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# Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light

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IN A RECENT ADDRESS<sup>1</sup> to the University of Copenhagen Karl Barth took note of some of the connections between his own thought and that of that other "wholesome intruder" Kierkegaard. His comments are revealing and shed some light upon certain aspects of the recent history of theology. But they are even more interesting as a further reflection of Barth's underlying attitude toward Kierkegaard. Barth acknowledges the latter's great insights but he is even more aware of what he takes to be his important limitations. He believes that he has learned much from Kierkegaard but he is also convinced that he has gone beyond him and that theology ought now to give up its preoccupation with his predecessor in favour of the lines he himself has developed.<sup>2</sup> This article is intended as a suggestion that the relationship between these two is much more complex than Barth allows or indeed imagines. It does this chiefly by calling attention to certain important similarities between their various positions. That done, it asks briefly in what sense Barth has actually gone beyond Kierkegaard and to what extent theology should follow his alleged lead.

Clearly it is impossible to provide in this brief space a detailed or general comparison of the thought of these two giants. Fortunately, however, it is possible to give a very accurate indication of their relationship by the simple expedient of comparing their treatments of the concept of paradox. More precisely, it is possible to do this by asking in what sense each regards Christianity as paradoxical. This is because the theme of paradox is central to the thought of each and, especially, to their respective accounts of the Christian faith. What follows is mainly an attempt to describe and relate their several positions respecting this central and revealing question.

It is one of the open secrets of Kierkegaard scholarship that he used the term "paradox" in a great variety of senses. In fact, he seems even to have had two quite distinct types of senses, types we can classify as the existential and the logical respectively. Further, he had no less than five distinct senses

1. The address in question was published under the title "Dank und Reverenz" in *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 23, no. 7 (July, 1963). The English translation by H. Martin Rumscheidt appeared as "A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille" in *CJT*, 11 (1965), 3-7 (cited below as "Reveille"). The relation of Barth and Kierkegaard is also discussed in N. H. Sørensen, "Karl Barth og Søren Kierkegaard," in Niels Thulstrup (ed.), *Kierkegaardiana* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955), pp. 55-64.

2. Cf. e.g.: "I consider him to be a teacher into whose school every theologian must go once. Woe to him who has missed it! So long as he does not remain in it or return to it!" ("Reveille," p. 7).

of the latter type.<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that he has these many senses, but fortunately it is not necessary for our present purposes to catalogue or describe them. At least in his case, unless otherwise indicated, we are concerned with "paradox" only in the ordinary sense of apparent logical self-contradiction.

However, certain other distinctions are important. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between the Kierkegaard of the authorship, the real Kierkegaard and what, lacking a better term, I shall call the phantom Kierkegaard. The first is the writer of that wealth of views expressed in the pseudonymous literature officially referred to as "the authorship,"<sup>4</sup> views directed at concrete situations and calculated to elicit a particular response. The second is, of course, the ring-master of the whole circus, the creator of the many pseudonyms, the foster-father<sup>5</sup> of his various puppets. He is "a *souffleur* who has poetically produced the *authors*,"<sup>6</sup> a figure who is the source of his many spokesmen and whose inner convictions must often be inferred from, and sometimes in spite of, the thoughts they are allowed to express. The third is something quite different from either of the preceding, and this despite the fact that he stems ultimately from a failure to distinguish between them. He is an historical fiction. He is, as we shall see, the product of accident and animosity coupled with a failure to heed Kierkegaard's repeated warnings about the peculiar character of his works.

It requires only the barest acquaintance with the shape and variety of the authorship to realize that all the views expressed therein cannot possibly be directly ascribed to Kierkegaard. Indeed, to do so would make no more sense than to attribute to Shakespeare all the opinions he puts in the mouths of his characters. Kierkegaard repeatedly emphasised the distance between himself and the pseudonyms<sup>7</sup> and it is clear that he was entirely justified in doing so. He wrote at length concerning his over-all strategy.<sup>8</sup> He pointed out that there were contradictions within the authorship.<sup>9</sup> He explicitly requested that he should not be personally saddled with the views expressed by his creations.<sup>10</sup> He expressly pleaded that any quotation from the pseudonymous works should be accompanied by the name of its respective

3. I have attempted to distinguish these various senses in a paper "Kierkegaard, 'Paradox' and Irrationalism," to be published in *Journal of Existentialism*. Some of these senses were tentatively distinguished in my "Søren Kierkegaard," *Architects of Modern Thought*, 5th and 6th series (Toronto: C.B.C., 1962).

4. This particular phrase occurs throughout many of the pseudonymous works, but it is particularly prominent and important in Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

5. This description, like many similar ones, occurs on the second page of the unnumbered fragment "A First and Last Declaration" which appears at the end of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) (cited below as "Declaration" and *Postscript*, respectively).

6. "Declaration," p. 1. Cf. also *Journals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), no. 647.

7. Cf. "Declaration," *passim*, and *Journals*, no. 1238.

8. Cf. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and *Postscript*, pp. 225-66.

9. Cf. *Journals*, no. 1238.

10. Cf. "Declaration," p. 2.

author.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, he held that failure to observe these elementary precautions would prove the ultimate source of all misinterpretations of his thought. Unfortunately, there is much evidence to suggest that in this, as in so many other things, he was a sound prophet.

The problem of interpreting Kierkegaard can be put in other and simpler terms. As he repeatedly insisted, his writings are essentially poetic. He attached great importance to this feature, and had a special name for anyone who might overlook it. Such a critic, he said, would prove himself to be a mere *chicaneur*.<sup>12</sup>

But despite all these difficulties we can be quite certain about the position of the Kierkegaard of the authorship concerning the so-called paradoxical nature of Christianity. It is, in fact, quite clear that this Kierkegaard holds that to the unbeliever the claims of Christianity will appear logically contradictory and that he can become a believer only by accepting them as such. This is a constant refrain of Johannes Climacus, who underscores this point with phrases such as "being nailed to the paradox,"<sup>13</sup> "the crucifixion of the understanding,"<sup>14</sup> and "the martyrdom of faith."<sup>15</sup> This was one of the central emphases of Climacus and, indeed, one of the chief points of the authorship. But it is important to see this in its proper perspective and context. It is not simply that Climacus suspected that reason might be tainted with self-interest; it is not even anything like that. Fundamentally, it is because of his own position *vis-à-vis* Christianity. Climacus is made to assume the position of the reader. He is not allowed to speak from within the state of belief; indeed, he is not permitted even to pose as a believer. He is an outsider preoccupied with coming to believe. He is concerned above all with the transition to belief. And his claim that Christianity is a paradox or an apparent logical contradiction is a function of this concern; it is so because its claims appear contradictory in the light of the conceptions of the unbeliever. Though he is dealing with specifically Christian belief, Kierkegaard's point is the perfectly general and logical one that any really new position must appear logically contradictory and that, if it is to be believed, it must be accepted as a paradox. The clarification and repeated emphasis of this simple point is one of the central points of the authorship and, granted the historical context, at least as Kierkegaard understood it, it is not surprising that he should have laid so much stress upon it. Nor, historically speaking, is it irrelevant that he should have done so.

There is no doubt that the real Kierkegaard completely accepted this point. Climacus' constant reiteration of this view, together with his peculiar status within the authorship, is a sufficient guarantee of this fact. But this is not by any means the whole of Kierkegaard's real position. Indeed, taken by itself, it is a serious distortion. The other side of this position appears in,

11. *Ibid.*; *Journals*, no. 1238.

12. Cf. *Journals*, no. 1238.

13. *Postscript*, p. 512.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 500f., 531.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 496. Cf. pp. 208f.

for example, a rarely quoted *Journal* entry,<sup>16</sup> an unpublished fragment,<sup>17</sup> and certain scattered but familiar phrases<sup>18</sup> (all of which have been discussed elsewhere).<sup>19</sup> Briefly, all these items show that the real Kierkegaard assumes that the believer, he who has come to believe, can and does revise his concepts so that claims which once seemed contradictory no longer seem to be so.<sup>20</sup> They show that, at least in his private person, he assumes that faith provides a basis for the revision of our concepts and, in contemporary terms, renders our claims conceptually intelligible.

We have said that the real Kierkegaard assumes that the apparent logical contradictions experienced by the believer can be overcome and that paradox, at least in this sense, is simply a transient feature in the life of belief. Such admissions are almost wholly absent from the pseudonymous works, but it is important to see that this is no evidence whatsoever against our claim. These works do indeed use "paradox" in the particular sense of "apparent logical contradiction" but they do so frequently in conjunction with other senses which are permanent and essential features of Christian belief. Further, the assurance that the experience of paradox was a merely temporary affair, though strictly true and reassuring to certain believers, would have tended to undermine an experience the authorship was specifically designed to promote. The Kierkegaard of the authorship does not say or even allow that paradox in this sense can be overcome, but the items just mentioned establish beyond doubt that the real Kierkegaard conceived both Christianity and the life of belief as in principle logically coherent. This, indeed, he regarded as no less important than his other and much more explicit emphasis, viz. that any really new belief must first be accepted as a paradox. He knew that it was possible to achieve coherent belief, and that is precisely why he was prepared to lavish such exquisite care upon an authorship concerned mainly to describe and lead his reader to this state.

The preceding is important, but unfortunately it does not explain subsequent developments or much of Barth's relation to Kierkegaard. For

16. *Journals*, no. 1084. The crucial sentence is worthy of quotation: "While naturally it is a matter of course that for him who believes it is not the absurd."

17. The fragment in question is in answer to an objection urged by the theologian Magnus Eiriksson, and runs, in part, as follows: "When the believer believes the absurd is not the absurd—faith transforms it. . . . The passion of faith is the only thing capable of mastering the absurd. . . . In the category of the absurd rightly understood there is therefore absolutely nothing terrifying." (X<sup>6</sup> B 79). The quotation is from Cornelio Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," in H. A. Johnson and N. Thulstrup (eds.), *A Kierkegaard Critique*, pp. 182f. (cited below as *Critique*).

18. Cf. e.g.: "the Christian point of view," "(winning) through to faith," and "the sphere of faith." These particular phrases all occur in the unpublished fragment mentioned above, but they have many counterparts in both Kierkegaard's direct and pseudonymous writings.

19. See, especially, my paper, "Kierkegaard: 'Paradox' and Irrationalism" (note 3, above).

20. This view is also shared by Fabro. "In his unpublished answer to Theophilus, Kierkegaard, without ambiguity, defines his position, which may be summarized as follows: the object of faith is the absurd, the paradox, which is the inevitable cause of scandal, but only for whoever sees this object from the outside, i.e. for him who has no faith. . . . For the believer, for the man of faith, this object is neither absurd nor paradoxical. . . ." (*Critique*, p. 179).

this we must turn to the very different creature we have called the phantom Kierkegaard. He is a product of the critics, particularly the German ones, and can best be understood in this light. Very briefly, and in general terms, we may say that they interpreted Kierkegaard's conception of reason as mere logical capacity and conceived his rich and complex notion of paradox exclusively in terms of logical contradiction. They neglected the peculiar and well-advertised orientation of the authorship and hence failed to see the extent to which the would-be believer's experience of paradox was a function of the transition to belief. They neglected the distinctively poetic quality of this work and read it instead as a series of objective prose conclusions. The result was a new creation, a Kierkegaard who held that Christianity was itself logically contradictory and, indeed, in some sense true on that account. This, too briefly, is the story of the irrationalist Kierkegaard, the phantom figure who has haunted so much European thought in our century.

It is perhaps worth noting that this general interpretation dates almost from the beginning of the current Kierkegaard renaissance. Kierkegaard was first translated into German mainly by one Christoph Schrempf, a Lutheran pastor whose faith he had destroyed and who, in what was surely an act of vengeance and self-justification, represented him as a thoroughgoing fideist or irrationalist.<sup>21</sup> That interpretation has continued until the present. It is accepted by Brunner<sup>22</sup> and, with minor qualification, by Hermann Diem.<sup>23</sup> In the last analysis both see Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. So, I suggest, does Barth. Certainly this helps to explain both Barth's relation to Kierkegaard and, equally, his interpretation of that relation.

We have been forced to speak of three Kierkegaards and now it is necessary to distinguish as many Barths. Fortunately, however, the first does not concern us and the mere mention of it should suffice.

Both Barth<sup>24</sup> and many of his commentators<sup>25</sup> draw a sharp line between the first and the second editions of *The Epistle to the Romans*. They suggest that the first was written under the influence of Platonic idealism, while the second was an attack upon liberalism from a generally Kierkegaardian point of view. Personally, I am sceptical of this distinction and accept it

21. Schrempf's judgment concerning Kierkegaard is quite revealing: "He reduced Christianity *ad absurdum* and (against his will but quite conclusively) handed it over to the history of religion, which like all other history is nothing but archeology." This opinion is quoted in Theodore Haecker, *Søren Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 57.

22. Cf. e.g., Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 310, 376.

23. Hermann Diem, *Die Existenzdialektik von Søren Kierkegaard* (Zollikon/Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1950). (The English translation, by Harold Knight, appeared in 1959.) Diem has confessed that he can make no sense of Kierkegaard's remark: "While naturally it is a matter of course. . . ." (*Journals*, no. 1084).

24. See "Reveille," pp. 4f.

25. Cf. e.g., R. Bultmann, "Karl Barths 'Römerbrief' in Zweiter Auflage," in Jürgen Moltmann, (ed.), *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, I (Munich: Kaiser, 1962) pp. 119f.; Henri Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, 1, I (Paris: Aubier, 1957), pp. 17f.

for the moment only because it simplifies the present issue without in any way prejudicing it. Accordingly, I mention and set aside the Barth of the first edition of *Romans*. This leaves the Barth of the second and succeeding editions on the one hand and the Barth of the later and perhaps less familiar works on the other. Put another way, it leaves the Barth of the dialectical and of the quite different dogmatic theology. For obvious reasons, but without prejudice, I shall mark these as the early and the mature Barth. Each has his own distinctive attitude toward the Christian faith and, more particularly, toward its so-called paradoxical or contradictory character. This contrast is well illustrated in their quite different views of the Incarnation.

The position of the early Barth can be put most simply and helpfully by contrast with that of the real Kierkegaard. While not denying that reason is open to the entreaties of pride and self-interest, this Barth conceived it primarily as mere logical capacity and, in this connection, saw paradox as simple logical contradiction. Further, since he was not really concerned with the fact and significance of perspective, he failed to see the extent to which the would-be believer's experience of contradiction was actually a function of his transition to belief. Indeed, primarily concerned to answer the liberals of his day, and lacking Kierkegaard's supreme dialectical skill, he represented the paradox of Christianity as a real logical contradiction inherent in the very nature of that faith. This is borne out by the second edition (and indeed all the later editions) of *The Epistle to the Romans*. That work speaks freely of contradiction, absurdity, and paradox. It represents Christianity as paradoxical and absurd and speaks of the historical revelation of Christ as a "scandal."<sup>26</sup> It describes "the positive relation between God and man" alleged by Christianity as an "absolute paradox."<sup>27</sup> It speaks of the Messiahship as "sharply defined paradox" and says that as such it "is a matter of faith only."<sup>28</sup> It alleges that the paradox of faith is "unresolved and irresolvable."<sup>29</sup> Nor is the situation altered by the fact of belief. "Nor is the necessity of faith removed for the tension of the paradox remains without even the slightest easement."<sup>30</sup> Barth's description of the life of the believer is familiar and revealing. "He is what he is not; he knows what he does not know; he does what he cannot do. . . ."<sup>31</sup> In short, this Barth sees the acceptance of logical contradictions as a necessary feature of the life of faith.

26. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, E. C. Hoskyns (tr.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 276 (cited below as *Romans*). Note also the tone of the following: "Do we desire a test as to whether we have spoken rightly of the mission of the Son? Well, if we have not mightily offended every possible human method of investigation, and offended it at its most particularly sensitive spot, then assuredly we have spoken of—something else . . . and, since the mission of the Son of God is the divine reaction against sin, it can be described only in weighty negations, preached only in paradoxes, understood only as that absurdum which is, as such, incredible" (*Romans*, pp. 277f.).

27. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

In contrast, the mature Barth is not primarily concerned to attack his liberal opponents nor does he conceive of Christianity as a paradox. His fundamental concern is simply to describe and articulate the nature of Christian belief from the inside. His writings are explicitly and self-consciously from within the state of belief; they move within what might be called the Christocentric circle. Barth's own words support this account. He speaks repeatedly of his transition from dialectical to dogmatic thinking and, equally, of his movement from the theology of crisis or paradox to Christocentric theology. He distinguishes this latter period by its emphasis upon the rationality of faith and ascribes this insight to the influence and example of St. Anselm.<sup>32</sup>

These changes are particularly evident in his later treatment of the Incarnation. This event, which he had formerly described as absurd and paradoxical, he now refers to quite simply as the most natural of all natural events. This same conception pervades and, indeed, informs his *Church Dogmatics*. This expression could, in fact, be taken as typical of the approach and mood of that work. Barth's point is that the Christian must derive his conceptions of God and man not from natural theology but, quite simply and without prejudice, from the event or person of Jesus Christ. He holds that it is here that the Christian discovers the true nature of God and man. This is what makes the Incarnation "natural." Of course, Barth is not pretending to know how two allegedly incompatible essences were in fact once perfectly united. In any event, that is a question raised by, and perhaps best left to, historic theology. But he is insisting that one who truly believes will find the Incarnation and, equally, the other claims of faith conceptually intelligible. This is a fundamental feature of the mature or dogmatic Barth and distinguishes him sharply from his own earlier stage.

The preceding account of the various positions of these two men suggests that the relationship between them is at once more intimate and more involved than Barth supposes. Indeed, it reveals that at least certain of their positions are almost identical. These similarities are already apparent and it will suffice to name the two most important and obvious ones. At least in respect of the present crucial question, the position of the early Barth is identical with that of the phantom Kierkegaard. Similarly, the position of the mature Barth is identical with that of the real Kierkegaard. The significance of these resemblances may yet be in doubt, but their existence is obvious and scarcely open to dispute.

But, given the circumstances, such similarities are bound at least to suggest the possibility of influence. It is perhaps impossible to settle such matters conclusively, but it is at least necessary to consider the evidence.

The case of the early Barth is particularly difficult and his own comments are not always helpful. In his recent address he ascribes the changes

32. Cf. K. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960).

in the second edition of *Romans* to the influence of Kierkegaard,<sup>33</sup> this, of course, is in keeping with the view that there is a sharp distinction between this and the first edition. But his own earlier comments suggest something quite different. In his "Preface to the Second Edition," for example, he is clearly anxious to deny any such influence; indeed, he seems overly anxious to do so. His explanation of the changes from the first edition expressly depreciates the influence of Kierkegaard and, incidentally, Dostoevsky.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in this account he refers to Kierkegaard only parenthetically and says that his attention was restricted to what was "of importance for the interpretation of the New Testament."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless it is doubtful if this is the whole of the story; certainly the evidence suggests that Kierkegaard's influence was much more significant. Read or not, Kierkegaard was already widely known and discussed in German theological circles. His name appears on the first page of *Romans*.<sup>36</sup> and there are in fact more references to him than to Overbeck, whom Barth is careful to praise explicitly. And, though Barth tends to depreciate Kierkegaard's influence, he does not altogether deny it. In his recently published address he makes many concessions in this direction; he says, for example, that from 1919 onwards "he appeared in an important role in my literary utterances."<sup>37</sup> In fact, he had conceded this possibility even earlier. In the "Preface to the Fifth Edition" he asks (presumably because someone else had already asked): "Have they (my readers) been presented with what is really no more than a rehash, resurrected out of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Cohen?"<sup>38</sup> And, though this point is merely of passing interest, apparently this influence extends even to the first edition. This is suggested in the recent address and by Barth's use of the word "more" with reference to changes in the second edition.<sup>39</sup> It is also suggested by his answer to the charge that he had there imposed his system upon the text: "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. . . ."<sup>40</sup> But the question whether or not this influence actually extends to the first edition may be left to one side; in any event, it is present in the second. This edition is in fact fundamentally characterized by its insistence upon the absurd or paradoxical character of Christianity, a doctrine which was virtually identified with Kierkegaard. This, together with his own admissions, seems ample warrant for the claim that at least in this important respect the early Barth was under the influence of what we have called the phantom Kierkegaard.

33. Cf. "Reveille," pp. 4f.

34. Cf. *Romans*, p. 4.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

37. "Reveille," p. 4.

38. *Romans*, p. 22.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

In the more interesting and important case of the mature Barth the evidence appears to point in the opposite direction. At least, all the obvious evidence appears to do so. Indeed, it might even be argued that any such influence is simply out of the question. Barth appears to accept the irrationalist interpretation of Kierkegaard. He seems quite unaware that Kierkegaard had perceived the incompatibility between the experience of paradox and the state of real belief. He quite explicitly represents his later work as an advance upon Kierkegaard. And he freely acknowledges that his late "rationality-of-faith" emphasis derives from Anselm. All these facts seem to tell against the supposition that the mature Barth was in any way influenced by the real Kierkegaard.

But of course there is negative as well as positive influence. The mature Barth may be in part a reaction to the phantom Kierkegaard; this is at least consistent with the known facts. But (a different point) it is also possible to interpret at least some of these facts in a quite different way. It is possible to see Barth's rather ostentatious gratitude to Anselm as a stressing of one connection in order to underplay another. It is possible to wonder if the Barth who saw that faith must be coherent could really doubt that his no less perceptive predecessor could have failed to see this as well. And it is difficult not to feel that Barth's persistent habit of representing himself and his work as an advance upon Kierkegaard may be a way of allaying his own suspicion that he is in fact indebted to his predecessor. Personally, I think that the mature Barth was thus indebted but this must be, in the final analysis, mere conjecture. What is both more certain and more important is that Kierkegaard actually anticipated both of Barth's major positions and that he did so by almost a hundred years.

Thus far we have focussed our attention upon a shift in Barth's theological position. We now move to a more conjectural region to note another and parallel change which is perhaps equally revealing. This is his shift of style—if, indeed, that phrase adequately marks the differences between the works of these two periods. *The Epistle to the Romans* will again serve as an example of the early period. The style of this work is contorted, strained and tense—and, let it be admitted, this is part of its peculiar energy and strength. The works of the mature Barth have a very different style and their power is of a quite different kind. Allowing for the naturally ponderous character of the German language, they have an easy force and majesty. They remind one of the easy strides of a giant moving across empty spaces. More than anything else, they give the impression of a man who has just been liberated. Barth's implied explanation is that this change is due to a deeper experience of the gospel and, at another level, the influence of Anselm. No doubt there is much in these explanations, but the story of such changes is usually complex, and the preceding considerations suggest a further though not incompatible possibility. They suggest that the early Barth was haunted by the ghost of Kierkegaard, and that in his writings

he was enthralled by this fictitious being. By the same token, they suggest that the mature Barth has emerged from this spell and, doing so, has at last found his own true and authentic voice. There is what may be considered an indirect confirmation of this in a comment by Barth in 1932: "When, however, I look back at the book, it seems to have been written by another man to meet a situation belonging to a past epoch."<sup>41</sup> This quotation plainly and rightly stresses the importance of the original historical situation, but it also shows that Barth now sees himself as a different man. It says that there has been a change and, perhaps, a liberation. To this it is necessary to add but one thing. Though this liberation was extremely important in Barth's development, the Kierkegaard from whom he was liberated (if this is indeed the right way of putting the matter) was a phantom and not the real thing.

It is a not inconsiderable merit of this hypothesis that it helps to explain Barth's extremely ambiguous and surely otherwise puzzling attitude toward Kierkegaard. I say "puzzling" because the two are sufficiently close on a number of important matters for one to expect Barth to be at least sympathetic toward his predecessor. In fact, his attitude is reserved and at times almost hostile. Though this is not obvious in his major works, it emerges in his conversation and is only beneath the surface in his recent address. It appears in his tendency to play down the influence of Kierkegaard upon *Romans*, in his neglect of the obvious similarities between Kierkegaard's views and his own, and in his frequent presentation of himself as an advance upon Kierkegaard. It is apparent in his tendency to discourage others from working on and defending Kierkegaard and, equally, in his own abandonment of a book on Kierkegaard upon which he was once working. Most obviously, it appears in the complete omission of any reference to Kierkegaard in his fairly recent historical work *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*.<sup>42</sup> Such facts and the attitude they reflect cannot, we think, be adequately explained by the fact, which even innocent misinterpretation cannot wholly hide, that Kierkegaard anticipated in principle at least both of Barth's major positions. To explain them we need to assume something like an early bewitchment with and subsequent liberation from the phantom Kierkegaard, together, of course, with the resentment which normally accompanies such experiences. This may or may not be the correct explanation, but the ambiguity and hostility remain, and this means that the relationship is more complex and involved than Barth's very simple version allows.

The preceding must surely raise doubts about Barth's claim to have gone beyond Kierkegaard. This is not simply because, as we have said, Kierkegaard also recognized that theology must be written from inside the faith. Fundamentally it is because, like many of the critics, Barth has seriously misinterpreted much of Kierkegaard's work. He did not see that for

41. *Ibid.*, p. vi.

42. Zollikon/Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947.

Kierkegaard the reason is related to the total life of man, and hence did not appreciate the richness and variety in his conception of paradox. He thus missed some of the more interesting points Kierkegaard intended to make with this conception and, no less unfortunately, read him as advocating belief in what is itself logically contradictory. He did not understand or appreciate Kierkegaard's concern with the process of coming to believe, and so failed to see the extent to which the believer's experience of paradox was a function of this process. He did not see, or at least did not accept, the significance of Kierkegaard's claim that Christianity is primarily an existence-communication. These are all serious misinterpretations and, at least so far as these matters are concerned, it is tempting to suggest that, far from having gone beyond Kierkegaard, he has not even caught up to him. But one thing at least is clear. Long before Barth, Kierkegaard saw quite clearly both that coming to believe involved the acceptance of a paradox and that real belief involved the revision of our conceptions and the consequent disappearance of the paradox. It was Kierkegaard who first made this double point and it would be a shame if a continued misreading of his works and intentions were to deprive him of the honour of this discovery.

These same facts raise doubts concerning Barth's further claim that theology should abandon its preoccupation with Kierkegaard in favour of the lines he himself has indicated. The verdict implicit in this account can be put very simply. Despite its obvious difficulties, Kierkegaard's conception of paradox contains in miniature both a radical anthropology and an extremely perceptive account of the transition to, and the nature of, real belief. Rightly understood, it represents a valuable and permanent contribution to our understanding of these subjects. But Barth does much less than justice to its various insights. Indeed, having misinterpreted Kierkegaard's conception, he took his lead from the admirable but psychologically less sophisticated Anselm. Hence, while he sees that real belief involves moving beyond the experience of paradox, he fails to take account of the other points contained in this conception. These, however, are equally important, and it is doubtful indeed if theology ought to proceed until she has assimilated all of Kierkegaard's lessons.