of their own being and of the being of this world. Nevertheless, I intend to say in the continuation of my work everything that I can say about it, and to say it as clearly as I can. Therefore it is not a question here of defending the individual results of my work against Tillich, but only of demonstrating its starting point and direction, which runs diametrically opposite to his own. And in order to formulate this concisely, I would say that I—and I believe that here I can also speak in the name of Barth—am seeking in terms of Jesus Christ, yes, more precisely, in Jesus Christ, the reality of the world and of life and the knowledge of it, while Tillich seeks for the knowledge of Jesus Christ, or, as he so characteristically says, of the Spirit of Christ, in the knowledge of the world and of life.

4

The Debate on the Critical Historical Method: Correspondence Between Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth

FIFTEEN QUESTIONS TO THOSE AMONG THE THEOLOGIANS WHO ARE CONTEMPTUOUS OF THE SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY

Adolf von Harnack

FIFTEEN ANSWERS TO PROFESSOR VON HARNACK

Karl Barth

AN OPEN LETTER TO PROFESSOR KARL BARTH

Adolf von Harnack

AN ANSWER TO PROFESSOR VON HARNACK'S OPEN LETTER

Karl Barth

POSTSCRIPT TO MY OPEN LETTER TO PROFESSOR KARL BARTH

Adolf von Harnack
On the Critical Historical Method

FIFTEEN QUESTIONS TO THOSE AMONG THE THEOLOGIANS WHO ARE CONTEMPTUOUS OF THE SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY*

Adolf von Harnack

1. Is the religion of the Bible, or are the revelations in the Bible, something so unequivocal that in reference to faith, worship, and life it is permissible to speak simply of the "Bible"? But if they are not, can the determining of the content of the gospel be left entirely to subjective "experience," or to the "experiences" of the individual, or are not historical knowledge and critical reflection necessary here?

2. Is the religion of the Bible, or are the revelations in the Bible, something so evident and clear that no historical knowledge and no critical reflection are needed to understand their meaning aright? Or on the contrary are they something so inconceivable and indescribable that one must simply wait until they shine forth in the heart, because no human mental or intellectual faculty can attain to them? Or is it not rather that both these assumptions are false, and that one needs, in order to understand the Bible, in addition to an inner openness, historical knowledge and critical reflection?

3. Is religious experience different from, or identical with, the awakening of faith? If it is different from it, how is it distinguished from uncontrollable fanaticism? If it is identical with it, how can it come about except through the preaching of the gospel, and how can there be such preaching without historical knowledge and critical reflection?

4. If religious experience is contrary to or disparate from all other experience, how can the necessity of radical flight from the world be avoided, or how can the sophistry be escaped that one must still remain in the world, because even flight from the world rests on a decision of one's own will, and is thus something worldly?

5. If God and world (life in God and worldly life) are absolute contrasts, how are we to understand the close connection, even equating, of love for God and love for one's neighbor which constitutes the heart of the gospel? How is this equation possible without a high regard for morality?

6. If God and world (life in God and worldly life) are absolute contrasts, how can we lead people to God, that is, to what is good?

* The correspondence appeared in Die Christliche Welt (1923).
How is such nurture possible without historical knowledge and a high regard for morality?

7. If God is definitely not all that is said of him in the development of culture and its knowledge and morality, how is it possible to protect this culture and one’s self in the long run against atheism?

8. If the pantheism of Goethe, or Kant’s concept of God, or similar things are simply contrasts to the true statements about God, how can we avoid abandoning these statements to barbarism?

9. If however the opposite is correct—that here, as in all physical and intellectual development, contrasts are at the same time steps, and steps are likewise contrasts—how can one grasp and develop this basic insight without historical knowledge and critical reflection?

10. If the insight “God is love” is the highest and final knowledge of God, and love, joy, and peace are his spheres, how is it permissible to remain always in the sad fix of making the transitional points of Christian experience independent and wishing to prolong the duration of their terrors?

11. If the liberating exhortation is still valid, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just . . . whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things,” how is it permissible to erect a dividing wall between experience of God and the good, true, and beautiful, instead of uniting them with the experience of God through historical knowledge and critical reflection?

12. If all sin is nothing but lack of respect and love, how can one put an end to this lack other than through the preaching of God’s holy majesty and of God’s love? How can one dare to mix in with it all possible paradoxes and arbitrariness?

13. If it is certain that everything that is subconscious, non-rational, fascinating, numinous, etc., remains subhuman as long as it is not apprehended, understood, and purified by reason and protected in its proper character, how is it possible to wish to belittle, even reject, reason? And what can one expect if this destructive work is completed? Is there not already a Gnostic occultism arising on the ruins?

14. If the person of Jesus Christ stands in the center of the gospel, how can the basis for a reliable and common knowledge of this person be gained other than through critical historical study, lest we exchange the real Christ for one we have imagined? But how else can this study be accomplished than by scientific theology?

15. Is there—admitting sloth, shortsightedness, and numerous ills—really any other theology than that which has a firm connection and blood relationship to science? And if there be such a one, what power to convince and what value does it have?

On the Critical Historical Method

FIFTEEN ANSWERS TO PROFESSOR VON HARNACK

Karl Barth

Concerning the title: One who makes a criticism of the form of Protestant scientific theology which since the days of Pietism and the Enlightenment, and in particular in the past fifty years in Germany, has established itself as normative, is not therefore necessarily "contemptuous" of "the scientific theology." The point of the criticism is that this theology may have moved further than is good from its theme (first clearly stated by the Reformation).

1. Beyond the "religion" and the "revelations" of the Bible, the one revelation of God should be taken into consideration as the theme of theology. "Historical knowledge" could then of course say to us that the communication of the "content of the gospel" can, at least according to its own statements, take place only through an action of this "content" itself. But "critical reflection" could lead to the result that this statement of the gospel is grounded in the essence of the subject matter (the relationship between God and man) and is therefore to be properly respected. The "scientific nature" of theology would then be its dependence on the remembrance that its object had previously been the subject, and must become this again and again, something that has nothing at all to do with "experience" and "experiences."

2. "Inner openness"—experience, experiences, heart, and similar things—on the one hand and "historical knowledge" and "critical reflection" on the other hand are possibilities which, for the "understanding" of the Bible, could equally well be useful, indifferent, or a hindrance. The Bible is "understood" neither through this nor that "mental or intellectual faculty," but by the power of the Spirit, who is the same as its content, and that in faith.

3. Therefore the so-called "religious experience" is as different from the awakening of faith by God as earth is from heaven, and in fact is not distinguished from "uncontrollable fanaticism." Why therefore should it not be possible for it to be the more or less clear symptom and witness of the awakening of faith? Faith, however, comes indeed from preaching, but preaching (whatever may be the state of the preacher’s "historical knowledge" and "critical reflection") "by the word of Christ." The task of theology is the same as that of preaching. It consists in taking up and passing on the word of Christ. In this why could not "historical knowledge" and "critical reflection" serve by way of preparation?
4. The faith which is awakened by God will never be able fully to avoid the necessity of a more or less "radical" protest against this world, inasmuch as it is a hope for that which is promised but unseen. A theology that would lose understanding for the basic distance of faith from this world would of necessity also be equally unmindful of the knowledge of God the Creator. Because the "absolute contrast" of God and world, the cross is the only means by which we as men can conceive of the original and final unity of Creator and creation. Sophistry is not the insight that not even our protest against the world can justify us in the sight of God, but rather the usual attempt to bypass the cross by the help of a trite concept of creation.

5. It is precisely the bringing together in the gospel of love for God and love for our neighbor that is the clearest indication that the relationship between our "life in the world" and our "life in God" is that of an "absolute contrast" which can be overcome only by the miracle of the eternal God himself. Or is there anything more strange, more incomprehensible, any fact in the world more in need of the revelation of God, than that of "neighbor"? "High regard for morality," yes, but do we love our neighbor, or can we love him? And if we do not love him, what is the state of our love of God? Does anything show more clearly than this "heart" (not of the gospel, but of the Law), that God does not make alive unless he first slays?

6. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

7. The statements about God which are derived from "the development of culture and its knowledge and morality" (e.g., the statements of the war theologians of all lands) may have their significance and value as expressions of particular "religious experiences" (e.g., one's experiences during a war) alongside those of primitive peoples who do not yet know such higher values. As the "preaching of the gospel" (3) these statements in any case do not come into consideration, and whether they "protect" culture and the individual "from atheism," rather than, derived as they are from polytheism, plant atheism, may be in each case an open question.

8. "True statements about God" can only be made at all where one knows he is placed not on some height of culture or of religion, but before revelation and thereby under judgment, under which, together with all human statements on this subject, those of Goethe and Kant also stand. Schleiermacher's intimidation by "barbarism" is to be rejected as unreal and irrelevant, because the gospel has as much and as little to do with "barbarism" as it has to do with culture.

9. Although within human statements about God among themselves, it may be that "as in all physical and intellectual development" BARTH: Answers to Harnack

"contrasts are at the same time steps and steps are likewise contrasts," even then (and it is more urgent, at least for theology, to "grasp" and "develop" this insight) between the truth of God (which can indeed also be expressed in a human statement) and our truth there exists only contradiction, only either-or. For humility, longing, and petition will always be for our part the end, as they were the beginning. The road from the old to the new world is not one of stages, not development in any sense, but a being born anew.

10. If the insight "God is love" is the highest and final knowledge of God, how do we dare to continue to act as though we were in possession of it? Is not the "transitional point" precisely as long as time? Is our belief not always also disbelief? Or should we believe in our faith? Does it not live by being faith in God's promise? Are we perhaps saved other than in hope?

11. "... the peace of God, which passes all understanding ..." (Philippians 4:7). The "dividing wall" indicated by this "passes" is basic and insurmountable. If "the peace of God ... will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" and make the exhortation in Philippians 4:8 ("whatever is true ...") possible, then it is peace of a kind that passes all understanding. There is a connection between it and that which we call good, true, and beautiful, but the connection is precisely the "dividing wall," the divine crisis, which is the only basis on which it is possible to speak seriously of the good, true, and beautiful.

12. If sin is perhaps something more than "lack of respect and love," that is, a falling away of man from God and being lost in a likeness to God, the end of which is death, then preaching (theology) God's holy majesty and love is a task which seems not to be able to spare our human thinking and speaking from going on unexpected paths. Spectator theology may then speak of "all possible paradoxes and arbitrariness." Anyone who is in a position where he can show a clearer solution for the same (the same) task, should show how it is done. Historical knowledge tells us that Paul and Luther were not in this position.

13. After all, which theological tradition is it which, starting from the apotheosis of "feeling," seems to have had a happy landing in the fearsome quagmire of the psychology of the subconscious? Who is it that apart from critical reason thought he could open a particular "religious" source of knowledge? And ad vocem "Gnostic occultism": which theology is it that is notoriously in danger every moment of losing its most gifted followers to Dr. Steiner?*  

*Translator's note: Rudolf Steiner, founder of Anthroposophy, a school of theosophical Neo-Buddhism.
On the Critical Historical Method

AN OPEN LETTER TO PROFESSOR KARL BARTH

Adolf von Harnack

Highly Honored Colleague!

I thank you for dealing with my "Fifteen Questions." They were addressed to you, particularly to you.

Through your "Answers" some things have become clearer to me, but precisely thereby the contrast which exists here between us has become all the clearer; I shall attempt to formulate this in what follows. To be sure, other things have remained completely obscure, or rather have become so; above all your answer to my first question. Despite strenuous efforts it is totally unintelligible to me. Since, however, very much depends on this basic question, an important matter remains here under the burden of an oppressive fog, that is, your concept of "revelation."

In reference to the title of my questions and to question 15: You see in the scientific theology of the present an unstable and perishable product, which has been formed since the days of Pietism and the Enlightenment, and which possesses only the value of a fortuitous communis opinio. I see in this scientific theology the only possible way of mastering an object through knowledge, a way that is both new and old at once—new because it has come to greater clarity and maturity only since the eighteenth century; old because it began when there were first thinking men. You say, "The task of theology is the same as that of preaching." I answer that the task of theology is the same as the tasks of science in general, but the task of preaching is the pure presentation of the task of the Christian as a witness to Christ. You transform the theological professor's chair into a pulpit (and wish to divide up what is called "theology" among the secular disciplines). I predict to you on the basis of the course of all of church history that this undertaking will not lead to edification but to dissolution. Or is it intended that your proclamation should work only as a "ferment"? Surely no one would intend that, and it is certainly not your intention. And yet, I acknowledge the ferment: courage to be relevant, courage to bear testimony.

On questions 2 and 3: I cannot understand what in your opinion remains if one is obliged, in reference to the understanding of the religion of the Bible, as a matter of principle to make a tabula rasa of "inner openness," "experience," "experiences," "heart," "historical
knowledge," "critical reflection." To be sure, you say, the religion of the Bible is only understood "by the power of the Spirit, who is the same as its content, and that in faith." But since you continue, "Therefore the so-called 'religious experience' is as different from the awakening of faith by God as earth is from heaven, and in fact is not distinguished from 'uncontrollable fanaticism,'" the "therefore" is just as obscure to me as the justification of the figure of speech you use and as your designation of the relationship between religious experience and faith. However, I am not able to speak about things I do not understand. I am glad that you subscribe to the thesis "Faith comes by preaching through the word of Christ." Yet, just as the "of Christ" instead of "of Jesus Christ" already appeared to me to be fatal because of reminiscences from church history, so my mistrust is strengthened in reference to the context in which you (on question 14) make use of the Pauline words "we no longer know Christ according to the flesh." Thus we no longer know the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, the historical Jesus Christ? How am I to understand that? On the basis of the theory of the exclusive inner world? Or on the basis of one of the many other subjective theories?

On question 4: It pains me that you have given only a very hurt answer to this question, "The faith which is awakened by God will never be able fully [1] to avoid the necessity of a more or less [1] 'radical' protest against this world, inasmuch as it is a hope for that which is promised but unseen." Have you perhaps not yet made up your own mind on this point? Then it would have been better to postpone the answer. It sounds so indecisive that it lacks either insight or the courage to testify.

On question 5: You answer my question in reference to love for God and for one's neighbor with the problematical nature of the concepts "neighbor" and "love for neighbor" which is especially characteristic of your theology but not of the gospel, which does not see any problems here at all. In your statement I see the greatest contrast to the simple gospel.

On question 6 (the possibility of leading a person to God): You simply answer with John 6:44. If that is all that you have to say here you condemn all Christian education and, like Marcion, sever every link between faith and what is human. According to my understanding of the matter, you have the example of Jesus against you here.

On questions 7-9: You comment that in each individual case it is an open question whether the knowledge of God which has developed in human history apart from revelation protects from atheism or plants it. That is only half an answer to my question of whether God is

**HARNACK: Open Letter**

**decidedly not** all that is said of him on the basis of the development of culture and its insights and morality. Or should I assume that you join me in rejecting such an observation? Scarcely! For your statement that "the gospel has as much and as little to do with 'barbarism' as it has to do with culture" can be understood only as a radical denial of every valuable insight concerning God within the history of human thought and morality. And your standpoint becomes thoroughly clear through the statement "between the truth of God . . . and our truth there exists only contradiction, only either-or . . . . The road from the old to the new world is not one of stages, not development in any sense, but a being born anew." But is it not contradictory to perceive the foundation of one's own status as a Christian in this way, and yet to acknowledge that God has let it come to be in stages in the process of which eternal values are given? You should recall how Augustine tells of the development of his status as a Christian!

To questions 10 and 11: The answers which you give to the questions posed here are, in my opinion, those which as a result of the problematical situation into which you bring Christian faith, are furthest removed from evangelical Christianity. The "transition point" from godlessness to God should last for each Christian as long as "time": our faith is always also disbelief; we are saved only in hope; a connection between what we call good, true, and beautiful and the peace of God exists only to the extent that a dividing wall connects, etc. By giving these answers to my questions you use what is incomplete in Christianity, of which we are all aware, to destroy the possession itself, and to make an illusion of the confidence in which we are privileged to live, and frivolity of the joy which should fill our life. You will deny this, but what you put in its place is the description of a frame of mind which at best can be felt by only a few to be the "peace of God," and which can by no means be the necessary presupposition for all Christian humility.

On this basis your answer to question 12 is also understandable. The simple gospel out of which Jesus spoke his easily intelligible and comforting parables for the salvation of souls does not suit you; but rather, Christian preaching cannot "spare our human thinking and speaking from going on unexpected paths." Will there be anyone who can understand you at all when you are entirely involved in extremely sublime psychology and metaphysics? And if you then surprisingly leap over to Paul and Luther, I have no doubt that even today every Christian would find it easier to imitate the preaching and life of these Christians than to follow your message. Yet—are Paul and Luther examples for us to imitate? Can we dress ourselves in their armor?
Must we lesser ones torment ourselves in trying to experience what they experienced? It is—permit me once more to speak "problematically"—at one and the same time our power and our fate that we have experienced Paul and Luther. Against this fate nothing helps except the word of comfort which they themselves call out to us, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

You did not answer question 13, but contented yourself with a reference to the fact that the dominant theology or one of its lines has led into the quagmire of the psychology of the subconscious, and into occultism. Since my question was not addressed to your theology but was aimed in an entirely different direction, I will remain silent there, but must still comment that by divine ordinance all contempt of reason and science is punished with occultism, and that each age possesses only one science.

I also miss a full answer to question 14. Does the awakening of faith take place insofar as it includes the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ as the midpoint of the gospel, without reference to his historical person? If this question must be answered in the negative, can faith dispense with historical knowledge of this person? If such knowledge is necessary, can critical historical study thereof be irrelevant to faith, or is it not rather absolutely necessary? What you indicate in this connection in reference to biblical science can well be reduced to the formula: The most radical biblical science is always correct; thank God that it is so, for in this way we are rid of it. This standpoint, known to us all too well from recent second-rate church history, gives carte blanche to every conceivable fantasy and to every theological dictatorship that dissolves the historical element in our religion and seeks to torture the consciences of others with its own experience.

I sincerely regret that your answers to my questions only show the size of the chasm that separates us, but what is important is neither my theology nor yours, only that the gospel is taught aright. But if your method should gain the ascendency, it will not be taught any more at all, but exclusively handed over to revival preachers, who freely create their understanding of the Bible and who set up their own doctrine. In highest esteem,

Von Harnack

On the Critical Historical Method

AN ANSWER TO PROFESSOR VON HARNACK'S OPEN LETTER

Karl Barth

My Highly Esteemed Doctor:

It is not necessary to say that I regard as an honor the detailed discussion which you gave to my answers to your questions, and that I am very grateful to you for it. In spite of this, it is with hesitation that I approach the task which the editor thought it was obvious I should take—that of giving to you on the basis of your letter further information about my theological thought. You yourself state that my answers have shown you only the chasm that separates us. Is it not useless and vexatious for me to present to you and most of the other readers of Die Christliche Welt merely more riddles? My position is awkward in another way as well. The first time you posed real questions, to which I, as one of those involved, could and must answer, as well or as poorly as I might. In your letter, however, you oppose me—and here I would not wish to dispute your right to do so as my honored former teacher—as the one who has arrived and is knowledgeable and who, on the basis of the experience and the reflection of a full and rich life, no longer has the time and the ear not only for answers other than those he himself would give, but also for questions other than his own. Is there anything left to be said to your observations? Is not the conversation ended? But since you would say to me that my answers are not those which you possessed when you asked your questions—which I would not doubt—I still owe it to you and our hearers to confess that on my part I regard my answers as very questionable, and that I reserve everything further for the future and for the possibility of being better instructed, and also that your objections will not disturb me from seeking further, first of all in the direction of my answers. Let me also, but this time somewhat by way of recapitulation, take up each point separately. For the proper understanding of my continuing disagreement I must refer you—as you in a similar situation would certainly also do—to my detailed published writings and those of my friends Gogarten and Thurney sen (for the other group of those envisaged by you I take no responsibility at all). Speaking less to you than to the public I may permit myself the observation that it will not be possible to refute us effectively for very long without having read us seriously.
You see in what you term “scientific theology” “the only possible way of mastering an object through knowledge,” and call it “new because it has come to greater clarity and maturity only since the eighteenth century; old because it began when there were first thinking men.” I hope I am not attributing anything inappropriate to you when I assume in this definition, made clear by reference to the eighteenth century, that for you among the Reformers, Luther and Calvin (together with all that annoying tribe of “revival preachers”), although perhaps not Zwingli and Melanchthon, are probably excluded from the “scientific theologians,” and that it would be quite foreign to your thought to consider seriously regarding the Apostle Paul (besides whatever else he was) as such. But be that as it may, I think I know “thinking men” in ancient and modern centuries who as theologians have traveled very different roads from those regarded as normal since the eighteenth century, and the dismissal of whose “science” (if science is intended to mean “relevance to the subject matter”) seems to me highly questionable. If one appeals to the theology of Paul or Luther, you can only explain it to yourself as a presumptuous attempt at imitation. On this side of the “chasm” the procedure appears to us simply as one in which the superior relevance of these and other older theologians, however little they fit into the present theological clique, has forced itself so irresistibly on us that neither by the protest of the modern spirit (which must perhaps first learn to understand itself!) nor by faith in the forgiveness of sins (!) to which you appeal, can we feel ourselves freed from the duty of taking into consideration the possible validity of their basic approach more earnestly than has been done, especially in the most recent epoch of theology, despite all research in Paul and enthusiasm for Luther. Basically it cannot be here a question of reparation. To be sure, it is my private opinion that the practice of reparation a classic train of thought in theology, the practice which was called “theology” in the Middle Ages and the period of Protestant scholasticism, was probably more instructive than the chaotic activity of theological schools of our day, for whom the concept of an authoritative object has become foreign and monstrous because of the sheer authoritarianism of method. But I also think I know that the same thing neither can nor should return, and that we are to think in our day for our day. Therefore it is really not specifically a matter of removing from theological study the critical historical method of biblical and historical research developed in recent centuries, but of a meaningful way of incorporating it into theology and of sharpening the questions which result from it. I think I said this in my answers 2, 3, and 14, and may be permitted to express

surprise that you continue to charge me with regarding critical biblical science as something “irrelevant,” with wanting to be “rid” of it, and with needing to be threatened, because of contempt for reason and science, with the penalty of occultism, which is “by divine ordinance” determined for such a misdemeanor. What I must defend myself against is not historical criticism, but rather the matter-of-course way in which one, still today, empties theology’s task: Instead of that which our predecessors called “the Word” (the correlation of “Scripture” and “Spirit”) one has placed this and that which have been dug up by historical criticism beyond the “Scripture” and apart from the “Spirit,” which one calls the “simple gospel,” a gospel that can be called “word of God” only as a figure of speech, because it is in fact at best a human impression thereof. The sentence which was so repugnant to you and to others, that the task of theology is the same as the task of preaching, is unavoidable for me as a grammatical statement (in the carrying out of which, of course, many things must still be considered). In this I assume it is conceded that the preacher by rights is also to proclaim “the word” and not his own experience or experiences, maxims, and reflections. You have conceded that “through the word of Christ” (the definite article is not important to me) comes the truth of preaching and faith. If, however, it is the task of the preacher to reproduce this “word,” then it is also the task of the theologian (who finds himself at least in virtual personal union with him). The practical and practical differences of execution are obvious, as is also the fact that some things which belong in the lecture hall can be omitted in the pulpit, and vice versa. The theme of the theologian, however, which he investigates in history, and which he must strive to express in a manner relevant to his own situation, cannot be a second truth distinct from the truth which he is obliged to present as a preacher. This is what was obvious in the beginnings of Protestant theology (I think particularly of Zürich and Geneva). I cannot see, however, how the subsequent abstract separation of “scholarly” and “edifying” thinking and speaking can be based on the nature of the subject matter. But if this unity of the task of the theologian and the preacher is justified, what they both must abandon as their theme is, along with everything that is merely human impression and not word of God, the “simple gospel” that is left over in the Bible as an alleged “revelation” after the adequate basis of knowledge of all revelation given in the correlation of “Scripture” and “Spirit” has been completely eliminated.

*Translator’s note: The German reads, “das Wort des Christus,” literally, “the word of the Christ.”
there can be no a priori impossibility of letting this witness also speak through it; on the contrary. From this conclusion to the canonization of, for instance, Faust is a long road, which a sensible church will not enter on.

Thus Scripture bears witness to revelation. It is not necessary to believe it; indeed one cannot believe it. But neither should one undermine the fact that it witnesses to revelation, and indeed genuine revelation, not a more or less veiled religious human possibility, but God's possibility, that he has acted under the form of a human possibility—and this as reality. The witness relates that the word became flesh, God himself became human, historical reality, and that this occurred in the person of Jesus Christ.

From this it by no means follows for me that this event can also be an object of human, historical knowledge, but that precisely this is excluded because and insofar as it deals with this reality. The existence of some Jesus of Nazareth, for example, which can of course be known historically, is not this reality. Moreover, a "simple gospel," historically knowable because humanly convincing, which provides no offense and is thus in your meaning a "simple gospel," a word or a deed of this Jesus, which really would be nothing but the realization of a human possibility, would not be this reality. I of course doubt that it is possible at any significant point, even considered only historically, to loose a word or a deed of Jesus from the background of this reality, that is, from the Scripture which witnesses to revelation and thus also to the offense, and to regard it as "simple gospel" in your sense. Why, for example, I regard this as impossible in reference to the command to love God and one's neighbor, I have indicated previously in my answer 5, and for this I was chastised by you, but not refuted. I can now only in passing enter protest against your designation of the parables of Jesus as "easily intelligible and comforting" parables, and hope in both cases to have at least a few historians on my side. But even if you should succeed in claiming one point or another from the tradition for your viewpoint, it would only mean that this point is not, or is only in context with other points, the object of the testimony, the kerygma, which is no doubt also in your opinion the sole point of the writing of the New Testament. But the object of the witness was designated so clearly by the apostles and evangelists themselves as revelation, as the activity of God himself, it was placed in such complicated concealment, so protected against all desire to understand it directly, that not only all obvious references to this "central point of the gospel," as they are brought together for example in the second article of the creed in a suspiciously threatening bundle, but assuredly also

Or should not we theologians, if we do not wish to do this, muster the courage to let our theology begin with the perhaps basically skeptical, but in any case clear, reminder of the witness, which is of course "totally unintelligible," unheard-of, unbelievable, and of course offensive, that God himself has said and done something—indeed something new outside of the correlation of all human words and things—yet brought as this new something into this correlation, a word and thing alongside others, yet this word and this thing? I am not now speaking of the possibility of accepting this witness; I am only asking whether we should not first of all quite soberly reckon with the fact that so-called Christianity so far as we can tell began with this witness. This witness, which can never be analyzed enough by historical criticism, but which will not for that reason cease being this witness, is what I term in its totality the "Scripture." In this the question of the delimitation of "Scripture" in reference to other writings seems to me to be a secondary one. Should a non-canonical writing contain this (but really this) witness to a noteworthy degree,
The "sermon on the mount," the parables and disputes of Jesus, the passion account, allow on careful consideration only the verdict that it is impossible to say that the historical reality (of the revelation) claimed here is knowable directly and historically. All that is knowable is that other which constitutes the historical context of the alleged revelation.

Beyond this other the barrier falls, and the offense, the fable—or the miracle—threatens. The historical reality of Christ (as reality of revelation, or of the "central point of the gospel") is not the "historical Jesus," whom an all too zealous historical research had wanted to lay hold of while bypassing those warnings erected in the sources themselves (only to come upon a banality which is now and will continue to be vainly proclaimed as something precious), of course not, as you said, an "imagined" Christ, but rather the Risen One, or let us say—holding back because of our little faith—the Christ witnessed to as risen. That is the "evangelical, the historic Jesus Christ," and otherwise, that is, apart from this testimony to him, apart from the revelation which must here be believed, "we know him no longer." In this sense I believe I can legitimately appeal to 2 Corinthians 5:16. Hence at the decisive point, that is, in answering the question what makes Jesus the Christ, the reference to the resurrection, there remains from the human point of view indeed only your "totally unintelligible." And I shall gladly confess to you that I would a hundred times rather take the side of the No, the refusal to believe which you proclaim on the basis of this state of affairs, than the artifices of a "positive" theology which end up by letting what is incomprehensible appear under control again as entirely comprehensible and evident; this is an emptying and a denial of the revelation, which with its apparent witness to the revelation, is worse than the bitterest and worst refusal to believe, which has at least the advantage of being suited to the subject matter. It is in this sense also that my declaration of sympathy for the "most radical" biblical science is meant. The theology of the Reformation did not need this negative discipline because it still had the courage not to avoid the offense of revelation and therefore did not raise at all the question of a historically knowable middle point of the gospel. We need it because in our flight from the offense we have fallen into this impossible question. I see the theological function, especially of historical criticism, as being that of making clear to us a posteriori that this cannot be done, that in the Bible we are dealing with testimonies, and always only with testimonies. And I maintain that this is the function which, in its way, it has actually splendidly fulfilled among us since the days of David Friedrich Strauss, even though largely not understood, and above all not itself knowing what it did.

The acceptance of these incredible testimonies of the Scripture I call faith. Here I once again cannot admit that this is a discovery of my theology, but ask, aside from sentimentalities, what else faith could be than the obedience which I give, as if it were God's Word, to a human word which it testified to as God's Word directed to me. Let no one deceive himself here concerning the fact that this is an unheard-of occurrence, that the Holy Spirit must now be spoken of; otherwise all the objections which Herrmann hammered home against "holding as true" historical events apart from this basis of knowledge would be valid. I therefore distinguish between faith as God's work on us (for only God can say to us in a way that we will hear it, what we cannot hear, 1 Cor. 2:9), and all known and unknown human organs and functions, including all our so-called "religious experiences." Is that such an unheard-of innovation? Must I, as Reformed, raise the question of whether Luther's explanation of the third article in the small catechism is really valid or not? And are you unable to perceive that it is through the rash abandoning of this concept of faith for the mess of pottage of a less paradoxical one that all doors are opened to the anthroposophic thewahabewohu of faith and occult "capabilities" of men, confronted with which official theology stands in total confusion?

It must be the case that everything that can be said against the possibility of revelation may also be said with the same weight against the possibility of faith. And now as the second excluded possibility this must remain, that the God who according to the witness of the Scripture has spoken the word of Christ now speaks it through the witness of the Scripture, through the power of the testimonium spiritus sancti internum, also to me, that I hear it and by hearing it, believe. Is this then the "theory of the exclusive inner word" or one of the "many other subjective theories"? In question 3, you yourself spoke of the awakening of faith. I agree, but in the sense that as in the "intelligible and comforting parable" of the Lost Son, Luke 15:32, it is a matter of the awakening of one who is dead, and, just as in the case of revelation, of God's miracle. In any case, I have no confidence in any other objectivity than the one outlined here or through the correlate concepts of "Scripture" and "Spirit," least of all in the papacy of a science that would first have to demonstrate through its results its absolute superiority to the subjectivistic activity of the "revival preachers."

But now you also, highly honored Doctor, have conjured up against me the shadow of Marcion with the claim that I "sever every link between faith and what is human." May I inquire what basis you find for this in my second and third answers? Have I really made tabula rasa of those human organs, functions, and experiences? In any case
it is not my intention to do this. I think I also really know that man, believing or disbelieving, lives on as man, in time, in the world of things, from his point of view exclusively dependent on his own human possibilities. I think I also know that man's faith is at any moment entirely determinable as "inner openness," "experience," "experiences," "religion," "historical knowledge," "critical reflection," etc., just as the witness of revelation can be entirely interpreted, yes, must be interpreted (insofar as God himself does not interfere!) as a bit of disagreeably obscure human intellectual and cultural history. Neither here nor there would I "sever" (that would be a completely senseless undertaking!), but rather say that what is human is only relative, witness, parable, and therefore is not, as would at least be a consistent inference from your statements, on some peaks or heights of development, itself the absolute! Rather the human is the pointer (understood or not understood) to the absolute. According to this then, that which is historically and psychologically comprehensible, that which we know in ourselves and others as "faith," would be witness and symptom of that work and miracle of God in us, of faith, which, created by "the Word" and absorbed in "the Word," to speak with Luther, is our righteousness before God himself. In the same way then, the religions of the Bible, which were the starting point for your first question, would be witnesses and symptoms of the historical reality of the incarnation of God. The basis for knowing both justifying faith and revelation would be God's activity through his Word to us. Do I really not make myself clear to you?

But, and here I think I strike the nerve of all your objections, I am indeed satisfied with regarding only as witness all that which occurs here and there in time and by human activity, and I reject specifically the possibility, somehow and somewhere, be it in history or in ourselves, of making something relative absolute, or, to speak in Kierkegaard's terms, of passing from witness to "direct communication." If I do not completely misunderstand the Bible and the Reformation, the latter is and must remain, in the most exclusive meaning, God's affair: But solely as Word and work of God, as the activity of the Trinity itself, which can be witnessed to and believed only as revealed, is it true that eternity becomes time, the absolute relative, and God man (and thereby—only thereby—each time the opposite also occurs), that the reality corresponds to the sign and only thereby the sign to the reality, as Luther, with ultimate insight, remarked in his teaching on the Lord's Supper, though not far from the natural titanic arrogance of the homo religiousus. It can never become true as a historical psychological reality that becomes directly know-

able somewhere in our religious experience, in the movements of our conscience, in the relationships between man and man, nor, even though they were the purest, in the ideas of God of Goethe and Kant, or whatever heights of human resemblance to God you might name. If it does become knowable here or there, then the miracle has occurred, which we do not deny but with which we may not reckon as with a possibility or even a general truth, which we, when it is present (present as the miracle of God), are to worship. My rejoinder to your reproof of "severing," which I do not regard as justified, is to the effect that through the continuity which you claim exists between the "human" and faith you rob faith of content just as in the continuity which you claim between history and revelation you rob revelation of content. I do not sever, but I do contest any continuity from the one to the other. I maintain a dialectic relationship which points to an identity which cannot be carried out and therefore also is not to be asserted. Therefore the pointers visible on the stages of life's way are to be ascribed only as parables—such pointers as those provided by "Christian" biography of all ages (which despite Augustine, or rather precisely in reference to him, is to be designated as an undertaking both promising and ambiguous). Value only as parables is to be ascribed to the struggles and successes of "Christian" pedagogy, which truly and for good reason has never become rid of heathenism, and which is honored rather than dishonored when it is placed under the hope and under the judgment of John 6:44. Value only as parables is also to be ascribed to all "Christian" protest against the world, which as human undertaking (why do you insist on drawing the inference that I am here irresponsible?—I repeat in due form my "devious" answer) can surely only be a more or less "radical" protest, a "half-breed," little protest, a demonstration, a gesture, but can never hope to anticipate and actualize the passing away of this world and the coming of the Kingdom. All "becoming" can be parable, only parable, in contrast to the birth that moves from death to life through which we alone—but only on the way which God himself travels and is—come from the truth of man to the truth of God.

You would like (always in connection with the charge of Marcionism) a "full" answer from me to the question: "whether God is decided not all that is said of him on the basis of the development of culture and its insights and morality." All right. But then let me ask you really to listen to my full answer: No, God is "decidedly not all that," as surely as the Creator is not the creature or even the creation of the creature. But precisely in this No, which can be spoken with full sharpness only in faith in revelation, the creature recognizes itself as
the work and the possession of the Creator; precisely in this No, God is known as God, as the source and the goal even of the thoughts which man, in the darkness of his culture and lack of culture, is accustomed to form of God; precisely this No definitively established by revelation is not without “the deep, secret Yes under and above the No,” which we should “grasp and hold with firm faith in God’s Word,” “and confess God is right in his sentence on us, so that we then have won.” And thus it is with this No: “Nothing but Yes is in it, but deep and secretly, and it seems to be nothing but No.” What “contrast-greedy” person may have said that? Kierkegaard or Dostoevsky? No, Luther! (EA, 11, 120). Is Luther perhaps to be suspected of Marcionism? According to Zwingli, yes, but I think that you join me in understanding him better than that, and why should you not at the same time understand me a little better? Should what is human really become meaningless because in faith in revelation its crisis dwells, which makes really impossible all identifications between here and there—always with the exception of the one identification which it does not become us to express (the end of all things foreseen in I Cor. 15:28)? Does it not really become full of meaning and promise, for the first time important and possible, by moving from the twilight of supposed fulfillment into the light of real hope? Is it really not enough for us to have and behold in the perishable the parable of the imperishable, to live in it and work for it, to rejoice as men that we have at least the parable, and as men to suffer from the fact that it is only parable—without anticipating the “swallowing up of death in victory” by a spurious consciousness of eternity, precisely because the great temporal pointer applies to the greater eternal Is and not to something other? Have I really made a “tabula rasa”?

Yes, you say it, highly honored Doctor, and you must know why you say it, although you cannot base it on my statements. I fear that here, precisely here, you necessarily misunderstand me, even if we could agree concerning revelation and faith. How does it come that just here where it is a matter of the existential question of our relation to God and the world, of the confirmation in hope of faith in revelation, that you quite unambiguously exchange the role of defender of science for that of defender of the so-called Christian possession? What is the meaning of the complaint about the “sublimity” of my metaphysics and psychology, as if now suddenly general intelligibility were for you the measure of correct theology? What is the meaning of measuring the distances which, sometimes more, sometimes less, are said to separate me from so-called “evangelical Christianity,” as if in our conversation it were suddenly a question of the Christianess of

my theology? What is the meaning of the reproach for “commanding” a “frame of mind” that is disagreeable to you, when it was your scientific misgivings that pointed to the fact that for me neither revelation nor faith is made understandable in the familiar “simple” way as a frame of mind, and hence the topic “frame of mind” was obviously introduced into the debate by you? What is the meaning of all the strong words “illusion,” “frivolity,” “greed for contrast,” etc., where you have certainly not demonstrated the right to draw from my perhaps unsatisfactory, but in any case cautious answers such tumultuous conclusions and accusations? How am I to explain to myself this transition from teaching to chastising? How shall I answer it? You can certainly guess that I too have angry thoughts about the connection between the scientific character of your theology, which makes it necessary for you to reject what I (and not only I) call revelation and faith, and its Christianess, which comes to expression by casting suspicion on the Pauline expression “saved in hope” as “problematical.” I too would be in a position, where the misunderstanding between us seems hopeless, to announce strong scruples and to utter very sharp words. But what would I accomplish by that except on my side also to put a seal on this hopelessness, and that should not be done. It will also be better in every respect if I stop here.

Let me repeat: I do not intend to be obdurate in the positions in which I have revealed myself to you, highly honored Doctor, and to our voluntary-involuntary audience in this conversation; first because I know how shatteringly relative everything is which can be said about the great object which occupies you and me. I know that it will be necessary to speak of it quite differently from the way which corresponds to my present understanding, and in the future I would also like to be able to listen attentively to what comes from you. But that with your questions and answers you have driven me from the field, though I will gladly endure it when it really happens, I cannot this time admit.

With highest respect,

Yours,

KARL BARTH
POSTSCRIPT TO MY OPEN LETTER
TO PROFESSOR KARL BARTH

Adolf von Harnack

Professor Barth has given a very detailed answer to my open letter. I thank him for the rich content of his presentation. I regret, however, that I am unable at this time and in this journal to continue the discussions, since the number and the weight of the problems are too great to be dealt with briefly and in this place. But there are two things I would not like to leave unsaid.

1. Paul and Luther are for me not primarily subjects but objects of scientific theology, and so also are my colleague Barth and all those who as preachers express their Christianity as prophets and witnesses, whether they do this in biblical commentaries or in dogmatic writings, etc. In life, of course, scientific theology and witnessing are often enough united, but neither of them can remain sound if the requirement that they be held separate is not enforced. Both are "relevant"—not just bearing witness, as it might appear on the basis of Professor Barth's exposition—but the type of relevance is in each case very different. A scientific theological presentation can also inspire and edify, thanks to its object, but the scientific theologian who is bent on inspiration and edification brings strange fire upon his altar, for as there is only one scientific method, so there is also only one scientific task—the pure knowledge of its object. Success that comes to science in addition to this fruit is an unexpected gift.

2. The concept of revelation is not a scientific concept. Science is unable to bring the God-consciousness and the paradoxical preaching of the founders of religions and prophets (as is true of religious experiences in general) together under one category, or to explain them as "revelation." It is however completely futile to attempt to take a "word" of this sort as something so purely "objective" that the influence of human speech, hearing, perception, and understanding can be eliminated. I have the impression that Professor Barth seeks to do something like this, and in so doing calls for assistance on a dialectic which leads us to an invisible point between absolute religious skepticism and naïve biblicism—a most tormenting explanation of Christian experiences and of Christian faith! But since for centuries it has again and again been presented in new guises, it is probably individually justified and must therefore be treated with respect. But is it able to build a community, and are the wild blows justified with which it beats down everything else that appears as Christian experience? And if he who perceives Christian faith in this way and never otherwise is able to find footing on its glacier bridge, is there room on it for even his children and friends? Would he too not do better, instead of setting up a strict either-or, to recognize that he plays his instrument, but that God has yet other instruments?

In Barth's answer at a few points a certain sensitiveness appears which is magnified even to the assertion that my responses sounded like "chastisement." I cannot be judge in my own case, and I am therefore all the happier to say that in my letter I was moved by no other intention than that of attaining clarity in reference to a theologian friend.