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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE: A TRIBUTE TO KARL BARTH

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My Encounter with Karl Barth

by Carl F. H. Henry

Dr. Henry and Word, Inc., have graciously granted the Bulletin permission to publish this excerpt from Henry's forthcoming autobiography, tentatively titled Confessions of a Theologian.

When Karl Barth came to America for a few lectures at University of Chicago Divinity School and Princeton Theological Seminary, George Washington University made a belated effort to bring him to the nation's capital. Barth was weary; but he volunteered to come for an hour's question-answer dialogue. The university invited 200 religious leaders to a luncheon honoring Barth, at which guests were invited to stand, identify themselves, and pose a question. A Jesuit scholar from either Catholic University or Georgetown voiced the first question. Aware that the initial queries often set the mood for all subsequent discussion, I asked the next question. Identifying myself as "Carl Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*," I continued: "The question, Dr. Barth, concerns the historical factuality of the resurrection of Jesus." I pointed to the press table and noted the presence of leading religion editors or reporters representing the United Press, Religious News Service *Washington Post*, *Washington Star* and other media. If these journalists had their present duties in the time of Jesus, I asked, was the resurrection of such a nature that covering some aspect of it would have fallen into their area of respon-

sibility? "Was it news," I asked, "in the sense that the man in the street understands news?"

Barth became angry. Pointing at me, and recalling my identification, he asked: "Did you say *Christianity Today* or *Christianity Yesterday*?" The audience—largely nonevangelical professors and clergy—roared with delight. When encountered unexpectedly in this way, one often reaches for a scripture verse. So I replied, assuredly out of biblical context, "*Yesterday, today, and forever*." When further laughter subsided, Barth took up the challenge: "And what of the virgin birth? Would the photographers come and take pictures of it?" he asked. Jesus, he continued, appeared only to believers and not to the world. Barth correlated the reality of the resurrection only with personal faith.

Later, UPI religion reporter Lou Cassels remarked, "We got Barth's 'Nein!'" For Barth, the resurrection of Jesus did not occur in the kind of history accessible to historians. Religious News Service and other media echoed my "encounter with Barth." But at the end of the hour Barth added a gracious apology. He was not fully happy, he said, with the way he had responded to some questions, and particularly about the way he had referred to *Christianity Today*. Some years later when Barth wrote his *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, he commented in the preface that he could go neither the way of *Christian Century* nor the way of *Christianity Today*.

A Letter of Thanks to Mozart

by Karl Barth

In his forward to the delightful collection of Barth's tributes to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the composer whom the great theologian passionately loved, John Updike writes:

Karl Barth's insistence upon the otherness of God seemed to free him to be exceptionally (for a theologian) appreciative and indulgent of this world, the world at hand. His humor and love of combat, his capacity for friendship even with his ideological opponents, his fondness for his tobacco and other physical comforts, his tastes in art and entertainment were heartily worldly, worldly not in the fashion of those who accept this life as a way-station and testing-ground but of those who embrace it as a piece of Creation. The night of his death he was composing a lecture in which he wrote, in a tremulous but even hand, that "God is not a God of the dead but of the living"; not long before this Barth made notes foreseeing his death and the manifestation before "the judgment seat of Christ" of his "whole 'being,'" his being "with all the real good and the real evil that I have thought, said and done, with all the bitterness that I have suffered and all the beauty that I have enjoyed." Foremost for him in the ranks of beauty stood the music of Mozart, music which he placed, famously and almost notoriously, above the music of Bach and all others as a sounding-out of God's glory. He began each day with the playing of a Mozart record, partook of Mozart celebrations and festivals, and conscientiously served as a member of the Swiss Mozart Committee, which included the government minister Carl Burkhardt and the conductor Paul Sacher.

Through the kindness of the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. we are privileged to share with our readers from that collection, simply titled Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "A Letter of Thanks to Mozart," which appeared originally in the Luzerner Neuesten Nachrichten, January 21, 1956.

*In appreciation to Eerdmans for this kindness, it is fitting to mention that two other Barth books will soon be available from that publishing house: *Witness to the Word*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, and *A Karl Barth Reader*, eds. Rolf Joachim Erler and Donald Reiner Marguard, trans. G. W. Bromiley.*

Celebrate Barth's centennial year by reading about him; better still, by reading something from his own vast, stimulating corpus.

Basel, December 23, 1955

My dear Maestro and Court Composer:

Well now, someone hit upon the curious idea of inviting me and a few others to write for his newspaper a "Letter of Thanks to Mozart." At first I shook my head, my eye already on the waste basket. But since it is *you* who is to be the subject, I find it almost impossible to resist. For that matter, didn't you yourself write more than one rather odd letter during your lifetime? Well, then, why not me? To be sure, there where you are now—free of space and time—you [and your companions] know more about each other and also about us than is possible for us here. And so I don't doubt, really, that you have known for a long time how grateful I have been to you, grateful for as long as I can recall, and that this gratitude is constantly being renewed. But even so, why shouldn't you for

once see this gratitude expressed in black and white?

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

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

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

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

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

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

K. Barth

Is Karl Barth My Neighbor?

by Elouise Renich Fraser

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

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

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

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

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