God to us as he meets us in the reality of our life!). The Word speaks and is heard, and is therefore a living, present reality in connection with which it is completely unimportant how the historical Jesus of Nazareth is to be included in the context of psychic historical occurrences. The Christ speaks through Grünewald's painting of the crucifixion, of which Barth likes so much to speak, just as much as through the Synoptic Gospels. And what does he say? He is, as the crucified and risen one, the most powerful sermon of God concerning God's judgment, in which his No becomes his Yes, and embodies "God's existentiality, illumined by his uniqueness" (p. 276). "God is personality, unique, alone, peerless, and as such the eternal and almighty, and nothing else. The proof of this is Jesus, the human, historical Jesus. But Jesus is the *Christ*. This is God's uniqueness illumined by his existentiality. Therefore despite all believing and unbelieving historicism and psychologism, the *skandalon* of an eternal revelation in Jesus, a revelation of that which truly Abraham and Plato also had already seen" (pp. 276 f.; cf. 381 ff.).

I do not know if I understand Barth correctly, but I can interpret his statements only thus: that Jesus is a symbol for the truth (preaching of the truth), that God's revelation is neither a psychic historical

fact or form as such, so that it would be possible to read off directly the divine reality in the methodically conceived, "perceptible" history—perhaps in its "high points"—nor something that would be at all immanent for all "perceptible" occurrences. As a result, the attempts of a certain liberalism to have revelation immediately in the historical person of Jesus are just as false as all pantheistic talk of the revelation of the "God-nature" in the All. Therefore he is a symbol for the fact that God's revelation is present always unhistorically and supra-historically, always unnaturally and supra-naturally, always only in a definite now, in a definite man. The symbol for this is the "Christ," and that not as an idea (all rational considerations are eliminated), but as *verbum visibile*, as living, present power.

How I can get beyond this, I do not see, even though I exert myself to follow the Barthian thought patterns and reflect on the meaning of faith and revelation. "Christ" is thus just as much a "sign" as baptism "in its paradoxical uniqueness" is for Barth (p. 192), or as Adam, in whom the imperceptible No of God becomes perceptible; in this connection Barth expressly declares the historicity of Adam a matter of indifference (p. 171). In reality, Barth makes Adam and Jesus parallel in this sense: "In the one man Adam the imperceptible becomes perceptible, that God says No to us . . . In the one Jesus Christ the imperceptible becomes perceptible, that God does not cease to say Yes to us" (p. 178).

THE RELATIONSHIP TO THE TEXT

With my references and critical comments I have not exhausted this book, which despite all its one-sidedness is a rich one. I also intentionally declined to go into the relationship of the new edition to the first one, and hope that someone else will undertake this task. I must confess, however, that the new edition made a much deeper impression on me than the first did. I have also refrained from regarding the book as a commentary on the Letter to the Romans, for the sake of the clarity of the issue with which it basically deals. But precisely because of the issue it seems to me that in conclusion a word is necessary about the relationship of Barth to the text. In the understanding of the task of explaining the text as Barth develops it in the Foreword, I am quite in agreement with him. As it is self-evident for him that the philological historical explanation of the text is a necessary side of exegesis, it is self-evident for me that a text can be explained only when one has an inner relationship to the matter with which the text deals. And I agree also when Barth formulates the high point of exegetical understanding as follows: "As one who would understand, I must press

Paraphrase = the best commentary
Requires criticism

forward to the point where insofar as possible I confront the riddle of the subject matter and no longer merely the riddle of the document as such, where I can almost forget that I am not the author, where I have almost understood him so well that I let him speak in my name, and can myself speak in his name." In other words, a paraphrase, truly the greatest art of exegesis, is the best commentary.

But I must reproach Barth for having let this ideal become a schema by means of which he does violence to the Letter to the Romans and to Paul. Before I go into the matter, I would like to confess once again that Barth has grasped Paul's view of faith in its depths, and likewise that through his exegesis many details have become more alive for me. But I must express the verdict that his "commentary" does violence to the individual life of the Letter to the Romans and to the richness of Paul. It is not at all a matter of a more or less correct or complete presentation of psychic historical perceptibility, but of the understanding of the subject matter.* The measuring "by the subject matter of all words and phrases contained" in the document to be explained, which Barth justifiably demands in the Foreword, cannot, if one is in earnest, occur without criticism. And this criticism is much more radical than philological historical criticism; nor is it criticism from a standpoint taken outside the text and its subject matter, which Barth correctly rejects for exegesis (p. 10), even though it may be justified in other contexts. Rather it is the consistent carrying out of the basic principle, which it is agreed is correct, of understanding the text on the basis of the subject matter. One must measure by the subject matter to what extent in all the words and sentences of the text the subject matter has really found adequate expression, for what else can be meant by "measuring"? In Barth, however, I find nothing of such measuring and of the radical criticism based on it. It is impossible to assume that everywhere in the Letter to the Romans the subject matter must have found adequate expression, unless one intends to establish a modern dogma of inspiration, and something like this seems to stand behind Barth's exegesis—to the detriment of the clarity of the subject matter itself.

It would not be doing Barth a favor to leave the book uncriticized; for example, to ignore to what degree neo-Kantian (Cohenian) terminology often has influenced the words and concepts, or not to consider that many antitheses are based on the origin of the author in the

* Barth will in part take from what is said here and in part will say to himself that, in that which involves the philological historical explanation and in what concerns the evaluation of the content of Romans and of Paul, I largely follow what Jülicher said in this journal [*Die Christliche Welt*], 1920, issues 29 and 30, concerning the first edition.

land of psychoanalysis, that many formulations are obviously determined by the works he happened to be reading at the moment (and in a new edition will probably share the fate of corresponding expressions in the first edition, that is, to disappear)—in short, to forget that the subject matter is greater than the word which interprets it. And I believe it is from no lack of respect when I say that the same is true of Paul and his Letter to the Romans. When I discover in my exegesis of Romans tensions and contradictions, heights and depths, when I endeavor to show where Paul is dependent on Jewish theology or on popular Christianity, on Hellenistic enlightenment or Hellenistic sacramental beliefs, then I am thereby practicing not only philological historical criticism (at least not if I do not consider my task as an exegete mechanical), but I am doing it from the point of view of showing where and how the subject matter is expressed, in order to grasp the subject matter, which is greater even than Paul. I believe that such criticism can only serve to clarify the subject matter, for the more strongly I feel that in this matter it is a question of saying the unsayable (and Barth knows this very well), the more clearly I perceive also the relativity of the word and as an exegete stress it. It is not merely a question of the relativity of the word, but also of the fact that no man—not even Paul—can always speak only from the subject matter itself. In him there are other spirits speaking besides the *pneuma Christou*. And therefore criticism can never be radical enough. Such criticism therefore is—it follows from Barth's own basic premise of "measuring by the subject matter"—inseparable from exegesis and real history. Only in such criticism can the historical work attain its final goal, in which it meets the systematic theology which has traveled on another road—reflection on the motives and forces, on the bases of our life.

KARL BARTH'S *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS**

Adolf Schlatter

"The author to the readers." These are the words which Barth placed over Romans 1:1-7. These words repulse anyone who has learned to know Paul. Paul an "author" who had nothing but "readers" in mind—but how were things done in those days? After his letter arrived in Rome, it was read aloud to the Christian community there. Paul is here giving instruction to hearers, and these hearers were not sitting isolated, each in his study busily reading; they were a congregation gathered with one accord before God, and they then and subsequently carried out their common worship by letting Paul speak to them. Does it have no consequences for the reproduction of the letter if the apostle is turned into an "author" and the community that listens to him into "readers"?

This apparently incidental little heading is a product of Barth's intention which supports his entire undertaking and which created the total material of his extensive book. Paul is to speak to us; are we not isolated, lonely "readers" who have long since forgotten that we are members of the church, and for that reason do not stand in any inner relationship to Paul? In contrast to those commentaries which offer only preparatory helps to understanding, Barth conceives of the work of the exegete as the responsibility for repeating the word of Paul to himself and his readers in such a way that it becomes a component part of their own inner being. Barth seeks to achieve this by bringing the Pauline word out of the situation in which it arose. The exegete is not to repeat once more a word directed to men who were once alive, but the word should encounter us free from all restrictions of time, and loosed from all historical conditions, "vertically from above."

In saying this I have indicated the power of the book, which moved many to listen and made them grateful. His presupposition is an earnest, unbroken affirmation of God, of the God who is present for us when we see Jesus. Therefore the Letter to the Romans is for Barth a timeless, entirely modern, entirely contemporary word. All that is human, all that is historical, sinks away. What is Rome, what is the early Roman Christian community, what is Paul? Nothing that should keep our eyes from God. The plight of finiteness and corruptibility, of "being thus and so" rests upon them; therefore let the veil

* From *Die Furche*, XII (1922), issue 6, columns 228-232.