

Barth in Conversation

Volume 1, 1959–1962

Edited by Eberhard Busch

Translated by

The Translation Fellows of the Center for Barth Studies
Princeton Theological Seminary

Karlfried Froehlich, German Editor

Darrell L. Guder, English Editor

David C. Chao, Project Manager

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Translators' Foreword

The three volumes of Barth's "Conversations" in the German Gesamtausgabe [Collected Works] provide an unusual and enriching encounter with the person and thinking of Karl Barth. These edited collections of diverse encounters with Barth were the work of Professor Dr. Eberhard Busch, already well known as Barth's biographer. They were one of the outcomes of years of work at the University of Göttingen, where Busch was Professor of Reformed Theology (the chair that Barth inaugurated in 1921). With the assistance of his students, he painstakingly assembled, edited, and annotated these accounts. The result is a highly readable experience of Barth in retirement. He was sought by a great diversity of groups and individuals and often joined them at the Restaurant Bruderholz not far from his home in the Basel neighborhood of that name. In these discussions, we see how Barth's vast theological project actually works, how it translates into concrete contexts, and how it remains a living, dynamic process, with profoundly important trajectories for the thought and practice of the Christian church.

The translation of the *Conversations* is a project of the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. From its inception in the mid-1990s, under the leadership of then Director of the Princeton Seminary Library, Dr. Stephen Crocco, the faculty affiliated with the Center had discussed the challenges of expanding the English translations of Barth's works. Linked to the daunting challenge of such expansion of the English Barth library was the issue of reliable translations. Without in any way diluting our gratitude for the English edition of the *Church Dogmatics*, there were growing concerns about some aspects of that massive project. It was becoming clear that challenging issues were to be confronted with regard to terminology, consistency, accuracy, and stylistic appropriateness. More and more scholars found themselves revising citations from the English edition in order to make points that were congruent with the German text. To foster a higher standard of translation and to encourage expanded translation efforts, the Center for Barth Studies decided to invite a small group of Barth scholars interested in translation issues to meet and work on texts together. The first group gathered in June of 2007, immediately after the annual Barth Studies Conference on campus.

The experience of working together on translation issues proved to be stimulating and rewarding. This small group of avid Barth readers had a solid interest in meeting annually to explore ways to improve the general quality of Barth translation as well as to do actual translation projects as a group. To carry out the first objective, the group began to develop a "glossary" for Barth

translations, in which we noted, among other things, our agreement on how certain distinctive terms in Barth's vocabulary might be translated. The group was mentored by Karlfried Froehlich, emeritus professor of church history at Princeton, who is not only a native German speaker but also studied under Barth in Basel. His role has been to interpret the nuances and often complex allusions of the German text so that a resulting English rendition reliably captures the syntax, content, and mood of the German original.

At its first gathering, the group experimented with the translation of Barth's "conversations" in the first of three volumes in the Collected Works with that title: *Gespräche*. The advantage of this volume was that the various documents or chapters could be assigned to different translators. The annual meeting in June was then used as an opportunity for each translator to present challenges and questions that emerged from the actual task of translating texts. For discussion in the meeting, each participant prepared a segment of a current assignment. The sessions proved to be extraordinarily productive, not only in terms of the quality of each translated "conversation," but also as a training process focused on the improvement of translation skills. In 2013 a doctoral student at Princeton, David Chao, joined the project as its program manager. He brought with him not only expertise as an academic theologian and great skill with the computer technology needed to carry out the project. He also had several years of experience in academic publishing as an acquisitions editor. Chao has organized the project, set up systems for tracking the process of translating and editing each segment, and brought the project to a place where publication has become a real possibility. He has facilitated the formulation of policies and practices for "fellows" of the Center for Barth Studies, working out procedures for submission of assigned texts and their editing process. Also beginning in 2013, Kait Dugan, Curator of the Center for Barth Studies, has been instrumental in developing the fellows program through providing institutional support and funding.

The production of this volume has thus gone through several steps: Initial translation by a fellow, review of representative excerpts from the translated text at the annual meeting, critical review of all translations by Professor Froehlich as a multilingual native German speaker, with attention to the faithfulness and accuracy in rendering the German into English, and final editing by Professor Darrell Guder as a bilingual native English speaker, with attention to the quality of the English-language version.

The texts reproduce conversations, not carefully drafted and formulated lectures. The speech is idiomatic and not literary. There are sentence fragments and interjections as a normal part of conversations. In some instances, the German editors have reconstructed the text from cursory notes prepared for a conversation or taken down in the course of a conversation. Square brackets are used by the German editors to indicate such editorial emendations. In most cases we have integrated these clarifications into the translation but have continued the use of square brackets to indicate material that the translator has added to enhance understandability. The annotations of the German original have all been translated, making this volume a valuable resource for study of a great range of themes in Barth's theological project. There are several conversations or presentations that took place originally in English or French. In

the German edition, these were translated into German and then annotated. In this volume, the original English text is provided, the French is translated into English, and the annotations have been incorporated. The English originals were also conversational and not carefully written-out lecture texts. Thus at times the English is quite idiomatic and evidences the typical problems of spoken English. Citations from the *Church Dogmatics (CD)* are given first in the English edition, followed by the reference (*KD*) to the German original, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Where possible, English editions of cited German resources are provided in the footnotes.

Our appreciation for the work done by the original German editors, Professor Busch and his students, has grown as we have engaged these documents. They have created a wealth of scholarship that is a great enrichment of the Barth legacy. It is the hope of the fellows of the Center for Barth Studies that the availability of this resource in English will enhance the serious engagement of Karl Barth's theological legacy, building on the excellent work of our German and Swiss colleagues.

Karlfried Froehlich
Darrell Guder
Princeton Theological Seminary
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