

## 2

### Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism

*This lecture was given at the meeting of the Karl Barth Society of North America in Toronto, Spring 1974, and contains Frei's explanation of Barth's hermeneutical procedure and his stance towards historical criticism and factual claims; it also contains a fine description of Barth's Anselmian and Dantesque sensibility. Frei spoke from notes rather than from a full text, but the lecture was taped, and a transcription has been made and edited by Mark Alan Bowald. CPH 1974d.*

#### A Dantesque Vision

I was struck by the theme of the conference this year: *Beyond the Theology of Karl Barth*. It made me wonder just what there is beyond Karl Barth. May I make a moderate proposal?

I think all of you who have found yourself not simply studying Barth but then finding his thought congenial will have noticed how difficult it is not to fall into the same language patterns as Barth, to use the same vocabulary, sometimes even the same kind of syntax, and you will have noticed that it sounds terribly awkward and secondhand when it comes from people other than Karl Barth himself. A friend of mine, a theologian, was asked by a particularly fine student, who is a devoted Lutheran, and who has worked hard on Barth, 'If one is simply *not* a Barthian what does one finally learn from Barth?' And my colleague, who is neither a Lutheran nor in any sense a Barthian, thought for a minute and then he said,

It surely has been a long, long time since anyone has had a comic vision of the world, the sense, that is to say, of a vision of reality which is inherited from the tradition that is so profoundly embodied in Dante's *Divina Comedia*, the sense of reality being in the deepest way a divine comedy.

And it seems to me that this is particularly fitting when one recalls the way in which Barth as a Calvinist was always correcting, and being corrected by, Lutheran colleagues. We remember the Calvinist–Lutheran controversies and discussions which were revived in him – on the *extra Calvinisticum* against the *inter Lutheranum* (that is to say the question of the tension between the transcendence of the Divine Word over its own Incarnation, whether or not there is such a transcendence) or again the relationship between law and

Gospel, or again the relationship between justification and sanctification. In all these matters, where there really is no right or wrong and no final adjudication (but which are themselves, as Barth would have said, ‘beautiful problems’) Barth proceeded from so different a vision from his Lutheran friends and colleagues, even though, nonetheless, they were in such close contact with each other. The Lutheran finally proceeds always from a *religious* position, that is to say, he finds himself cast into the question of how he as a man under law, a sinner in a regulated world, can find a gracious God and how he can either solve or live fruitfully in the tension between his existence under law and his existence under Gospel. How different this is from Karl Barth who, even when he states the same issues, is proceeding from a totally different basis. He is proceeding not from, first of all, a basic situation of a *religious* problematic but a basic affirmation of a *reality*. He finds himself in a real world which everywhere manifests, first in the historical process in which mankind is engaged, but secondly even in nature itself, wherever he looks, the divine grace that emerged in the history of Israel and emerged for all mankind in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His basic affirmation is that this is the picture of reality. The real world is to be talked about this way, Barth proceeds from this vision, and whatever problems may arise are problems that arise in reflection on this reality.

Recall that for Barth it was always true that the history of the covenant, that particular history, was paradigmatic. It was almost as if – indeed, one would want to say it *was* as if that history was the one real history of mankind, and all history (all other history that historiographers, or as the Germans say, ‘scientific historians’, construct – all *Historie* in contrast to *Geschichte*, as Barth himself said) is to be regarded as a figure of that covenant history. All other history is a history in its own right, yes, and to be seen as having its own meaning, yes, but nonetheless, finally, its reality is to be understood as a figure in that one history into which we are – not only as members of secular history but also in our own experience – to include ourselves also, as figures in that one history. All of Barth’s theology was the constant sketching out in regard to particular doctrines or particular stages of that one history, this story as the vision of all reality. This was the vision of a *Divina Comedia*.

In the middle of the Twentieth Century the boldness and daring of that is so enormous and so right and so fitting that one cannot repeat it; one can simply either do something like it oneself, or go one’s own way in respectful disagreement. How do you compare, how do you modify basic visions of the world?

And how consistent it was! Do you recall that one aspect of Barth’s theology where he showed his consistency most of all? He used a peculiar German term which comes from the early Nineteenth Century. It comes, as a matter of fact, from Christian Wolff’s vocabulary as traced through Kant and

then through Hegel: *anschaulich*, or ‘intuition’, which always meant a kind of a concrete pre-conceptual grasp on the real tactile world. He used that word and with the early Heidegger he gave it a reverse twist and he suggested that we are to ourselves *unanschaulich*. We really don’t, even in our most apparently direct apprehensions of ourselves, have a direct glimpse of ourselves. And do recall that in the tradition not only of Schleiermacher but of all early nineteenth-century German philosophy one of the basic affirmations was that self-consciousness, direct presence to oneself – either immediately or, for Hegel, in a mediate way – is the essence of selfhood. And recall also that the early Barth, the Barth of the second edition of the commentary on Romans, had suggested that this is *so* true – it is *so* true that we are directly present to ourselves, directly conscious of ourselves – that it is precisely for that reason that all contact with the divine escapes us. For, in contrast to the liberal theologians, he said, there is no presence of God included in our direct presence to ourselves. The presence of God is precisely the radical other of our presence to ourselves; because we are, for the early Barth, *anschaulich* to ourselves, therefore God is totally *unanschaulich* to us. And recall how gradually first in the *Christian Dogmatics*<sup>1</sup> and then when he scrapped that in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* and then, increasingly consistently (I would maintain) from II/1 on, he reversed that picture. The reality of our history with God is *so real*, it is *so much the one real world in which we live* that what is *anschaulich* to us is really that: our life with God – to such an extent that we are not really *anschaulich* to ourselves. We do not know, we do not grasp ourselves.

So consistent was he in that you see, that he suggested that our very knowledge of ourselves as creatures, but even more our very knowledge of ourselves as sinners (which is, again, the Lutherans’ basic experience) is a knowledge, an apprehension, a tactile direct contact that has to be *mediated* to us. We have to learn it, in an almost Wittgensteinian way. (And there is, incidentally I think for me, a lot of relationship, a lot of similarity between the later Wittgenstein and Karl Barth.) We have to learn in an almost Wittgensteinian way how to use the concepts that apply to the way we know ourselves, because the world, the true, real world in which we live – the real world in which the Second World War took place in which Barth was so much engaged, in which the conflict with Nazism took place, in which the conflict or the *adjustment* with Communism took place later – that real world is only a figure of an aspect in that one overall real world in which the covenanted God of grace lives with man.

## A Dialectical Relationship to Historical Criticism

That, then, brings me more directly to the thing that I am supposed to talk about. For the early Barth, you see, was the Barth of a radical negative criticism of historical criticism for whom, in line with the unintuitability of God, the *unanschaulich* of God and the *unanschaulich* therefore of the real subject matter of the Bible, the most self-destructive historical criticism was the right kind of historical criticism.

You remember what he said in the first edition? It was (and it is one of the few sayings from the preface of the first edition that I think he held to all his life) that he was happy that he did not have to choose between historical criticism and the old doctrine of inspiration, but that if he did he would choose the old doctrine of inspiration. He held to that. He held to that through thick and thin. He felt he did not have to choose. But he also felt that the priority belonged to something like the old doctrine of inspiration (although it have to be carefully modified) – the doctrine of inspiration which genuinely pressed you to the subject matter of the Bible which was in the text, rather than to the peripheries which were behind the text which was what historical criticism did. During the dialectical period, in the twenties, the way he held the doctrine of inspiration together with the historical criticism, the way he avoided literalism, was by understanding that historical criticism must be radical. In the second edition preface and again in his acrid discussion with Adolf von Harnack, he insisted that the critics are not radical enough, and at least through to the 1930s, at least through volume I/2 of the *Dogmatics*, he preferred those critics that suggested that all reliable historical knowledge fails us, particularly in regard to the New Testament texts and particularly those that bear on the origin of earliest Christianity, and of course particularly those that bear on the destiny as well as the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Barth, the early Barth, the Barth of the dialectical period of the 1920s, had a deep stake in the kind of thing that Bultmann was doing in indicating that we know precious little about the life of Jesus Christ – that, as Bultmann was to say in that famous ungrammatical expression of his, the *that* is all we know about Jesus Christ, or, if not all, then essentially most of what we know about him. Barth had a stake in that because it indicated to him that one could not go beyond the text if one was to read the Bible for its subject matter, if one wants to read the Bible, if I may use the word, genuinely *religiously*.

Similarly, he (probably without knowing it) had a stake in the writing of Albert Schweitzer; certainly Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*<sup>2</sup> was in one sense thoroughly congenial to him. That is to say, it was congenial in the sense that a radically Christian, radically eschatological orientation (in the sense of Barth's own strange eschatology of the 1920s) allows a use of the text only in the way that the form critic suggested it was to be used, or at least in a

very similar way: the texts are reports of preaching, they are *kerygmatic*. Therefore, if they are to be understood, if they are to be interpreted, they must be interpreted *kerygmatically*. To use the kind of terminology that we have learned from Donald Evans,<sup>3</sup> self-involving language can only be understood in a self-involving way. And it cannot be understood scientifically or objectively-historically.

The early Barth had therefore, I say again, a stake in the most radical kind of criticism and if he found it possible to have historical criticism and the doctrine of inspiration together it was by virtue of the fact that the best historical criticism had, in effect, a self-destruct mechanism built into it. That is to say then that there was no *positive* relation between historical criticism and theology but only a *negative*, mutually exclusive one. But in that sense they were highly compatible; there was indeed a remarkably strong negative dialectical relationship between the two.

### An *Ad Hoc* Relationship to Historical Criticism

As Rudolf Smend observed in an article in the festschrift for Barth's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, *Parrhesia* (and, by the way, the article that Smend wrote is the best thing that I know of on Barth and historical criticism; it is a superb piece of work),<sup>4</sup> Barth at that stage did not have a *nachkritische* exegesis, a *post-critical* exegesis, but rather a *nabenkritische* exegesis: the two things (exegesis and criticism) were *juxtaposed*, side by side. They were not stages on the way of exegesis but simply rested there side by side.

But in the 30s, you see, it seems to me at any rate that a radical revolution occurred, although it was gradual. It was a revolution in exegesis which goes thoroughly with that reality vision of his, with that insistence that the world must be looked at historically, that the only way we know the world is historically. And when Barth began to talk that way then he also began to talk in his hermeneutics about a new analytical category that he felt applied to the right kind of exegesis and he called it 'literary-historical'. And that is in a certain sense an extremely accurate description of what he now proceeds to do and how he now proceeds to relate himself to historical criticism.

It is, in a way, thoroughly parallel to another series of reflections he had. You may recall that he had in the 20s a polemic (a very sympathetic, profoundly sympathetic polemic) against Ludwig Feuerbach, in which he said that this notion of Feuerbach's that religion is just an illusory projection of our own self-apprehension is a profound threat to liberal theology but that it ignores two basic aspects of the human individual, that is to say, that he is a sinner and that he does not know his own limitation, namely death. Anybody who knows himself to be a sinner and anybody who knows that he is radically limited by death will never allow even the species notion of man to be

projected into deity. And at that point, all you can do after being profoundly sympathetic to Feuerbach is simply to laugh him off. But when Barth took up the polemic against Feuerbach again in the *Dogmatics* several times, especially in volume IV/2, it was on a totally different basis. It was not on a negative basis. He couldn't do that any longer because, you see, we don't even know our own sinfulness and our own radical limitation in the face of death. We don't even know that, really, directly. We know it only as communication from God. Then alone do we know what sin and real death mean. And so the only way you can polemicize against a man like Feuerbach who would raise man to the level of God is, as it were, by ignoring him, as it were by putting over against him a positive vision.

The reason I mention that is you see that from now on Barth's relation to historical criticism is of the same sort. You look steadily at the text and what the text says, and then, you utilize, on an *ad hoc* basis, what the historical scholars offer you. You cannot state systematically or in a general theory what the relation between theological exegesis and historical criticism is. You could do that in the dialectical period of Barth, when there was a general theory, namely a negative compatibility between historical exegesis and theological exegesis. Now you cannot do it anymore. The point however is that you must always be a theological exegete and then in particular cases of texts you will find an *ad hoc* relation, maybe negative, but maybe positive, with the always tentative results of historical criticism.

### Reading Naïvely

In the *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, Barth has an exegesis which Smend, and Eichholz in the essay on Barth in *Antwort*,<sup>5</sup> both consider very important, as does James Wharton<sup>6</sup> in a fine talk that he gave at the Barth Colloquium at Union Theological Seminary two years ago. He has an important exegesis of Numbers 13 and 14, the story of the spies in the land of Canaan, the Israelites by the land of Canaan; and he precedes it by a prefatory hermeneutical remark because he says that this story should be called a *history*. And then he goes on,

The term 'history' is to be understood in its older and naïve significance in which – quite irrespective of the distinctions between that which can be historically proved, that which has the character of saga, and that which has been consciously fashioned, or invented, in a later and synthetic review – it denotes a story which is received and maintained and handed down in a definite kerygmatic sense.<sup>7</sup>

Notice that there are certain distinctions here. First, *that which can be historically proven* – that is to say, empirical history, history to which our fact

questions are relevant. As my son said after coming home from a Sunday school lesson on the story of the resurrection when he was twelve years old, he said to me, 'What's the evidence for that one?' It's that kind of history: 'What's the evidence for that?' that Barth speaks of first of all, that which can be historically proven. The word he uses there is not *geschichtlich* but *historisch*; that's *historisch* history, that for which evidence is relevant.

Secondly, *that which has the character of saga*. And by saga he means a history-like story, but a history-like story which is poetic and therefore has grown up, as it were, through an oral tradition.

And finally, *that which has been consciously fashioned or invented*. That is to say what a later and sophisticated redactor will have put down, never mind whether something happened or not. And I would propose to you here that the nearest equivalent to that in modern terms is what we speak of as the novelist. The realistic novel is something history-like but it is at the same time invented. Now the novel is history-like in two ways. First, the author seems to be saying, 'I'm not giving you myth, I'm not giving you a fable or an allegory because a fable or an allegory always has a distance between the story, the representation, and what it means, the thing represented – whereas the representation *is* what I mean; I don't mean something else. I mean what I say. I am being literal.' And Barth, incidentally, wanted the text always to be literal in that same fashion: it means what it says. It is to be taken literally *whether or not* something happened. The novel is history-like in a literal way: just as history is rendered literally so a novel is rendered literally. And that means then, secondly, that such an account speaks about the interaction of persons and temporal incidents in such a way that these two things render each other and by their interaction render the story and the meaning of the story. The *meaning* of the story is not something detached from the story, but emerges out of these temporal connections of character and incident with each other, which mean each other and nothing else. Whereas, of course, in myth in particular the interaction of character and circumstance in time is only a surface element – and this is not so in a novel and, Barth says, not so in the Bible.

So Barth speaks, you see, of three sharply distinct things which do however have a common generic or literary–historical character. And thus, you see, what Barth can do now is to suggest that in a certain way we *can be critical*. We are no longer at the same stage as the naïve pre-critical forebears. We are no longer there. We do not read Genesis in the same way our forebears did. And yet it has the same character for us – the same literary–historical character in which we can read it as thoroughly sophisticated critics. Barth did not deny the truth or (in a peculiar, hard to get at sense) the *historicity* of Genesis. He always vehemently insisted that the creation accounts are *Geschichte* but he insisted equally strongly that they are not *historische-Geschichte*. First of all, nobody was there, and therefore the evidence is

ludicrous. But secondly, an event which is an immediate rather than a mediate relationship between God and man is something to which our notion of factual temporal event is not adequate, so that we cannot say how creation is a temporal event – or, shall we say, we can only think of it *analogically* as a temporal event. As such we must think of it as a temporal event, but our category for thinking of it as a temporal event must be analogical to our *historisch* category of event; it cannot be literally the same.

In these ways then Barth is indeed, you see, in the position to suggest that we must be as naïve as our forebears were before the rise of criticism in the interpretation of the Bible and as naïve as the Bible itself. There must be between us and the text a direct relationship, a direct relationship which is really, if you wanted to put it this way in a very broad sense, literary. We read naively. We understand the texts without any schematism coming between us and the reading, and yet we do not do it in the same unsophisticated way as they did it. We do it as those who are perfectly well aware that there is such a thing as criticism. But we have now, you see, unlike the historical critic, Barth claims, gone beyond it.

Let me then go on in the same passage,

In relation to the biblical histories we can, of course, ask concerning the distinctions and even make them hypothetically. But if we do so we shall miss the kerygmatic sense in which they are told. Indeed, the more definitely we make them and the more normative we regard them for the purpose of exposition, the more surely we shall miss this sense. To do justice to this sense, we must either not have asked at all concerning these distinctions, or have ceased to do so. In other words, we must still, or again, read these histories in their unity and totality. It is only then that they can say what they are trying to say. To be sure the history of the spies does contain different elements. There is a ‘historical’ (*historisch*) element in the stricter sense. [Quite possibly these were, in our sense of the word, real persons. Certainly, judging by the archaeology, the names were those of real cities and real localities. So there is a *historisch* element there.] ... There is also an element of saga (the account of the branch of grapes carried by two men, and of the giants who inhabited the land). There is also the element which has its origin in the synthetic or composite view (fusing past and present almost into one) which is so distinctive a feature of historical writing in Old and New Testament alike.<sup>8</sup>

(It is also, by the way, a feature of the novel, isn’t it? From the very beginning in the Eighteenth Century, literary critics who were trying to understand this new genre always suggested that the novel must be about something



contemporary to the writer, contemporary to our manners, contemporary to the world we lived in, even if it took the shape of, and succeeded in reproducing the atmosphere of the old. The novel has its own peculiar way of synthesizing the old and the new, past and present time, successfully. Barth suggested that the same thing is very true of Old and New Testaments.)

It is to the latter elements then, that we must pay particular attention in our reading of these stories if we are to understand them. For they usually give us an indication of the purpose which led to their adoption into the texts. But in relation to them, if we are discerning readers we shall not overlook the historical elements or even jettison those which seem to have the character of saga.<sup>9</sup>

We look for the common literary character in all of it. The meaning of it is clear, he suggests, and it is the text. The Bible is largely and centrally realistic narrative. He was of course well aware of the disjunctions and the distinctions of the Bible, but the comprehensive frame for Barth, the most important thing, which lends it unity more than anything else is that it is realistic narrative. And please bear in mind that that is not the same thing as that obscure and wretched notion called *Heilsgeschichte*. It is *not* the same thing. But as realistic narrative it is *clear*.

The truth of it, when we raise that question, and we have raised it for the philosopher at any rate, is a quite distinct question. Though for Barth, it must be added, that distinction does not really arise. Remember that, for Barth, it depicts the one real world in which we all live so that to understand the meaning of it is the same as understanding the truth of it. If you understand it rightly you cannot *not* think of it as real, what is depicted there. That strange, marvelous little book on Anselm's proof for the existence of God<sup>10</sup> is in a peculiar sense also applicable to Barth as an interpreter of the Bible as realistic narrative. He didn't make that application himself but it is clearly consonant with what he does. Bear that in mind.

So then, 'in relation to them, we shall never overlook the historical elements or even jettison those which seem to have the character of saga' because we can't hold them together literarily. How he concludes, then, is by saying, 'When the distinctions have been made', and we must make them, 'they can be pushed again into the background and the whole can be read', and – here comes the marvelous phrase – 'with this tested and critical naivety as the totality it professes to be.'<sup>11</sup>

That was what Barth's ambition was, to be a *direct* reader of the text, and not of some hypothetical subject matter behind the text. The subject matter is the text. But he did it not as an uncritically naïve reader but as a critically naïve reader, and as a result he felt confident that, even though he could state

no general theory about the relationship between theological exegesis and historical criticism, there was no conflict and given individual texts you would find how the two related themselves to each other, provided always that historical critical exegesis was not the governess but was in the service of the theological exegete. Even though he could never distort its results, nonetheless he must use it as a handmaid rather than either a mistress or a mother.

## Questions

*Question:* How does Barth handle passages like the one in Paul where Paul deals with the resurrection by trying to point to what looks like to me some empirical evidence where he says, ‘Look, over 600 people saw Jesus after he was raised from the dead’? Now there we see right in Scripture we have some effort being made to tie one of the Christian truths to empirical evidence of some sort.

*Frei:* Quite candidly I don’t remember. The trouble is, one of the reasons I am hesitant to reply to questions is that I am in the presence of greater experts than myself. I should say that, although I read avidly in sections of IV/1, IV/2, I/2 and III/1 this time for this particular presentation, it has been some time since I really read in Barth so I will have to call on the experts to correct me here. But Barth’s position is perfectly clear. He says in reply to Bultmann that it is perfectly obvious that in the biblical text the resurrection is something that happened to Jesus and not to the disciples. It is the right response to make. Whether true or not, the story has it happening to Jesus. But that limits one’s options. And even though one has certain stories that affirm *Geschichte*, it is a *Geschichte* which is an immediate relationship between God and time, unlike most *Geschichte* that we know which is a mediated relationship, and therefore we are not in a position to make dogmatic statements about the relevance of concepts of fact and evidence to that. However, we go by the text and we do know that the relationship between notions of factuality and historical evidence should be related positively rather than in opposition to this divine–human history. And therefore to the extent that one can make it, in exegesis, come off, that there is as positive a relation as Paul’s testimony claims – to that extent, we follow it and we obey it. Nonetheless, on the other side, there is the word of Paul also, that indicates to us, that warns us that we should not speculate. And I am now talking not about the Barth who wrote the book on the resurrection of the dead, but the later Barth of the *Dogmatics*. We should not speculate. None of us know really what a spiritual body is. We are not given an evidential witness scene of what a resurrection is like, and thus no matter how positive the evidence, the event itself remains, though strongly to be affirmed, an evidentially indescribable, rather than a describable event. And it

is not surprising therefore that here empirical testimony becomes not absent, but utterly confused. The Gospel accounts are confused and confusing, and to go behind them even with the aid of Paul's testimony, to go behind them to see the 'factual thing in itself' is therefore an impossibility. I think that's fair, though I stand subject to correction. I do believe that it makes good sense to talk that way.

*Question:* [Largely inaudible on the tape; the question is directed to clarifying the perception that early in Barth's career he maintained a separate and adversarial relationship between theological exegesis and historical criticism. The question ends with a reference to Barth's *Credo*<sup>12</sup> which made this point pungently.]

*Frei:* Yes, he used to do that sort of thing all the time. As you know he was a wonderful, delightful and perverse man who could make a point often by exaggeration. Remember, somebody asked him once whether the snake really talked in the garden, do you recall? And he said, 'I don't know whether it talked or not, it's far more important what it said.' And then he added, 'Yes! It talked!' I'm tempted to let it go at that. All I can say is that he was working on I/2 and doing preliminary work on II/2 at the same time that he was writing the appendices to *Credo*, and I think what he did there was to make a point by exaggeration. He was no longer really, if you read the sections on hermeneutics in I/2, that simplistic and separatist about the two things, theological and historical exegesis. But take the audience into account. He could not be subtle. He had to be direct and driving to make his point.

*Question:* Professor Frei, your presentation has done a magnificent job of showing the difference between the uses of *Geschichte* and *historisch*. I get constantly impatient with, for instance, James Barr – and there have been a whole number of others – saying that this distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich* is all just one big blur of confusion. I think, Dr. Frei, that you have made a real contribution in the way you have brought out the importance of this distinction in Barth's thought. On this matter of his tending to downplay the historical question, I think one has to recognize that Barth saw almost the whole of historical scholarship concerning itself with historical questions and hardly anybody except himself bothering about the theological question, and that he didn't tend to so emphasize the historical just because this was the thing worth worrying about.

*Frei:* Yes, I do agree with that, particularly in view of the fact that he, when he saw other people doing theological exegesis, especially as the 40s and 50s progressed, he thought that they were doing it in a hair-raising, *unhistorical*

way. One of the greatest objections he had to the whole existential syndrome, that whole malaise, if I may so call it (and in Germany I gather they now regard it as something that was something of a foolish wild mercury) was that it was totally unhistorical. It had nothing to do with the real world of outward events in which selves and political event, selves and ordinary history interacted. And he was desperately concerned with that all the time and he thought proper theological exegesis had to be concerned with that; so not only did he see historical critics doing no theological exegesis but even the theologians who were doing theological exegesis weren't doing what he regarded as the proper kind of historical-theological exegesis.

I do agree completely, but may I make one point with regard to Professor James Barr, since with some hesitation I shall have to admit to being something of an admirer of James Barr's work. I read his books assiduously. I just wish there weren't so many of them. There are now three that say much the same thing. He and I have had some correspondence. You are absolutely right in what you say about Barr's reading of Barth. I think he may be coming around. (You know how that is when one talks to somebody who doesn't agree with one, one always thinks they may be coming around. He probably isn't at all.) But I have suggested the reading of Barth that I have just given you to professor Barr and pointed out to him that again and again in the first or third or so of *Old and New in Interpretation*, the second of his books, he hammers home a literary theme, namely, that while it is extremely awkward to think about the Bible as a history, the history of the mighty acts, the history of God's self-revelation (all those terms that Barth did use, which Barr has put so heavily into question as hermeneutical devices) nonetheless one of the marks of the Bible is that it is a cumulative narrative, literarily. And I suggested to him that he has been misreading Barth, that this is an understandable misreading because everybody else has been doing the same thing as far as I can see, and that Barth ought to be read from his literary-historical texts as an exegete. Perhaps not as a theologian, but as an exegete. I suggested that, in effect, he was saying the same thing as Barth was saying there. Barr said that that seems very likely and that therefore he would like to rethink his position on Barth, about *Historie* and *Geschichte*.

*Question:* I find the question of the whole point of view of the novel on realistic narrative very congenial itself, but one can see the reintroduction of another historical problem since the realistic narrative with which we are dealing with is millennia old and the novel is, I think, is only a few hundred years old in its present form. You don't have, for example, the great historical problem when we read *Middlemarch* but we have the tremendous historical problem of the texts we read when we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Could you comment on this?

Frei:<sup>13</sup> The text of an ancient document is always subject to a variety of critical evaluations, like attestation, happenstance, source, form, and redaction criticism. Let us recall that these procedures, revisable as they are, and their conclusions even more revisable, are thoroughly appropriate, but that they say nothing either way about a direct reading of the text. They tell us about these texts in its cultural contexts, mayhap even the intention of the author and the redactor. But is there anything that tells us that the text cannot be looked at also in its own light if it makes syntactical sense, grammatical sense, and if it appears that you could show forth a kind of structure in the text itself not simply in the thought of the redactors? In other words – the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

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<sup>1</sup> *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (Zürich: TVZ, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, tr. W. Montgomery (London: A&C Black, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement: A Philosophic Study of Everyday Language with Special Reference to the Christian Use of Language about God as Creator* (London: SCM, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Smend, 'Nachkritische Schriftauslegung' in Eberhard Busch, Jürgen Fangmeier and Max Geiger (eds), *Parrhesia: fröhliche Zuversicht: Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1966* (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1966), pp.215–237.

<sup>5</sup> G. Eichholz, 'Der Ansatz Karl Barths in der Hermeneutic' in *Antwort: Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956*, ed. Ernst Wolf (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), pp.52–68.

<sup>6</sup> James A. Wharton, 'Karl Barth as Exegete and His Influence on Biblical Interpretation', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (Fall, 1972), pp.5–13.

<sup>7</sup> CD IV/2, pp.478–479.

<sup>8</sup> CD IV/2, p.479.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum; Anselm's proof of the existence of God in the context of his theological scheme*, tr. I.W. Robertson (London: SCM, 1960).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostle's Creed*, tr. J. Strathearn McNabb (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936).

<sup>13</sup> [The beginning and end of Frei's response are difficult to make out on the tape, and what can be made out sounds rather garbled. I give only the relatively clear middle part of his answer.]