

## Questions posed during the *Reading More Barth Together* webinar

### Session 3: The Gift of Freedom

#### *Re: Freedom*

- Is there any chance that a distinction could be made between 'freedom' as Americans tend to define it, and how Barth would define it? It appears that, for Barth, God has the 'freedom' to either be omni-everything OR the freedom to be Father of the Son, etc. How to distinguish between these understandings of freedom?
- What was Barth's position on freedom in relation to the modern, liberal project/ idolatry?
- Could we use another English word in place of freedom for Barth?

#### *General Questions:*

- Given Barth's experience under Hitler, why does he not give us a specific example of the way to apply his words about ethics to a particular situation?
- Pages 84 & 85 seem a set up for situational ethics.
- As we come to an end of this series, what is the most striking Barthian insight that has shaped your view of theology?
- Could you comment on Barth's paragraph on "conditional imperatives" as being part of the "risk of obedience involved in the encounter and communion between Christian [siblings]"?
- Stanley says in *With The Grain Of The Universe* that Barth became a Father of the Church: Is that a particular example of "The Gift of Freedom"?
- I love these stories Will and Stan... the Black Panther burst in?! How exciting and challenging and crazy.... Glad to know that you had read Malcolm X...
- I think I follow the universalist arguments. But how do you reconcile that with Barth's assertion that God insists on a covenantal/partnering relationship? p. 81 ("God insists on man's participation in His reconciling work.... This is the meaning of God's covenant with man...This is the freedom of discipleship bestowed upon him.")

#### *Re: Barth and Marriage*

- How do we think about Barth's ethical framework in the light of his affair with his secretary?
- It is speculation to bring 21st century concerns to Barth on what would he do regarding gay marriage. What Barth can confront is the underlying ideas behind the speculation. Love to hear more about this... This is a methodological question, not a logical one
- I had understood that he asked for a divorce 3 times and his wife invited the woman to come and stay in the house...
- Alleged, alleged alleged... Happy to leave it to Jesus to judge it...

*Re: Final Questions*

- I'm deeply appreciative of these two series on Barth. I find it very timely again--after reading Barth 40 years ago at Duke with Robert Osborn.
- thank you !!
- Thank you for these 7 wonderful conversations. I am stunned that I can, without financial contribution, listen to both of you whom I have read for many years. Looking forward to the next B.

*Re: a follow-up series*

- Definitely, Bonhoeffer!
  - Life Together!

**Session 2: The Humanity of God**

- Happy Birthday Dr. Hauerwas!
- Please speak to Barth's understanding of the Church. Is the Church located in the institution, in the fellowship of believers, in some combination of the two? Where would Barth locate the Church?
- In re: "Theology is Christology." Barth frames his theology so thoroughly and exclusively through Jesus that I wonder about his interest in non-Christian (mostly Jewish) theology and thinking about God. Did Barth have any interest in, say, Hillel, Maimonides, ibn Ezra, the Baal Shem Tov, or even any of the Islamic sages?

- Barth seems at great strain to defend the reasonableness of a universalist position but rather coy about owning it. Any offers?
- Universalism tends to be a position that causes theologians to be taken less seriously, despite it being the natural conclusion of their theologies.
- That's fair. But perhaps this might have been altered if a figure of Barth's stature had come out from behind the curtain
- On page 50, Jesus is the one who reveals that God refuses to exist without human beings. That's another way to describe the 2nd person of the Trinity - who is both divine and human. So how can Barth say, "In His life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit He would in truth be no lonesome, no egotistical God even without man, yes, even without the whole created universe." If the Trinity, by definition, is relational, and includes humanity (2nd person), how can God ever be without humanity? Or lonely? It appears more 'deduced' from the Trinity.
- How might "the humanity of God" relate to arguments regarding abortion, virgin birth, immaculate conception in the sense that these arguments usually reference an argument that "humanity" is necessarily divine (in the abortion arguments) or necessarily sinful (in the virgin birth/immaculate conception arguments)?
- In the act of God turning toward humanity is there any dividing of humanity, world, or church? Humanity of God - humanity as world? humanity as church?
- Can you elaborate on the parables of God's good will and actions in human activity (p. 55)?
- Bishop, loved your remarks re bishops in the UMC. Spot on. Thoughts on human office confounding the ministry?
- post-covid, what would you tell us pastors and church leaders to put our hopes, energies, enthusiasm into? What should we leave behind? What would Bart tell us?
- One thing seems to be clear - we will need to assemble, we need to touch, we need to eat together (even if it is only a cracker and some grape juice); "Bodies are needed for worship".
- Is the American church the true church, in these times?
- How does the word 'freedom' in Barth differ from the American definition? Or of our common understanding?

- How can Barth's consistent "male" references (which are essential to his message) be translated into inclusive language?
  - "You regret it." Great response!
- Barth says that "the change in which we are engaged cannot be the last word. That, however, may be the concern of another generation. Our problem is this: to derive the knowledge of the humanity of God from the knowledge of his deity." p. 38 What does Barth mean in saying that this humanity of God project cannot be the last word?
- Is that joy that Barth discusses relate directly to his universalist theology?
- In Christ, God has turned ... from the foundation of the world! This is who God is, in essence. If God be for us ....
- "We have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which has appeared in JC." (p. 62)
- How do we believe in the church under Barth's schema if we struggle to identify where it happens?

### **Session 1: Evangelical Theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

- Barth observes "Nineteenth century theology worked on the general assumption that relatedness of the world is its primary task" [p. 23] and this is a problem. The unrepentant liberal rejoinder is that there is "no tenable alternative to one or another variation of Culture-Protestantism since there is no theological standpoint divorced from human culture." [George Rupp, Culture Protestantism, p. 55]. How would Barth respond?
- Would you both comment on how evangelicalism today expresses an attitude similar to the problem Barth states about the 19th century? Barth says (p.18), "The key problem arose from the conviction that the guiding principle of theology must be confrontation with the contemporary age and its various conceptions, self-understandings, and self-evidences, its genuine and less genuine 'movements,' its supposed or real progress."
- Barth is really focused on the historical location and general milieu in which they write, with this does Barth give room for theologians to reflect on their social location and how that affects their theology?
- The poet Dr. Hauerwas just mentioned was Carl Zuckmayer.
- If Barth critiques 19th-century theology for appealing to outside ideology to make Christianity intelligible, do you feel he sufficiently raises enough reasons for us to

continue to read these theologians? Does this situation parallel Stan's own choice not to write a history of Christian social ethics in America?

- How do we discern, with Barth, when a theology "has [had] its time" and must come to an end?
- About Barth's suggestion that, because of the revelation of God in Jesus we have more good information on God than we do on humans... should Jesus not also be a revelation of true humanity just as much as a revelation of God? If we are to maintain that his natures are equal...
- Does the religious a priori argument by Barth track Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity in Letter and Papers?
- Any comments on C.S. Lewis' writings on "longing."
- Great quote from the play 'Inherit the Wind' : God created man in his own image, so man, being a gentleman, returned the compliment.
- Does Barth's point boil down to eisegesis versus exegesis? Is it okay to come to agree with secular viewpoints when starting from a Christian perspective but not to start from the secular viewpoint and go looking for evidence in the scripture?
- Barth explains that 19th century theologians had been greatly influenced by Enlightenment philosophers. Could you talk about what philosophers and philosophical ideas in particular influenced these theologians? And, what philosophers/philosophies influenced late Barth?
- Illuminate the thread of language - from the language of Canaan to the language of the church of Jesus Christ/ translating the Hebrew God as Creator of the world to the eschatology of Jesus Christ as the end of the world - in terms of Barth's move(s) in theology from the glory of deity to the humanity of God as the-anthropology (this, too is a history as he develops the 19th century in this lecture.)
- Is it possible to work from the ground up (page 15) toward God, or is that method always compromised by human attempts at "intelligibility"?
- Orthodox theology has the apophatic tradition (the way of negation) that always hold constructive theology (statements about God) in balance. Should our Evangelical theologies listen more closely to that tradition?
- Shirley Guthrie, who studied with Barth, used to say that Barth talked about the sovereign grace of God, not the sovereignty of God.

- Is Stanley's work overly influenced by the philosophy of Wittgenstein?
- What can we learn from Barth about staying in conversations with those in our communities who not only are prioritizing subjective religious experience but making various idols of the current socio-political climate- an intersection where thoughtful conversation seems difficult if not impossible?
- Is there much difference between an Osteen service and a Trump rally?
- would you comment on Schleiermacher's absolute dependency
- How do we "correct" our friends without being obnoxious?
- Our lectionary gospel text this Sunday is the parable of the wheat and weeds. This parable relates to anxiety over good and bad, or the anxiety of diversity. Part of Jesus' answer is don't try to eliminate the diversity, leave it to God to judge. On the other hand, this text also addresses human behavior. Not all human behavior is acceptable. Jesus certainly judged human behavior -particularly religious behavior. Still, human anxiety arises regarding who is in and who is out. The text pushes against this anxiety saying such anxiety is undercut by God. So, the question arises: What should we do or say when Jesus says, leave