

“Bombshells in the Playground”: Disrupting Hermeneutics

What might Karl Barth (*Romans*, 1919) have contributed to the 1919 Bible Conference?

ASRS 2019, San Diego

John Webster, La Sierra University

“On Thursday, July 24 [1919], [Herbert C.] Lacey gave a presentation on “The Aim, Scope, and Content of our College Bible Studies.” In this presentation he called for the college Bible department to become much stronger intellectually. . . Most significant to this discussion on Ellen White, he recommended that [the curriculum] cover the “inspiration of the Bible.” . . Lacey suggested that the church should produce a pamphlet that addressed this issue in a “simple” and “straight-forward style.” Others objected that their enemies “would publish it everywhere.” Wirth opined, “I wish you general [conference] men would get something for us, because we [the teachers] are the ones that suffer.” [A.G.] Daniells, always the consummate administrator, suggested that the General Conference Committee look into the matter, and that it seemed that it was important to have agreement among history and Bible teachers on the nature of inspiration in relationship to Ellen White’s writings. Several more requests were made for such a statement on inspiration. Nothing appears to have happened because of this request. Perhaps it was simply too controversial for church administrators to probe.”¹

“The following book is an attempt to read the Bible differently than we were generally taught at universities under the dominance of the theology of the 1890’s. Question: in what way different? I wish to answer: more in accordance with its *subject matter, content, and substance*, focusing with more attention and love upon the meaning of the Bible itself.” “The approach I have taken seemed to me the most appropriate one in order to let Paul speak for himself.” First quote: Preface Draft I; second quote: Preface Draft I A². Unpublished draft prefaces for the First Edition (1919) of Karl Barth’s *Römerbrief* (Epistle to the Romans). [Italics supplied].²

It would probably be widely agreed today, that many of our most pressing and intractable controversies in Adventism expose an underlying hermeneutical problem. How are we to read the Bible? How are we to interpret the Spirit of Prophecy? Perhaps even, ‘How are we to understand the nature of authority in the church?’ While these controversies do involve disagreements over the *theory* of interpretation, perhaps even more decisively they arise from actually divergent *practices* in interpreting Scripture (and Ellen White). As such, and somewhat ironically, we are still saddled with much the same problem we struggled with 100 years ago. What I shall try to do in this paper is attempt to bring that other voice from 1919 (from ‘the old world’) to bear on our continuing Adventist conversations here in the ‘new world.’

The first edition of Karl Barth’s epochal *Epistle to the Romans* (*Der Römerbrief*) was published in 1919.³ While it was the completely rewritten second edition (1921/2) that became influential enough to even make it onto HarperCollins’ list of the top 100 books of the century,⁴ it was actually the first edition that got Barth his teaching position at Göttingen University and launched his career as probably the most influential theologian of the 20th century. It was also this first

¹Michael W. Campbell, *The 1919 Bible Conference and its Significance for Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2008, p. 159-160. He quotes from the “Report of Bible Conference, Held in Takoma Park, D.C.,” July 30, 1919, 1213-14. He goes on to say “William G. Wirth affirmed a second time that such a statement was needed or he would be discredited when he returned home and presented such a view of inspiration. W. E. Howell, chairman of this session, recommended that the teachers really needed something that the teachers could have in their hands that was a “true representation of the matter.” Ibid., 1215.

²See Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), Appendix 2 The Preface Drafts to the First Edition of Barth’s *Römerbrief*, p. 277.

³The publishing date is given as 1919, but actually the commentary was first printed in December 1918.

⁴<https://www.librarything.com/bookaward/HarperCollins+100+Best+Spiritual+Books+of+the+Century>

1919 edition (which has not been translated into English, by the way) that Karl Adam famously said fell "like a bombshell on the theologians' playground."⁵ For even in the first edition one can discern the basic outline of a significantly new approach to revelation, inspiration and biblical hermeneutics. Over the course of the next couple of years, as the *Römerbrief* was being repeatedly reprinted, Barth wrote a new preface for each edition, in which he answered his critics and engaged in further explication of what he was after and the new hermeneutics he had employed. Unfortunately, the specifics of this paradigm-shift still remain rather unclear in Adventism.

Of course, on this side of the Atlantic but also in 1919, Seventh-day Adventist leaders and teachers gathered in Takoma Park for a General Conference Bible Conference to address many Biblical and theological concerns, including issues concerning inspiration and hermeneutics, not least in light of their own recent experience with the life and work of Ellen G White who had just died some four years earlier.⁶ Famously, the minutes of the conference were 'lost' only to be rediscovered in the 1970s, with excerpts published in *Spectrum* in 1979.⁷ It would probably not be an exaggeration to call both the original Bible Conference, and the rediscovery of the minutes, rather 'explosive' at their own time, and in their own right.

In my paper I wish to briefly analyze Barth's triadic hermeneutics (particularly as articulated in the prefaces to the *Römerbrief*) and then bring it to bear on the parallel discussion in Adventism. This warrants doing because (despite the significantly different social, cultural, and theological contexts) in their own way they were both grappling with more or less the same problem. I shall argue that Barth's triadic hermeneutic of *die sache* (what he later called 'theological exegesis') could be very helpful to Adventists today as we continue to struggle with these issues. As noted above, the fact that the thrust of Barth's argument is so little known or addressed in Adventism is unfortunate. Perhaps this paper can do something to address this in some small measure?

I. Karl Barth's 'Disruptive Hermeneutic': The Paradigm-Shift Behind the *Römerbrief*

In 1965, in the second edition of his epoch-making work, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Hans-Georg Gadamer referred to the first edition of Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* as "a virtual hermeneutical manifesto."⁸ This is intriguing, "since the word 'hermeneutics' does not even appear in any of the editions of Barth's *Römerbrief* and because the theme of hermeneutics, apart from a few remarks in the prefaces, is nowhere specifically addressed."⁹ But now, since the discovery/publication of

⁵Karl Adam, *Das Hochland*, June 1926, as referenced in J. McConnachie, "The Teaching of Karl Barth," *Hibbert Journal* 25 (1926–1927), p. 385.

⁶Michael Campbell has probably produced the most comprehensive study to date. See footnote #1 above.

⁷Couperus, Molleurus (ed.), "The Bible Conference of 1919." *Spectrum: Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* (March 1979): 23-26.

⁸Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1965, p. 481. *ET Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 581.

⁹Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Romerbrief*, p. 4. In fact, Burnett puts it this way "Barth could indeed say from the beginning of his theological revolution, as he did throughout his career, that '*methodus est arbitraria*.' Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his talk about method and hermeneutics in the first half-volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, where we repeatedly come across statements such as "When God's Word is heard and proclaimed, something takes place that for all our hermeneutical skill cannot be brought about by hermeneutical skill," or "The only proper thing to do here is to renounce altogether the search for a method of hearing God's Word, for an unequivocally correct description of its entry into [the human realm—original 'man*'], into the realm of his experiences, attitudes and thought." KD I/1:153, 192; CD I/1: 148, 184. [*I will try to use inclusive language in brackets]

the *six draft prefaces* for the first edition (that Barth had labored over yet ultimately discarded) we know that Gadamer was basically correct. For while Barth does not discuss inspiration and hermeneutics *theoretically* (except for the prefaces, where they *are* clearly front and center) he certainly engaged in a new exegetical *modus operandi in practice* in the commentary proper.

The *Römerbrief* turned out to be totally *sui generis!* And from the prefaces it becomes apparent that Barth was *very* aware of what he was doing (and clear-eyed about how he would likely be misunderstood).¹⁰ First, *he believed that the Bible had been muzzled* (and that this claim would puzzle pious believers).¹¹ Second, *he wanted to figure out how and why this had happened* (and that this would put him in conflict with the hermeneutics of both liberal and conservative scholars alike).¹² Thirdly, *he wanted the Bible to be able to speak for itself once more in the here and now* (but he realized that his proposal for how to do this would likely just perplex everyone!).¹³

¹⁰“Both [Barth & Thurneysen] were aware of how provocative their particular *method* of exegesis would likely appear to their contemporaries, and it is precisely this that Barth recognized he needed to address in his preface. . . [I]t appears that a major source of Barth’s concern, even months before writing his first preface draft, was over how his commentary *as a commentary* would be received. His concern was that his commentary would be summarily dismissed as merely an abstract or eccentric ‘theological’ reading of Paul’s Romans, that it might be regarded as a highly original and creative theological treatise written in the name of a ‘commentary’ but was not *really* a commentary at all. . . Barth’s critics, as he suspected, did, for the most part, regard his ‘theological’ reading of *Romans*, apart from being historically and critically *naïve*, as the product of eisegesis.” Burnett, p. 268.

¹¹“Also, this book does *not* consciously use *easier language* than the *Römerbrief* itself. It only wants to interpret by *paraphrasing* the thoughts of Paul, not by translating them into our ‘easier’ thoughts. For the language and the content are one. The ‘easier’ Christian way of thinking, which perhaps leaves the reader soon longing for more of the same, does *not*, unfortunately, by any means indicate that we, after all, have arrived upon the same subject matter as Paul and the Bible. If ears will be once again open to the *subject matter* with which Paul was concerned, then will his language be once again understood as well, as was obviously the case in the first century. . . What kind of reader did I have in mind . . . the same as Paul himself had in mind, namely, everyone who is in any way moved by the same matter which the *Römerbrief* is all about. . .” Draft Preface V, quoted Burnett, p. 279

¹²“The second request is that one should not seek in this book what is not intentionally stated there—especially all that which I would characterize as ‘antiquarian’. Whoever . . . wants to be informed about the little one knows and the great amount one does not know about the personality of Paul, about the composition of the Roman Christian church, about Pauline ‘formulas’ in the context of the history of religions, or about the questions of authenticity which become particularly acute at the end of the letter, will be disappointed here. I have dared confidently to be quiet about these matters, for as interesting in my opinion as they are, they are not really important questions for understanding the text itself, questions which can be and should be considered, but their discussion should by no means, as has occurred, replace explication itself. Whoever insists upon knowing *about* Paul and his letter, will find—according to need, direction and taste—better things than I could ever write in B. Weiss, Godet, Lipsuis, Jülicher, Lietzmann and Zahn. I think I have offered instead a few things *from* Paul which are not found in the books of these scholars.” Draft V, Ibid. p. 278-9.

¹³“A third request is that one should not be too amazed at all the exposition in this book which lies seemingly so far from the ‘historical’ Paul. The superficial reader will hardly be able to avoid this, but it should not cause one to hastily reproach what is written here as ‘too much’ eisegesis of the text. I am gladly willing to have my errors pointed out to me in all their detail if I find precisely this occurring in my text. But, fundamentally, as much as this might be held against me I must say that I have offered a historical presentation of Paul’s views and not my own or the views of other moderns’ regarding the issues here at hand. The task of understanding Paul verse by verse has been enough of an assault on the whole of today’s thought and sensibilities. But, of course, I wanted to *understand*, *not* misunderstand Paul. Here I am forced to indicate with a few sentences something of the chasm which separates my method from that of today’s dominant science of biblical exegesis. To understand an author means for me mainly *to stand with him*, to take each of his words in earnest so long as he does not prove that he does not deserve this trust, in order to interpret him from the inside out. But today’s theology does not stand by the prophets and the apostles, does not participate in the same subject matter with them, but rather stands with the modern reader and his prejudices; it does not take the prophets and apostles in earnest, but while it stands smiling sympathetically albeit condescendingly beside them, it conceitedly distances itself from them and outwardly examines them historically and psychologically. That is what I have against it. What I call ‘to stand with him’ means to begin with the presupposition that what was once true will always be true and that, conversely,

The question as to how Barth got to this point is an interesting but involved story (which has elicited much scholarly debate).¹⁴ But let me just attempt to sketch the stages in Barth's thinking, that led up to his commentary on Romans, in terms somewhat familiar to Adventist ears (and I am being only *semi*-non-serious in doing so!): 1) God is GOD!—the breakthrough 'conversion of summer 1915,' i.e. the Bible had something to say about the gospel that was not being heard¹⁵ (analog to 1st Angel's Message: Everlasting Gospel); 2. Disenchantment with Christendom in the aftermath of WWI¹⁶ (analog to 2nd Angel's Message: 'Fall of Babylon'); 3) Revelation as abolition¹⁷ of religion¹⁸ (analog to 3rd Angel's Message: 'Come out of her my people').

So what then was this new 'hermeneutical paradigm' we have been talking about? Barth will later come to call it 'theological exegesis' but at this earlier stage of development he simply says "the approach I have taken seemed to me the most appropriate one in order to *let Paul speak for himself*."¹⁹ What this approach was will need to be discerned from Barth's actual exegetical practice, and his later reflections, responses to critics, and further articulations (to be found mainly in

the problems with which we are concerned today, if they are really serious problems, are the same as those with which serious people of all times have wrestled. Without this presupposition history is chaos. The words 'history' and 'understanding' make no sense for me at all without this living context between the past and the present which cannot be achieved through some empathetic art [*Einführungskunst*], but is *given* in the subject matter and in which one must *be*. Understanding history in this context can be nothing other than a continuous dialogue between the truth which was and which comes. The art of historical description must then consist precisely in suspending from this dialogue unimportant differences of former and present ways of thought and sensibilities, instead of continually emphasizing them as the decisive matter. Whoever in this sense does not 'read in', i.e. participate in the subject matter, cannot read out. I speak therefore of Paul's questions as if they were *our own* questions in the belief that they really *are*. And I let Paul speak about *our* questions in the belief that he really *has*. If it were otherwise, what would we have to do with him?" Ibid. 281.

¹⁴An earlier view had Barth undergoing 'two conversions' (from 'liberal' to 'dialectic' in the wake of WWI; and a second transition from 'dialectic' to 'analogy' after his book on Anselm in 1931 and characteristic of his mature *Church Dogmatics* to the end of his life). This reading was put forward by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (Communio Books, Ignatius Press: 1951, 1961). The second (and now dominant) view, argued for only one key transition (for all the minor shifts and developments) in Barth's journey which can be dated to a substantive theological insight which happened in "the summer of 1915." This view is linked to the magisterial historical work of Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵"What is today preached and believed as 'gospel' stands in contrast to the knowledge of God of the *Römerbrief*. It was out of this insight, which I did not seek, yet could also not avoid, that I came to the conclusion that I would allow my work to become a book. Its intention is to bring to hearing the strange voice of Paul and thus at least point to the existence of this riddle. . ." Unpublished Preface Draft VI, quoted in Burnett, p. 287. Cf. also Barth's earlier lectures: *Righteousness of God*, January, 1916; *Strange New World within the Bible*, February, 1917; published in Karl Barth (new translation by Amy Marga) *Word of God and Word of Man* (London: T&T Clark, 1928, 2011).

¹⁶Barth (like Kierkegaard before him) was troubled by the state of the church at this time (see *Word of God and Word of Man* in the above footnote). More particularly, Barth was deeply shocked that most of his German professors of theology had signed the "Manifesto of the Ninety-Three German Intellectuals to the Civilised World" in August 1914, supporting the German war effort (Thurneysen 1973:8; Busch 1976:81). Barth wrote as follows about this: "I did not know what to make of the teaching of all my theological masters in Germany. To me they seemed hopelessly compromised by what I regarded as their failure in the face of the ideology of war a whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching, which I had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy, was shaken to the foundations, and with it, all the other writings of the German theologians" (in Eberhard Busch, *Barth's 'Autobiography'* 1976:81).

¹⁷A complex German word (*aufhebung*, used significantly by Hegel) meaning all three of the following things: abolition; sanctification; transformation. For Barth Revelation (as God's self-disclosure) renders human religion as futile and pathetic 'flight from God'; but also can sanctify it as a site for the reception of the Word (i.e. the Jewish man Jesus); and religion (e.g. Christianity) can be transformed to be a form of appropriate response to revelation (i.e. point to Christ).

¹⁸See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. I/1 §17 "Revelation as the Sublimation (*aufhebung*) of Religion."

¹⁹Preface, Draft I A² for Karl Barth, *Römerbrief* [Epistle to the Romans] (First Edition, 1919) [Italics supplied]. Burnett, p. 277.

his prefaces to new editions of the book). Looking back now from our present historical vantage point, I suggest that if we were to search for a thesis statement, we could do worse than lift this controversial claim from the published Preface to the first edition: “. . . *my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance, is so still.*”²⁰

But *how* did Barth argue this was to be done? I will try to ‘reconstruct the logic of Barth’s argument’ in *three hermeneutical injunctions* as follows:²¹

1. “Consider well . . .” This first principle of hermeneutics means reading words (parts) in light of what they are trying to say (the whole). This is not a form of ‘special pleading’ for the Bible, but the principle to be applied in any attempt to understand whatsoever (e.g. it includes readings of “Lao Tse and Goethe” as well).²² a) This means being *ultimately* concerned about what the author/text is *concerned about*, not merely something else, be it the ‘world behind the text’ (of historical-critical interest)²³ or the ‘world of the text’ (of linguistic-rhetorical interest),²⁴ or even the ‘world of the author’ (of historical-psychological interest, as it was in the then dominant hermeneutics of Schleiermacher).²⁵ b) However, having said this, these preparatory interests are *not*

²⁰Immediate context: “Paul, as a child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all [persons] of every age. The differences between then and now, there and here, no doubt require careful investigation and consideration. But the purpose of such investigation can only be to demonstrate that these differences are, in fact, purely trivial. . . *my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance, is so still.* What is to-day of grave importance—and not merely crotchety and incidental—stands in direct connection with that ancient gravity. If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours.” [Italics supplied]. See Appendix A to this paper, for the full wording of the published preface to the First 1919 Edition.

²¹While the reconstruction is my own, I will try to provide enough of Barth’s own wording to justify my claims.

²²“. . . my ‘Biblicist’ method—which means in the end no more than ‘consider well’—is applicable also to the study of Lao-Tse and of Goethe. . .” Karl Barth, Preface to the Second Edition, (translated from the Sixth Edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns), *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1977), p. 12.

²³“The historical-critical method of Biblical investigation has its rightful place; it is concerned with the preparation of the intelligence—and this can never be superfluous. But, were I driven to choose between it and the venerable doctrine of Inspiration, I would without hesitation adopt the latter, which has a broader, deeper, more important justification. The doctrine of Inspiration is concerned with the labor of apprehending, without which no technical equipment, however, complete, is of any use whatever. Fortunately, I am not compelled to choose between the two. Nevertheless, my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance, is so still.” Preface, First Edition, *ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁴“Taking Jülicher’s work as typical of much modern exegesis, we observe how closely he keeps to the mere deciphering of words as though they were runes. But, when all is done, they still remain largely unintelligible. How quick he is, without any real struggling with the raw material of the Epistle, to dismiss this or that difficult passage as simply a peculiar doctrine or opinion of Paul! How quick he is to treat a matter as explained, when it is said to belong to the religious thought, feeling, experience, conscience, or conviction—of Paul! And, when this does not at once fit, or is manifestly impossible, how easily he leaps, like some bold William Tell, right out of the Pauline boat, and rescues himself by attributing what Paul has said, to his ‘personality’, to the experience on the road to Damascus (an episode which seems capable of providing at any moment an explanation of every impossibility), to later Judaism, to Hellenism, or, in fact, to any exegetical semi-divinity of the ancient world!” Preface, Second Edition, *ibid.* p. 7.

²⁵“An author can never ever be interpreted through the historical-psychological surface [*a la* Scheiermacher], but only by joining with him in the subject matter, by working with him, by taking each word of his in earnest, so long as it is not proven that he does not deserve such trust. . . Here I am forced to indicate with a few sentences something of the chasm which separates my method from that of today’s dominant science of biblical exegesis. . . The words ‘history’ and ‘understanding’ make no sense for me at all without this living context between the past and the present which cannot be achieved through some empathetic art [*Einführungskunst*], but is *given* in the subject matter and in which one must *be*.

illegitimate, for they are part of the “preparation of the intelligence to better understand” the substance, subject-matter or object of the words.²⁶ But such scientific work is only a means to an end, not the end itself.²⁷ c) Barth critiqued recent commentaries (both liberal and conservative²⁸) for not being real commentaries at all (i.e. not really seeking to understand *die sache*, or subject-matter).²⁹ d) To be clear, Barth agrees with scientific investigation of the Bible, but this is quite limited.³⁰ Its role is to figure out “what stands in the text.”³¹ e) Nevertheless, Barth was relentlessly accused of ‘Biblicism,’ a charge he rejected if it is taken to mean an uncritical reading and mere repeating of the words of the Bible, or submission to dogmatic and/or traditional prior notions of the meaning of the text. But if all it means is ‘consider well’ he will take the label.³² Finally, f) what Barth is calling for, is being ‘*more critical*’ rather than ‘less critical’!³³

2. “. . . by listening for the Word (*die sache*) in the words . . .”³⁴ What makes understanding possible (i.e. ‘the condition for its very possibility at all’) is a shared interest in the subject-matter/object/substantive theme (i.e. in German *die sache*) of the text. a) Again, this is not to down-

Understanding history in this context can be nothing other than a continuous dialogue between the truth which was and which comes.” Draft VI, Burnett, p. 287.

²⁶“Turning now to another matter. I have been accused of being an ‘enemy of historical criticism.’ Such language seems to me nervous and high-strung. I have, it is true, protested against recent commentaries . . . The protest was directed not only against those originating in the so-called ‘critical’ school but also, for example, against commentaries of Zahn and Köhler [conservative school]. I have nothing whatever to say against historical criticism. I recognize it, and once more state quite definitely that it is both necessary and justified.” Preface 2, Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, p.6.

²⁷“The whole procedure [of either liberal or conservative commentators] assuredly achieves no more than the first draft of a paraphrase of the text and provides no more than a point of departure for genuine exegesis. The matter contained in the text cannot be released save by a creative straining of the sinews, by a relentless, elastic application of the ‘dialectical’ method. The critical historian needs to be more critical.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸“Orthodox commentators . . . in the end . . . have no greater advantage [over the liberals] than this—that they are better able to conceal their lack of any tenacious determination to understand and to interpret.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁹“My complaint is that recent commentators confine themselves to an interpretation of the text which seems to me to be no commentary at all, but merely the first step towards a commentary. Recent commentaries contain no more than a reconstruction of the text, a rendering of the Greek words and phrases by their precise equivalents, a number of additional notes in which archaeological and philological material is gathered together, and a more or less plausible arrangement of the subject-matter in such a manner that it may be made historically and psychologically intelligible from the standpoint of pure pragmatism.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁰“Jülicher and Lietzmann [leading commentators] know far better than I do how insecure all this historical reconstruction is, and upon what doubtful assumptions it often rests. Even such an elementary attempt at interpretation is not an exact science. Exact scientific knowledge, so far as the Epistle to the Romans is concerned, is limited to the deciphering of the manuscripts and the making of a concordance.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 6.

³¹“So long as it is simply a question of establishing what stands in the text, I have never dreamed of doing anything else than sit attentively at the feet of [both modern liberal and older conservative scholars].” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³²“It is my so-called ‘Biblicism’ and ‘Alexandrianism’ which forbid me to allow the mark of competent scholarship to be that the critic discloses fragments of past history and then leaves them—unexplained. I have moreover, no desire to conceal the fact that my ‘Biblicist’ method—which means in the end no more than ‘consider well’—is applicable also to the study of Lao-Tse and of Goethe. . . . When I am named a ‘Biblicist’, all that can rightly be proved against me is that I am prejudiced in supposing the Bible to be a good book, and that I hold it to be profitable for [us] to take its conceptions at least as seriously as [we] take [our] own.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 12.

³³“This is a critical work in the full and most serious meaning of the word ‘critical’” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁴“The Word ought to be exposed in the words.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8. Cf. “Historians do not wish, and rightly do not wish, to be confined within such narrow limits [scientific reconstruction of “what stands in the text”]. . . . but intend quite clearly to press beyond this preliminary work to an understanding of Paul. Now this involves more than a more repetition in Greek or in German of what Paul says: *it involves the reconsideration of what is set out in the Epistle, until the actual meaning of it is disclosed.*” [Italics supplied] Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 7.

play or reject historical-critical preparation;³⁵ b) But rather to call for genuine understanding;³⁶ c) Which involves more than just reading the words and paraphrasing them;³⁷ d) It means thinking through the matter actually disclosed in the text;³⁸ e) So that the ‘enigma of the matter [*die sache*]’ can be properly disclosed.³⁹ f) Of course, Barth realized that saying that the commentator can “know the author so well that I . . . am even able to speak in his name” would be controversial;⁴⁰ g) But he believed this was consistent with ‘scientific investigation’ not in opposition to it,⁴¹ and that it gets to the essence of what interpretation is—i.e. discerning the “Word in the words”.⁴² h) Ultimately, Barth believed that the “Word in the words” was what would be of utmost importance and relevance to today,⁴³ not something to be fobbed off to ‘mere practical theology’ or just preachy application.⁴⁴ i) The assumption behind true exegesis must be a shared

³⁵“There is no difference of opinion with regard to the need of applying historical criticism as a prolegomenon to the understanding of the Epistle. So long as the critic is occupied in this preliminary work I follow . . . carefully and gratefully.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁶“It is at this point that the difference between us appears. . . By genuine understanding & interpretation I mean that creative energy which Luther exercised with intuitive certainty in his exegesis; which underlies the systematic interpretation of Calvin; and which is at least attempted by such modern writers as Hofmann, J.T. Beck, Godet, and Schlatter. For example, place the works of Jülicher side by side with Calvin: how energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent! Paul speaks, and the man of the sixteenth century hears. The conversation between the original record and the reader moves around the subject-matter, until a distinction between yesterday and to-day becomes impossible.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁷“The interpretation of what is written requires more than a disjointed series of notes on words and phrases. The commentator must be possessed of a wider intelligence than that which moves within the boundaries of his own natural appreciation. True apprehension can be achieved only by a strict determination to face, as far as possible without rigidity of mind, the tension displayed more or less clearly in the ideas written in the text. Criticism (κρίνειν) applied to historical documents means for me the measuring of words and phrases by the standard of that about which the documents are speaking—unless indeed the whole be nonsense.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁸“When documents contain answers to questions, the answers must be brought into relation with the questions which are presupposed, and not with some other questions. And moreover, proper concentration of exegesis presses behind the many questions to the one cardinal question by which all are embraced. Everything in the text ought to be interpreted only in the light of what can be said, and therefore only in the light of what is said.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁹“The Word ought to be exposed in the words. Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter; till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁰“What I have just said [see above footnote] will, I know, be severely handled. But I cannot prevent myself asking what comment and interpretation really mean.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴¹“Have men like Lietzmann ever seriously put this question to themselves? Can scientific investigation ever really triumph so long as men refuse to busy themselves with this question [the Word in the words], or so long as they are content to engage themselves with amazing energy upon the work of interpretation with the most superficial understanding of what interpretation really is?” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴²“For me, at any rate, the question of the true nature of interpretation is the supreme question.—Or is it that these learned men, for whose learning and erudition I have such genuine respect, fail to recognize the existence of any real substance at all, of any underlying problem, of any Word in the words?” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³“Do [commentators] not perceive that there are documents, such as the books of the New Testament, which compel [us] to speak at whatever cost, because they find in them that which urgently and finally concerns the very marrow of human civilization?—let the last word stand for the moment.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁴“Do [biblical scholars and commentators] not see that their student’s future in the Church presents a problem which lies at the heart of the whole matter, and which cannot be dismissed as though it were merely a matter for ‘Pastoral Theology’? . . . Do the historians really suppose that they have exhausted their responsibility towards their readers, when, *re bene gesta* [‘as a job well done’], they permit Niebergall to speak—in the fifth volume? [a final ‘pastoral’ volume of a German commentary series, after the real scientific work had been completed]. It was this miserable situation that compelled me as a pastor to undertake a more precise understanding and interpretation of the Bible.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 9.

interest in (or inquiry after) the same ‘object’ or subject-matter.⁴⁵ j) But he also makes clear that this can only achieve ‘scientific not absolute certainty,’⁴⁶ and that all this is not *against* proper scientific study, but ultimately in line with its very own goal.⁴⁷ k) All this was personal for Barth and based on his own experience as a student and pastor.⁴⁸

Barth realized that the crucial question was what he meant by talk of a ‘tension’ or ‘inner dialectic of the matter’ or ‘the Word in the words’ of the text?⁴⁹ a) Barth knew he would be criticized that this would just open the process to reading one’s own ideas into a text, a charge which he tried to refute,⁵⁰ b) by asking what other assumption [i.e. that Paul claims God is God!] *could* be made?⁵¹ Perhaps, nowhere is his ‘hermeneutical paradigm-shift’ better captured than in this extended quote from a discarded draft preface for the first edition [See Burnett, p. 278f]:

“Here I am forced to indicate with a few sentences something of the chasm which separates my method from that of today’s dominant science of biblical exegesis. To understand an author means for me mainly *to stand with him*, to take each of his words in earnest so long as he does not prove that he does not deserve this trust, in order to interpret him from the inside out. But today’s theo-

⁴⁵“When I am faced by such a document as the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, I embark on its interpretation on the assumption that he is confronted with the same unmistakable and unmeasurable significance of that relation as I myself am confronted with, and that it is this situation which molds his thought and its expression.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁶“Nor am I unique in making an assumption at the outset [for other assumptions are also made by others, often merely pragmatic ones, e.g. that the Epistle was written by Paul in the first century] Whether these assumptions are justified or not becomes clear in the course of the investigation, when each verse comes to be examined and interpreted. That the assumptions are certainly justified is at the end only a relative certainty. They cannot be proven. In this uncertainty my fundamental assumption is, of course, included. For the present, however, I assume that in [Romans] Paul did speak of Jesus Christ, and not of some one else. And this is as reputable an assumption as other assumptions that historians are want to make. The actual exegesis will alone decide whether this assumption can be maintained. . . the absurdity of a false assumption will become clear in the course of a detailed examination of the text.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁷“Is the whole learned society of New Testament scholars really satisfied that this work can be left to what is called ‘Practical Theology’, as Jülicher in attacking me has reasserted with intolerable and old-fashioned assurance? Jülicher calls me an ‘esoteric personage,’ but I am not that, nor am I a ‘bitter enemy of historical criticism’” preface 2. 10

⁴⁸“I myself know what it means year in year out to mount the steps of the pulpit, conscious of the responsibility to understand and to interpret, and longing to fulfil it; and yet, utterly incapable, because at the University I had never been brought beyond that well-know ‘Awe in the presence of History’ which means in the end no more than that all hope of engaging in the dignity of understanding and interpretation has been surrendered.” Preface 2, p.9.

⁴⁹“What, then, do I mean when I say that a perception of the ‘inner dialectic of the matter’ in the actual words of the text is a necessary and prime requirement for their understanding and interpretation?” Preface 2. *ibid.*, p. 10. Barth uses various phrases throughout the various editions to designate *die sache* of the epistle—the ‘Spirit of Eternity,’ ‘Kingdom of God’ or ‘Righteousness of God’ in the first edition; and ‘tension’ or ‘inner dialectic of the matter’ or ‘Word in the words’ in the second edition; and (picking up Bultmann’s phrase from his critique) in the preface to the third edition—the ‘Spirit of Christ’. What must be clear is that these are all equivalent terms for the same substance or *sache*. Learning to say it better is the point of every re-reading.

⁵⁰“I know that I have laid myself open to the charge of imposing a meaning upon the text rather than extracting its meaning from it, and that my method implies this. My reply is that, if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: ‘God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.’ The relation between such a God and [us], and the relation between such [as us] and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this KRISIS of human perception—the Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads—the figure of Jesus Christ.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹“Questioned as to the ground of my assumption that this was, in fact, Paul’s theme, I answer by asking quite simply whether, if the Epistle is to be treated seriously at all, it is reasonable to approach it with any other assumption than that God is God. . . . It is the conviction that Paul ‘knows’ that my critics choose to name my ‘system,’ or my ‘dogmatic presupposition,’ . . . and so on and so forth. I have, however, found this assumption to be the best presupposition even from the point of view of historical criticism.” Preface 2, *ibid.*, p. 11.

logy does not stand by the prophets and the apostles, does not participate in the same subject matter with them, but rather stands with the modern reader and his prejudices; it does not take the prophets and apostles in earnest, but while it stands smiling sympathetically albeit condescendingly beside them, it conceitedly distances itself from them and outwardly examines them historically and psychologically. That is what I have against it. What I call ‘to stand with him’ means to begin with the presupposition that what was once true will always be true and that, conversely, the problems with which we are concerned today, if they are really serious problems, are the same as those with which serious people of all times have wrestled. Without this presupposition history is chaos. The words ‘history’ and ‘understanding’ make no sense for me at all without this living context between the past and the present which cannot be achieved through some empathetic art [*Einfühlungskunst*], but is *given* in the subject matter and in which one must *be*. Understanding history in this context can be nothing other than a continuous dialogue between the truth which was and which comes. The art of historical description must then consist precisely in suspending from this dialogue unimportant differences of former and present ways of thought and sensibilities, instead of continually emphasizing them as the decisive matter. Whoever in this sense does not ‘read in’, i.e. participate in the subject matter, cannot read out. I speak therefore of Paul’s questions as if they were *our own* questions in the belief that they really *are*. And I let Paul speak about *our* questions in the belief that he really *has*. If it were otherwise, what would we have to do with him?”

c) This was a sympathetic yet significant critical revision of Schleiermacher’s ‘historio-psychological’ hermeneutic—the dominant theory of liberal modernity at the time, the idea that to understand one needed to ‘walk in the shoes’ of the other, and based on the assumption of a ‘universal human subjectivity’ one could achieve an empathetic understanding of the author’s personality [i.e. *Einfühlungskunst* or the ‘art of feeling into’]. d) Barth argued in contrast that a ‘shared subject’ is not a shared *subjectivity* but rather a shared **objectivity**—a shared concern for a common subject-matter, object, theme or substantive matter (or even better in German—*die sache*). e) This gives a specific third dimension to Barth’s hermeneutic (see diagram & explication later). The truth of yesterday and today are the same, but the statement (i.e. grasp or expression) of this ‘same truth’ can (must?) be quite different, which leads us to . . .

3. “. . . so that you can restate the Word (*die sache*) in your words here and now.” a) This was Barth’s unique and decisive move. Others who became leaders in the incipient *dialectical theology* movement of the 1920-30s (i.e. the authors of the journal *Zweichen den Zeiten*, which included Bultmann⁵² and Brunner⁵³) could agree to hermeneutical principles #1 and #2, but this one proved to be the stumbling block that led to the ultimate breakup of the movement. b) Barth argued that **“One can only understand that for which one stands”**⁵⁴ which I take to be that the task of understanding is not complete until one attempts ‘to say the same thing the author had said, for today, even if this means saying it in a very different way!’ c) This is why Barth kept on re-writing his commentary—because ‘the times they are a-changing’ and because we are

⁵²“The strangest episode in the history of the book since the appearance of the second edition has been its friendly reception by Bultmann [liberal] and its equally friendly rejection by Schlatter [conservative]. From the [former] I conclude to my very great satisfaction that the original outcry against the book as being an incitement to a Diocletian persecution of historical, critical theology was not demanded; from the [latter] that the course I have taken is independent of that positive theology to which I feel myself most nearly related.” Preface 3, *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵³From the Preface to the English Translation (Bonn, October 1932), Barth writes: “May I also ask my English readers . . . not to look at me simply through the spectacles of Emil Brunner, not to conform me to his pattern, and, above all, not to think of me as the representative of a particular ‘Theological School.’” *ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵⁴Unpublished Draft VI, Burnett, p. 278. For all its crypticness, I believe this one liner gets at the gist of Barth’s unique exegetical method better than almost anything else he wrote. It’s a pity it did not make it into the published text.

never finished listening anew, and at least for Barth, he always sensed he could, and thus needed, to say what he wanted to say in a better (i.e. more current) idiom.⁵⁵ d) As a result this meant that *both* the first and second editions exhibited a sort of contemporary ‘expressionistic style’ (not usually a complementary designation for a commentary!) that was unlike almost anything else in the field of Biblical commentaries.⁵⁶ e) But Barth uses this—an ‘art analogy’ of sorts—to help explain the third hermeneutical injunction.⁵⁷ f) Thus he believed that *die sache* [Paul’s message] should and could be restated today because it is just as true today as in Paul’s day; but to rightly understand and state it would mean speaking in the language and idiom of our time, not Paul’s. Barth strongly argued that understanding is not achieved until you can do this.⁵⁸ g) This led, of course, to the *eisegesis* charge, which Barth acknowledged as a danger, but regarded as an unavoidable one.⁵⁹ h) He distinguished this from the demand to ‘translate theology into common public speech’;⁶⁰ as well as rejecting the ‘simplicity’ argument.⁶¹ i) Barth also insisted that in

⁵⁵In the preface to the Sixth (and final) Edition of the *Römerbrief*, Barth wrote: “were I to set to work again upon the exposition of the Epistle, and were I determined to repeat the same thing, I should certainly have to express it quite differently.” *ibid.*, p. 25. What is little known is that Barth *did* in fact write another commentary on Romans much later in his career—a commentary, in form, at least much more like the commentaries we are used to! This 1959 work has recently been reprinted: Maico M. Michielin, ed. *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* by Karl Barth, trans., D.H. van Daalen, with an introductory essay by Maico Michielin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁵⁶“It has often been observed that the second edition of Barth’s commentary on *Romans* is a form of ‘theological expressionism’. Less common is the realization that the first edition was already written in what can only be described as an expressionistic style. To be sure, there are differences between the two editions even on the level of style. The rich battery of explosive images found in the second edition are largely lacking in the first, as is the widespread use of paradox. Such differences should not blind us, however, to the artistic features of the first edition. It was (as reviewers were quick to point out) a book which everywhere gave evidence of the ‘earnest, burning zeal’ which ‘surged’ through its author; a ‘pneumatic-prophetic exegesis’ redolent with an inexhaustible vividness; a ‘work of art . . . which reproduces the basic thoughts of that letter in the language of our time, indeed recast in the conceptual world of today;’ a book which made rich use of ‘irony’ to bring to nought its opponents; a book finally which one reviewer described as ‘modern in grandiose one-sidedness, saturated with radical intellectual streams’. One-sidedness, irony—in other words, the first edition already gave evidence of many of the stylistic features associated with the second edition.” Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, p. 139.

⁵⁷“For the same relationship stands between book and reader as between a work of art and its observer: the book is not only what the author is able and wants to make it, but just as much so what the reader is able and wants to take from it.” Draft Preface 5, Burnett, p.280. This is similar to Reader Response Theory, decades before it arose.

⁵⁸“Moreover, judged by what seems to me to be the fundamental principle of true exegesis, I entirely fail to see why parallels drawn from the ancient world—and with such parallels modern commentators are chiefly concerned—should be of more value for an understanding of the Epistle than *the situation in which we ourselves actually are, and to which we can therefore bear witness.*” [italics supplied] Preface 2, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 11.

⁵⁹“The publication of this book in English may perhaps lead to a fresh formulation of the problem, ‘What is exegesis?’ No one can, of course, bring out the meaning of a text (*auslegen*) without at the same time adding something to it (*einlegen*). Moreover, no interpreter is rid of the danger of in fact adding more than he extracts. I neither was nor am free from this danger. And yet I should be altogether misunderstood if my readers refused to credit me with the honesty of, at any rate, *intending to explain* the text. I must assure them that, in writing this book, I felt myself bound to the actual words of the text, and did not in any way propose to engage myself in free theologizing. It goes without saying that my interpretation is open to criticism. . . But I do not want to hear of criticisms which proceed from some religious or philosophical or ethical ‘point of view.’ Proper criticism of my book can be concerned only with the interpretation of the text of the Epistle. . . My book deals with one issue, and with one issue only. Did Paul think and speak in general and in detail in the manner in which I have interpreted him as thinking and speaking? Or did he think and speak altogether differently?” From the Preface to the English Translation (Bonn, October 1932), *ibid.*, p. x.

⁶⁰“Those who urge us to shake ourselves free from theology [e.g. Religious Socialists] and to think—and more particularly to speak and write—only what is immediately intelligible to the general public seem to me to be suffering from a kind of hysteria and to be entirely without discernment. . . Those who are genuinely convinced that the question is at present trivial must be permitted to go their way. Some of us, however, are persuaded that the question, What are we

doing so he was not merely writing a theological ‘free fantasia’ but doing exegesis of the text.⁶² j) But the question would persist: ‘Aren’t there at least some ideas in the text you find you just cannot agree with—e.g. for us today, perhaps Paul’s attitude to women or marriage?, etc.’⁶³—in short, doesn’t this method require an uncritical submission to everything and anything that one finds in the text, willy-nilly? Isn’t this the place where historical-criticism can help us? Barth responds to these charges in an extended conversation with Bultmann in the preface to the third edition [I give selected excerpts of this debate in Preface 3, in Appendix B at the end]. k) Barth’s response is somewhat surprising—he argues that it is not just an isolated idea or word here or there that is problematic but *everything!* There is *no* word in the text that is not human, historically conditioned, and stuck in a particular time and place—nevertheless the interpreter must strive to see beyond these words to the Word (that which they are attempting to talk about):

“Bultmann writes: ‘Other spirits make themselves heard, as well as the Spirit of Christ.’ . . . But I must go farther than he does and say that there are in the Epistle no words at all which are not words of those ‘other spirits’ which he calls Jewish or Popular Christian or Hellenistic or whatever else they may be. Is it really legitimate to extract a certain number of passages and claim that there the veritable Spirit of Christ has spoken? . . . It seems to me impossible to set the Spirit of Christ—the veritable subject-matter of the Epistle—over against other spirits, in such a manner as to deal out praise to some passages, and to depreciate others where Paul is not controlled by his true subject-matter. Rather it is for us to perceive and to make clear that the whole is placed under the KRISIS [critique or judgement] of the Spirit of Christ. The whole is *litera*, that is, voices of those other spirits. The problem is whether the whole must not be understood in relation to the true subject-matter which is—The Spirit of Christ. This is the problem which provides aim and purpose to our study of the *litera*.” Preface 3, *Romans*, p. 16-17.

l) Obviously, it is not perchance that both Barth and Bultmann speak of the ‘*Spirit of Christ*’ because the Holy Spirit is essential to any attempt to hear the Word in the words. m) But what is distinctive to Barth is the claim that the interpreter can/must move on from the ‘struggle’ to hear, to the confidence to speak *for* Paul, and in Paul’s name (despite the obvious fact that he/she can only speak in the idiom and words of today), and even when one is not sure how to restate every word or claim in the text.

Even so, the extent to which the commentator will be able to disclose the Spirit of Christ in his [or her, *passim*] reading of Paul will not be everywhere the same. But he will know that the responsibility rests on his shoulders; and he will not let himself be bewildered by the voices of those other spirits, which so often render inaudible the dominant ones of the Spirit of Christ. He will, more-

to say? Is an important one, particularly when the majority are prepared at any moment to lift up their voices in the street.” Ibid. p. 4.

⁶¹“I could not make the book more easily intelligible than the subject itself allows. . . . The simplicity which proceeds from the apprehension of God in the Bible and elsewhere, the simplicity with which God Himself speaks, stands not at the beginning of our journey but at its end. . . . I am in no way bound to my book and to my theology. As yet, however, those who claim to speak simply seem to me to be—simply speaking about something else. By such simplicity I remain unconvinced.” Ibid. p. 5.

⁶²“In writing this book, I set out neither to compose a free fantasia upon the theme of religion, nor to evolve a philosophy of it. My sole aim was to interpret Scripture. I beg my readers not to assume from the outset—as many in Germany have assumed—that I am not interpreting Scripture at all, or rather, that I am interpreting it ‘spiritually.’ In this context the word ‘spiritually’ is used, of course, to convey a rebuke. It may be, however, that the rebuke turns back most heavily upon those who launch it so easily against me.” From the Preface to the English Translation (Bonn, October 1932), *ibid.*, p. ix.

⁶³As Bultmann puts it: “Other spirits make themselves heard, as well as the Spirit of Christ.” Preface 3, *ibid* p16

over, always be willing to assume that, when he fails to understand, the blame is his not Paul's. Nor will he rest content until paradoxically he has seen the whole in the fragments, and has displayed the fragments in the context of the veritable subject-matter, so that all the other spirits are seen in some way or other to serve the Spirit of Christ." Preface 3, Barth, *Romans*, p.17.

To be clear: to understand, one must struggle with the author/text, reading every word with as much attention and devotion as any proponent of a theory of Verbal Inspiration [#1], *but refusing to be distracted by the inevitable obstacles any ancient text will throw up, press on to grasp die sache* [the subject-matter] i.e Paul's witness to Revelation as occurring in the historical self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ [#2], and then to give voice to Paul's witness as clearly and emphatically as one can in the idiom and cadence of today—even when doing so means that one must speak quite differently from the way Paul spoke.

While Barth's idiom would keep on changing over the next five decades of his career—what never changed was Barth's understanding of the responsibilities required to *truly understand*.

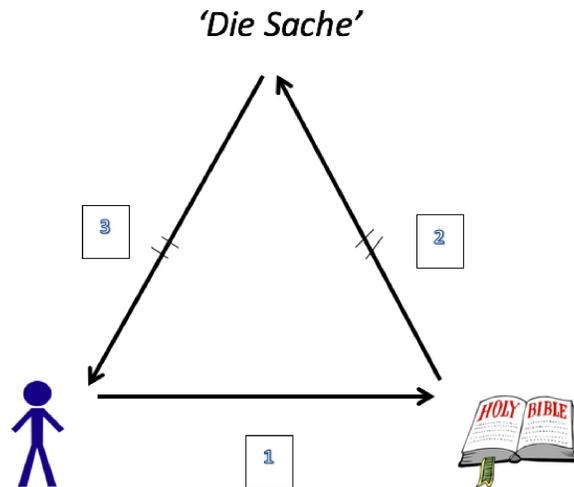
Two things remain for me to do in this paper. First, is for me to put my money where mouth is. We are now some 100 years from when Barth said and wrote these things (which I have perhaps over laboriously attempted to document above). Much has changed in the interim. So it would be deeply ironic for me to simply leave it here. Rather, I will try to say all this over again in a very different idiom—the idiom of our time and place—some 100 years later. But remember my task is to say what I think Barth *meant*, in my own words and idioms (and you can be the judge).

The second and final move in this paper will be to bring all this home by returning to the other hermeneutical conversation of 1919—our own Adventist discussion of many of the same issues. We will briefly (and, of course, hypothetically) ask, 'What would Barth have said if he could have been a guest at the 1919 Bible Conference'?

II. 'Triadic' Hermeneutic ("One can only *understand* that for which one *stands*")

A. How to Read the Bible as a 'Witness to the Word'?

[What follows is an attempt to paraphrase Karl Barth's groundbreaking discussion of theological exegesis (hermeneutics) in the Prefaces of his epoch-making *Römerbrief* of 1919f; particularly Prefaces #1-3.]



Reader. The figure of the person in the above diagram stands for the contemporary reader/interpreter/exegete/theologian. Such a “reader” brings a whole world (i.e. the “world in front of the text”) to bear on the interpretive enterprise—this world is shaped by culture, language, experience, worldview, philosophy, etc. The more the “reader” is aware of, and attentive to, the shaping influences on him or her, the better. An “aware” reader is always better than one “unaware.”

Scripture. The Bible too has its own world (i.e. the “world of the text”; and the “world behind the text”)—worlds very different from the world of the “reader.” The more the reader knows of these worlds the better. Here is the place for all the various historical-critical, literary-critical (and socio-critical, etc.) methods aimed at “preparing the intelligence” and “clearing the rubble” from our understanding of the world of the text, and the world behind the text, so that we might attempt to hear the Word in the words.

Die Sache (the “Object” or subject matter) at the apex of the triangle is *that something which the reader seeks to come to understand better* (sorry for the convoluted grammar, but the fuzziness is necessary). It is that which gets better known (or better described) as a result of the hermeneutical exercise. [Note: this description of the hermeneutical process applies to all reading whatsoever—it is not restricted to the Bible—thus it is not a case of ‘special pleading’]. It’s the “good” or “value” that one reads the text expecting to learn something about. In the case of *theological exegesis* (i.e. what Barth is calling for from readers of the Bible) *die sache* will be variously described, as the “Word of God,” the “Gospel,” “God with us,” the *wiederholung Gottes*, the “secondary objectivity of God,” the “economic Trinity,” or in our language, the “Advent” or “Coming of God.” But remember that while we get this preliminary sense of *die sache* from past readings (and the history of the church), the reason we read the Bible again and again, is to get ever better at naming, describing, interpreting, understanding, and being faithful to this reality. Theological exegesis is what happens between memory and expectation.

Now, on to the directional arrows in the chart above. (Please note that interpretation starts with arrow 1, moves to arrow 2, and concludes with arrow 3 in a counter clockwise way).

Arrow #1. Is the attempt of a contemporary reader/interpreter/scholar/theologian to understand the words of the text. This also involves coming to know and understand the world behind the text, and the world of the text. This is the traditional understanding of the task of the Biblical scholar and of textual exegesis. Barth’s novelty (at least to modern-liberal ears) is to insist that the work of hermeneutics or interpretation is not finished at this stage (arrow 1). That it must press on to arrows 2 and 3.

Arrow #2. Is the attempt to hear the Word in the words. To figure out what the Biblical author (e.g. Paul) or text (e.g. Romans) *is trying to say*. From common experience we know that what was “said” is not always the same as what someone was trying to “say.” We also sometimes think we know what someone was trying to say better than how they actually said it. And sometimes, we come to know something that we are entirely indebted to someone for first saying, even if later we come to know it better than they do. We also have experiences where we think we come to know something because of what someone said, even though we realize that we still know far less than they do

about it. All these outcomes (and more besides) are possible with regard to our engagement with Scripture. So line #2 in the diagram stands for *what we think the text/author is saying about 'die sache'*. Here we find the famous Hermeneutical Circle #1. We follow line #2 to find the "Object" (*Die Sache*); but we have to have some preliminary understanding of the "Object" (e.g. what the text is about) to begin to arrive at any sense of #2. But this circularity is "virtuous" (productive) not "vicious" (tautological). To take Romans as an example, line #2 represents what we understand Paul to be saying about the Gospel (e.g. about God's free grace offered us in Christ Jesus). Barth argues that it is towards this end that the Biblical scholar must always push, for anything less would not actually be an interpretation of Paul. [On this point Bultmann, Brunner and the rest of the *dialectical theologians* publishing in their new journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* ('Between the Times') agreed with Barth against both the normal liberal historical-critical and conservative scholars who wanted to stop with #1.]

Arrow #3. But now comes Barth's most important and radical step. It is not enough to simply state #2 clearly. One *must* move on to #3, which is to find *correspondingly analogous* words and language to describe the "Object" (*Die Sache*) in our own time, place, culture, philosophy, science, worldview, etc., precisely in order to faithfully understand and interpret the text and the author of the text. Lines #2 and #3 are *congruent* but not identical. What theological exegesis must push on toward is a restating and re-envisioning of what we have learnt from the text (e.g. from Paul in Romans) for *our own selves and worlds which are quite different from the worlds of Paul and the Bible*. For Barth (and I think he is right) theological exegesis is aborted unless it continues on to this goal. Sometimes, #3 will be almost identical to #2, but sometimes it might seem like almost the opposite. What makes them congruent is simply their *rootedness in the Object (Die Sache)*. They are tied together at the apex. [On this point Bultmann was ambivalent. He agreed in principle, but worried that Barth was forcing us into blind acceptance, without room for criticism, of the Biblical worldview. He was not separating the kerygmatic 'kernel' from the mythological "husk." Liberal Biblical scholars were horrified at this #3. For them it has place only as a "homiletical addendum." It has no place in proper exegesis. Exegesis tells us what Paul thought. Theology might go on to tell us what we should think. But they are two separate things. Barth insisted that the text was not understood until we had figured out what we could, and must, say *in the name (and thus authority) of the text (e.g. of Paul!)*]

Here is the notorious Hermeneutical Circle #2. For what we think we can and therefore must say about the "Object" (*Die Sache*), i.e. line #3, is precisely congruous with what we think the Scriptural text is saying about (*Die Sache*), i.e. line #2 (if we are to be faithful to Scripture's authority as the Primary Witness to the Word of God); even though it might not be identical to it. And furthermore, that this discovery only came about by our attempts to lay aside our preconceived notions and come to grips with the words and worlds of the text, i.e. line #1.

This is the desired result of the hermeneutical enterprise—the "understanding" that one sets out to achieve. Thus, for Barth, to understand Paul in Romans involves simultaneously a deeper understanding and interpretation of the *words of the text, line #1*; of the *message of the text, line #2*

(i.e. what Paul is trying to say); and of *the Object of the text (Die Sache, or the “One of whom the text is speaking”)*, which if we are to bring theological exegesis to its conclusion, we must speak about in our own words/world *on the authority of Paul/Romans, line #3*.

Finally: Barth contends that this triadic structure is the shape of *all hermeneutical enterprises whatsoever* and not merely some “special pleading” for theology (i.e. theological exegesis is no different, in structure to any other attempt at understanding). This is what we do when we try to understand a Shakespearean play, or a physics textbook. We don’t need a contrived ‘historical-grammatical’ method (nor a convoluted theory of Inspiration arguing for the supernatural *mode of production* of the texts) to achieve the goal of understanding. Of course, as Christians we do acknowledge that when we read the Bible we are dependant on the same Holy Spirit (to help us grasp *die sache*—we call this ‘illumination’) that inspired the original authors of the text to bear primary witness to the events of ‘God with us.’ Of course, this is what Calvin knew and argued in the 16th century. But the engagement between reader and text is, at least in form, a normal human enterprise (warts and all).⁶⁴

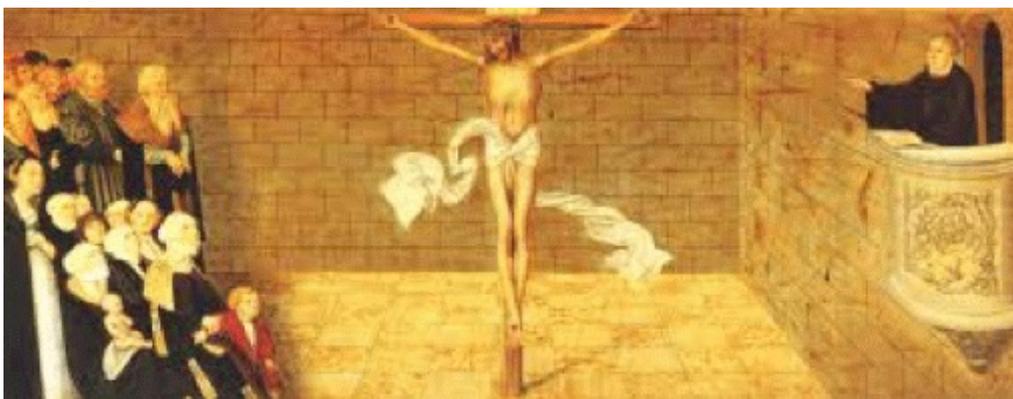
Brief Summary:

“We read the words, in order to hear the Word, which we must then restate in our words.”

—John Webster

B. A Picture Worth a Thousand Words. But perhaps, we can explain this even better. As the saying goes “a picture is often better than a thousand words”:

Reproduced below is the Cranach altarpiece painting from Reformation times still hanging in the village church in Wittenberg in which Luther regularly preached. Note the ‘hearers’ on the left, and Luther preaching from an open Bible on right, *but* pointing to Christ in the center. Note, further that the congregation is looking at Christ on the Cross, made possible by Luther’s preaching from the Bible. It only takes a little imagination to see the triangular shape: hearers/readers on left; Bible (& Preacher) on right; and Christ /Cross at the apex/center. I was privileged to see this painting in person in Wittenberg.



⁶⁴For detailed documentation of Barth’s line of reasoning in his own words, see the earlier parts of this paper, where I draw on the first three Prefaces to the first three Editions of his *Römerbrief* (Romans Commentary, first published 1919, 2nd edition 1922 and following years) where he engages in extended debate with friends and opponents, and in articulation of his understanding of the work of biblical exegesis. For a later account, see Appendix C—‘Theological Exegesis’ where I give Barth’s short answer to what he means by ‘theological exegesis’ in his 1936 book, *Credo*.

C. A Contemporary Analogy for This View of Theological Exegesis—Holography

If medieval paintings don't do it for you (to say nothing of systematic theology), here is a more contemporary analogy that might help explain how all this works in theological exegesis, in contrast to both the fundamentalist and liberal views—the Holographic Analogy.

Some of you might recall that one of the candidates in the 2017 French Presidential election used holographic technology to appear 'live' on stage before thousands of supporters in Paris, using real-time 3D 'holographic projection' while actually speaking on stage (hundreds of miles away) in Lyon. Quite impressive and realistic.⁶⁵ Of course, we are also familiar with earlier (more rudimentary) uses of recorded holographic reproduction from the Star Wars movies (e.g. the holographic image of R2-D2 projecting a message of Princess Leia)!

I want to suggest that the Bible can helpfully be thought of as a kind of 'holographic projector.' First a few words about the holographic technology, then I will try to explain the analogy. You need several different laser beams, shining from different perspectives onto the same live and moving object, to create a 3D color holographic reproduction of that object (for projection elsewhere or recording for later projection). As you can see from the youtube link (below), the object produced by the holographic projection is very close to the real object (in form, color, 3D shape, and movement) but not *identical* to it—for it remains more translucent and ephemeral. The data of the hologram can be stored in normal digital or analog formats—but one must 'switch on' the holographic projector for an actual reproduction to occur as a 'living event.'

So too, with the Bible and theological exegesis. The primary purpose of Scripture is to 'render the identity of God and God's purpose, will and work'—that is to say the 'Word of God'—and it does so by reproducing a 'holographic replication' of the 'event' (i.e. "and the Word became flesh" John 1:14) in which God did so. So, while we were not personally there, we have the next best thing—a 'living' replication. That's what 'theological exegesis' (and at its best preaching) tries to make happen. To use contemporary philosophical language: this is a simulation (i.e. a *simulacrum*, a term now widely used in philosophy for the imitation of the real world that we create in our minds, art, science and culture), or contemporary replication, of the historical *wied-erholung Gottes* [God's 'self-replication' in history] itself (the actual reality of the Advent where God replicates God's primary Triune Objectivity, in a secondary objectivity—for us). Without it, all we would have is a dead letter.

Now here's what it takes: we *must* have several different contrasting accounts (i.e. 'books', just like the different laser beams needed for a 3D hologram) to make it work. Far from being a 'problem' the 'discrepancies' in the Biblical accounts are *essential* to the whole process! What is a problem for fundamentalism (for it sees the Bible as a divine encyclopedia of salvation and thus any discrepancy would be destabilizing), and is a mere 'brute fact' for liberalism (and thus perhaps the basis for rejecting the whole thing?), is just an essential *means to an end* for theological exegesis. No diversity, no holographic reproduction.

⁶⁵You can see this for yourself here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EejJoePprsA>

Secondly, the replication (i.e. the *simulacrum*, the reproduced Object, *die Sache*) is not *identical* to the real Object (i.e. Jesus) but it is enough of a simulation that we can actually get to know & love the person in reality. The reproduction is not perfect, but it is trustworthy, it is the closest we can get to ‘being there’ without actually being there. Here is the essential contrast to both fundamentalism and liberalism. In fundamentalist readings of the Bible the *living person* can so easily be lost in the clutter of ‘information’ about God’s will; and in liberal readings the person is believed lost in the past (behind the ‘ugly ditch’ of history to use Lessing’s terms) and all we can do is weave together bits and pieces of the history and thinking of the times. Theological exegesis dares to believe that we can have as genuine an encounter with God as did the persons who experienced the *wiederholüng Gottes* for themselves!

Of course, what makes this happen is the Holy Spirit. It is what switches on the ‘holographic projector.’ As John Calvin said, we need the Spirit for Scripture to be Scripture. It is this striving to hear the Word in the words, to see the *wiederholüng Gottes* in the *simulacrum*, to recognize the signature pattern in the *theodrama* that makes for theological exegesis.

III. What might Karl Barth (*Romans* 1919) have contributed to the 1919 Bible Conference?

This is not as farfetched as it might at first seem. For on the one hand, Karl Barth did eventually, albeit belatedly, visit the United States in a celebrated tour (for the first and only time) in 1962.⁶⁶ And on the other hand, the minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference reveal that Adventist scholars and leaders were not unaware of contemporary developments in the culture and theology.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, of course, no such encounter actually happened.⁶⁸

But it might be instructive to imagine how it could have gone if it *had* happened. We do know that when Barth did visit America and was asked what the focus of a future ‘American theology’ should be, he perceptively urged a ‘theology of freedom.’⁶⁹ One God; same Gospel; but ever new ways to hear and restate the Word in the words. So, what might he have said to Adventists?

⁶⁶Barth toured widely across the USA including to Washington DC (where the Bible Conference had been held, some 43 years earlier). He gave a famous series of 5 lectures each at Princeton, Chicago, and San Francisco. This (along with the rest of the lectures) was later brought out as Barth’s last book to be published during his lifetime, Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962, 1968).

⁶⁷For example, many present at the Bible Conference were aware of the rising fundamentalist movement. Even though he was not present, the example of George McCready Price is instructive. Whatever one might think of him, here was someone who had read (and quoted from) Alfred North Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World* almost as soon as it had been written (1925)! Even Wikipedia states that “Price, concerned about scientific methodology, had read Whitehead and other philosophers and understood that facts were always subject to interpretation.” This is all the more remarkable, given that it would still be decades before Whitehead’s process philosophy would have a significantly influence on Adventist theology in the 1970s.

⁶⁸I know of no direct mention of Adventism in print (though I may be mistaken, given how vast the Barth corpus is). The *Gesamptausage* [i.e. ‘collected works’] projects over 70 volumes (over and above existing works like the *Church Dogmatics*) and now stands at 50 volumes. But I did hear second hand (from Dr. Daniel Walther) that Barth did defend the religious freedom of Adventists in Switzerland in public statements to the press.

⁶⁹See Barth’s Introduction to the American Edition, *Evangelical Theology*. Interestingly, Barth’s challenge was taken up in a monograph devoted in large part to a call to retrieve the Sabbath as a force for sanctification and freedom in American life. See, Herbert W. Richardson, *Toward An American Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

The minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference make clear that the central issues discussed and debated were exegetical and hermeneutical in nature: issues in Biblical and prophetic interpretation, theology (W.W. Prescott's devotional series on "The Person of Christ"; and discussions on the inspiration and interpretation of both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy), and later (in the teachers conference) matters of historical method (lectures led by Albertsworth and Benson).⁷⁰

Barth (having grown up in a conservative home) would have recognized that for all the differences in location, education and culture, we were struggling with many of the same problems he was struggling with in the 'old world.' For all the talk of the 'king of the north,' 'the daily' and 'the seven trumpets,' Barth would have felt at home in a community that took the words of the Bible with such utter seriousness. He might have listened intently (albeit with some bemused recognition) at all the debates over verbal inspiration, inerrancy and the human side of prophets! But he would have been familiar with the arguments and concerns of both the 'traditionalists' and the 'progressives' (Campbell's terms). And, after much listening, if his opinion had been sought, I think he would have gently (or not so gently!) urged us to find another way—to "Look again, and look a little higher."⁷¹ I think he would have tried to make three points.

1. We must seek to hear the Word in the words. Barth would have urged us not to get hung up on the mere letters and words, e.g. the 'king of the north,' 'the daily,' the 'seven trumpets' or the historical discrepancies in the writings of Ellen White. For Daniel, Matthew, John and Ellen were all human, and therefore not beyond making mistakes, or being conditioned by their culture or time and place—this is obvious and inevitable. But we should press on to seek to hear what they are trying to say. The differences between then and now, the historical discrepancies, no doubt require careful investigation and consideration. But the purpose of such investigation can only be to demonstrate that these differences are, in fact, purely trivial. The historical-critical method of investigation has its rightful place; it is concerned with the preparation of the intelligence—and this can never be superfluous. Nevertheless, our whole energy of interpreting needs to be expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond the words in the text into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance, is so still. What is to-day of grave importance—and not merely crotchety and incidental—stands in direct connection with that ancient gravity. If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of these witnesses, those answers can be ours.⁷²

2. That we recognize the 'Advent' itself as *die sache* of both the Bible (as Primary Witness) and of Ellen White (as Secondary Witness). As we have seen, for Barth *die sache* of Scripture, must always be sought again and again in ever new contexts and locations. I can just imagine him (with his characteristic twinkle in his eye) point out that after all it *is* the 'noun in our name'! What *die sache* was for the early Barth of the First Edition (i.e. Eternity, or the Kingdom and Righteousness of God) came to be stated quite differently in the Second Edition (i.e. 'krisis,' 'tension,' 'the inner dialectic of the matter,' or the 'Spirit of Christ'), and quite different again in

⁷⁰See M. Campbell, *The 1919 Bible Conference*, Appendix B, pp. 224-229.

⁷¹Words of the angel in Ellen White's account of her first vision in 1844. See *Testimonies* Vol. 1, Chapter 7.

⁷²Attentive readers will no doubt be aware that we drifted into a tighter and tighter paraphrase and the quote of the words from the preface to Barth's first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, 1919.

the later Barth of the *Church Dogmatics* (i.e. as God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, 'God with us'). Barth would have asked us to struggle to hear *for ourselves* the Word in the words. And then to say that Word in *our* words, in our time and place in the *theodrama* of the Coming God. I think Barth would have agreed that "The Advent" would be a good way to say that indeed—as long as we remember that we are in the midst of the Advent ourselves (with the Primordial Advent in Creation/Covenant in the beginning, as witnessed to in the OT; the First Advent in the incarnation, death, resurrection/ascension of Jesus as witnessed to in the NT; and the promise of the Second Advent still to come in the future).⁷³ The words of the Bible are a witness or pointer to the Advent itself with is God's self-disclosure in human history!

3. That we Exercise the Theological Freedom (and Responsibility) to Give a New Articulation of the Advent for our time. Mere repeating what we said in 1844, or 1919 will not do. We want to give voice to the same subject-matter, the same Object, the same promise of the Coming God—but to do it faithfully will mean saying it quite differently from how we said it back then! It will mean hearing afresh, and speaking afresh. Mere repeating of old discoveries, rehashing of old debates, and re-warming of old truths, will not ensure that we have anything real and vital to say to the world of today. We need a 'present truth'!

Back in 1919 Barth spoke of "a joyful sense of discovery" which propelled him forward in his struggle to break free from a failed theology, ethics and exegesis. It resulted in a commentary that dropped like a bombshell on the playground of the theologians. For many at the 1919 Bible Conference, the issues seems explosive in their implications. The re-discovery of the minutes in the 1970s seemed to re-ignite the long simmering embers. But what of 2019? What 'joyful sense of discovery' might still awaits us?

Let me end with a much later word from Karl Barth (in fact from his last book):

"Theology is concerned with Immanuel, God with us! Having this God for its object, it can be nothing else but the most thankful and *happy* science!"⁷⁴

⁷³Thus the Advent is a *theodrama* of the Coming of God. As such it has its own 'tension,' 'inner dialectic,' 'krisis' or judgment character. Indeed we can agree that the Advent is the Spirit of Christ in action by the power of God!

⁷⁴Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 12.

APPENDIX A: Karl Barth, Published Preface, First Edition, *Römerbrief*

“Paul, as a child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all [persons] of every age. The differences between then and now, there and here, no doubt require careful investigation and consideration. But the purpose of such investigation can only be to demonstrate that these differences are, in fact, purely trivial. The historical-critical method of Biblical investigation has its rightful place; it is concerned with the preparation of the intelligence—and this can never be superfluous. But, were I driven to choose between it and the venerable doctrine of Inspiration, I would without hesitation adopt the latter, which has a broader, deeper, more important justification. The doctrine of Inspiration is concerned with the labor of apprehending, without which no technical equipment, however, complete, is of any use whatever. Fortunately, I am not compelled to choose between the two. Nevertheless, my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance, is so still. What is to-day of grave importance—and not merely crotchety and incidental—stands in direct connection with that ancient gravity. If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours.

‘Long, long ago the Truth was found,
A company of men it bound.
Grasp firmly then—that ancient Truth!’

The understanding of history is an uninterrupted conversation between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of to-morrow. And it is a conversation always conducted honestly and with discernment. In this connection, I cannot fail to think with gratitude and respect of my father, Professor Fritz Barth. For such discernment he signally displayed throughout his whole active life.

It is certain that in the past [those] who hungered and thirsted after righteousness naturally recognized that they were bound to labor with Paul. They could not remain unmoved spectators in his presence. Perhaps we too are entering upon such a time. Should this be so, this book may even be of some definite, though limited, service. The reader will detect for [themselves] that it has been written with a joyful sense of discovery. The mighty voice of Paul was new to me; and if to me, no doubt to many others also. And yet, now that my work is finished, I perceive that much remains which I have not yet heard and into which I have not as yet penetrated. My book is therefore no more than a preliminary undertaking. Further co-operation is necessary. If only many, better equipped than I, would appear on the scene and set to work to bore for water at the same source! However, should I be mistaken in this hope of a new, questioning investigation of the Biblical Message, well, this book must—wait. The Epistle to the Romans waits also.”

Safenwil [Switzerland], August 1918.

APPENDIX B — Excerpts from Barth's Preface to the Third Edition of the *Römerbrief*

“I should like, however, to take this opportunity of adding something to what was said in the preface to the second edition about ‘Historical Criticism,’ about the ‘Dialectic of the Matter,’ and about ‘Biblicism,’ because they affect the general method of approach. Bultmann complains that I am too conservative. He agrees with me that criticism must begin with the subject-matter, but thinks that this must lead on to the criticism of some of Paul’s opinions, because even he fails at times to retain his grip upon what is, in fact, his subject. Bultmann writes: ‘Other spirits make themselves heard, as well as the Spirit of Christ.’ I do not wish to engage in a controversy with Bultmann as to which of us is the more radical. But I must go farther than he does and say that there are in the Epistle no words at all which are not words of those ‘other spirits’ which he calls Jewish or Popular Christian or Hellenistic or whatever else they may be. Is it really legitimate to extract a certain number of passages and claim that there the veritable Spirit of Christ has spoken? Or, to put it another way, can the Spirit of Christ be thought of as standing in the Epistle side by side with ‘other’ spirits and in competition with them? It seems to me impossible to set the Spirit of Christ—the veritable subject-matter of the Epistle—over against other spirits, in such a manner as to deal out praise to some passages, and to depreciate others where Paul is not controlled by his true subject-matter. Rather it is for us to perceive and to make clear that the whole is placed under the KRISIS [judgement] of the Spirit of Christ. The whole is *litera*, that is, voices of those other spirits. The problem is whether the whole must not be understood in relation to the true subject-matter which is—The Spirit of Christ. This is the problem which provides aim and purpose to our study of the *litera*. . . Even so, the extent to which the commentator will be able to disclose the Spirit of Christ in his [or her, *passim*] reading of Paul will not be everywhere the same. But he will know that the responsibility rests on his shoulders; and he will not let himself be bewildered by the voices of those other spirits, which so often render inaudible the dominant ones of the Spirit of Christ. He will, moreover, always be willing to assume that, when he fails to understand, the blame is his not Paul’s. Nor will he rest content until paradoxically he has seen the whole in the fragments, and has displayed the fragments in the context of the veritable subject-matter, so that all the other spirits are seen in some way or other to serve the Spirit of Christ.” Preface 3, Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, p.16-17.

“Bultmann further goes on to hint that there lurks behind my whole method of exegesis a ‘modern form of the dogma of Inspiration.’ Schlatter also noticed the same tendency with disapproval. But, from the preface to the first edition onwards, I have never attempted to conceal the fact that my manner of interpretation has certain affinities with the old doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. . . . Is there any way of penetrating the heart of a document—of any document!—except on the assumption that its spirit will speak to our spirit through the actual written words? This does not exclude a criticism of the letter by the spirit, which is, indeed unavoidable. It is precisely a strict faithfulness which compels us to expand or to abbreviate [our commentary on?] the text, lest a too rigid attitude to the words should obscure that which is struggling to expression in them and which demands expression. This critical freedom of exegesis was used by Calvin in masterly fashion, without the slightest disregard for the discipline by which alone liberty is justified. The attentive reader will perceive that I have employed this method, believing it to be demanded by the text. I can only hope that I have not fallen into the snare of indiscipline which inevitably threatens those who employ it. . . . The Spirit of Christ is not a vantage-point from which a ceaseless correction of Paul—or of any one else—may be exercised schoolmaster-wise. . . . No human word, no word of Paul, is absolute truth. In this I agree with Bultmann—and surely with all intelligent people. . . . But, nevertheless, we must learn to see beyond Paul. This can only be done, however, if with utter loyalty and with a desperate earnestness, we endeavor to penetrate his meaning.” Preface 3, *ibid.*, p.19.

APPENDIX C — Barth's Later Understanding of 'Theological Exegesis'

From, Karl Barth, *Credo* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, 1964). Appendix: Answers to Questions

II. Dogmatics and Exegesis

The Credo is subject to Scripture, and Dogmatics [doctrinal theology] has therefore to be continually corrected by Exegesis. It comes under its control. So we must now of course acquaint ourselves with what is to be understood by *Exegesis*. The exegesis which is, if I may use the expression, pre-ordered to Dogmatics must be an attempt to understand Holy Scripture within the pale of the Church: it must therefore be *theological* exegesis. By that I mean an exposition and explanation which have before their eyes *that* exposition and explanation which have before their eyes *that* question which is to be put to prophets and apostles: To what extent is there given to us, here in this text, witness to *God's Word*? Theological exegesis is an exegesis which is carried out under a quite definite presupposition. This is, firstly, that the reader of the Old and New Testaments remembers that in this book the Church has up to now heard God's Word; and secondly, that this reader or investigator reads in the expectation that he himself will also for his time hear God's Word. The place of theological exegesis lies right between this remembrance and this expectations, corresponding to the time of the Church between Christ's Ascension and Second Coming. Therefore, *that* exegesis which is *norm* for dogmatics is not an exegesis that is without presuppositions. There is no such thing. The alleged freedom from presuppositions of which a certain Gnosis is accustomed to boast, simply means that yet *another* presupposition is being made. Concretely this means that God's revelation is not to be reckoned with, that on the contrary it is possible to adopt a *neutral* attitude to what this Scripture points to, just as it is possible to take up this attitude to other things. This neutrality, this unconcern about God's revelation, and therefore this 'freedom from presuppositions' is a presupposition exactly like any other. As a matter of method we have to choose which of these presuppositions shall be valid and of course in the Church only one comes into consideration as significant and relevant. If there is a Church, then the canon is to be read in a way that corresponds to the Church, that is with that remembrance and that expectation which I have mentioned. Please take note that in all that I have said the pretentious word 'pneumatic exegesis' has not passed my lips. I am perfectly satisfied with furthering a *theological* exegesis.

Such theological exegesis is the criterion of all the propositions of Dogmatics. It goes without saying that it is also the criterion by which the Credo and all the historical Confessions of the Church are measured and will always have to be measured. Along the whole line of Dogmatics the Reformation Scripture-principle must fundamentally remain in force. If it should really come to pass that such a theological exegesis saw itself compelled to strike out certain parts of the *Credo* (Virgin Birth, Resurrection?) effect would have to be given to this demand without more ado. But to strike out the resurrection of Christ from the Credo—that could only be the demand of a very *untheological* exegesis. A theological exegesis will at once admit that the *resurrexit tertia die* stands at the centre of the New Testament witness in such a way that it can be said: this witness stand or falls with this statement. Of Ascension and Virgin Birth a theological exegesis will certainly not say that they stand at the center of the New Testament witness, but rather that they stand in a very remarkable way on its margin. Certainly the Virgin Birth is encompassed

with noteworthy question marks, and Dogmatics in its treatment of it must keep that fact in view. With regard to my Lecture I hope that you remember not only *that* I took up on this point a positive position, but also *how* and in what connection (*res* and *signum*) I did this. I came to the position of holding fast to the Virgin Birth from having ascertained in the New Testament that here a kind of signal is given which to the early Church was at all events sufficiently important to be received into the Credo. In the sense in which I have here presented the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, I think I am able to justify it before the claims of a theological exegesis. Therefore I cannot accept the objection that I went wrong in theological exegesis, and I must put the counter-question, whether it is not rather an exegesis, which believes itself to be at liberty to strike out the Virgin Birth, that is to be described as an un-theological exegesis?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Karl. *Das Hochland*, June 1926, as referenced in J. McConnachie, "The Teaching of Karl Barth," *Hibbert Journal* 25 (1926–1927), p. 385.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Karl Barth*. Communio Books, Ignatius Press: 1951, 1961.
- Barth, Karl. Translated from the Sixth Edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. *The Epistle to the Romans* London: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1977.
- _____. New translation by Amy Marga. *Word of God and Word of Man*. London: T&T Clark, 1928, 2011.
- _____. *Credo*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, 1964.
- _____. *Church Dogmatics* Vol. I/1 §17 "Revelation as the Sublimation (*aufhebung*) of Religion."
- _____. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962, 1968.
- Burnett, Richard E. *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Campbell, Michael W. The 1919 Bible Conference and its Significance for Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology, Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2008.
- Couperus, Molleurus (ed.). "The Bible Conference of 1919." *Spectrum: Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* (March 1979): 23-26.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1965, p. 481. ET *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall New York: Crossroad, 1992.
- McCormack, Bruce. *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Michielin, Maico M. ed. *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* by Karl Barth, trans., D.H. van Daalen, with an introductory essay by Maico Michielin. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- Richardson, Herbert W. *Toward An American Theology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.