



# A skirmish in the early reception of Karl Barth in Scotland: The exchange between Thomas F. Torrance and Brand Blanshard

*Edited by Iain and Morag Torrance*

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The name of Brand Blanshard may not be as familiar today as it once was. Blanshard was one of the greatest American philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century. Born in Fredericksburg, Ohio in August 1892, Blanshard was the son of a Congregational minister. He studied first at the University of Michigan, and then won a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford, where he was taught by H. W. B. Joseph and met F. H. Bradley and T. S. Eliot. He gained a doctorate at Harvard, taught at Swarthmore College 1925–44 and then at Yale until he retired in 1961. He died in 1987. Blanshard is often regarded as the last of the great ‘absolute idealists’, and his study *The Nature of Thought*<sup>1</sup> was recommended to the second year class in Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh in the 1960s when the set text was F. H. Bradley’s *The Principles of Logic*. In 1952, Blanshard delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of St Andrews.

The daily newspaper *The Scotsman* reported on the Gifford Lectures and ran a short article noting that Blanshard had indulged in a swipe against Karl Barth. This was too much for Thomas F. Torrance, at that point still Professor of Church History at New College,<sup>2</sup> to swallow without a response. A theological argument followed, which *The Scotsman* was kind enough to publish in full, day after day, throughout April 1952.<sup>3</sup>

There follow the initial report of Brand Blanshard’s comments, and then the exchange of letters.



Report in *The Scotsman*, April 11, 1952, p. 6

**“THEOLOGY OF CRISIS”**  
**Professor Blanshard resumes Gifford Lectures**

Professor Brand Blanshard, Yale University, resumed his series of Gifford Lectures at St Andrews University last night with a statement and criticism of the new “theology of crisis.” The leaders of the movement are the theologians, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, both of whom have themselves delivered Gifford lectures in recent years, Barth at Aberdeen and Brunner at St Andrews.

The new theology, Professor Blanshard said, owed its attractiveness to its very bold strategy. Faith was not to be achieved by thought or any other sort of effort on our part; it was the result of a “divine encounter,” a one-way transaction in which God Himself descended into the human spirit.

Because they were so sure that faith was beyond the reach of reason, Barth and Brunner accepted undisturbed the results of scientific criticism. They could admit that the Scripture was full of errors, and that in the long struggle of theology with science, science had been generally right. They could hold this because they believed that faith provided an insight of its own, different from that of reason, and above it. Unfortunately, when we tried to learn from them what it was that the insight disclosed, we got most unsatisfying answers. Barth and Brunner, like their master, Kierkegaard, revelled in paradoxes. Indeed, they represented God as being so completely “other” that He almost disappeared; we were supposed to believe things about Him that, by our standards, were self-contradictory, and ascribe actions to Him that our moral sense could only regard as evil.

Professor Blanshard considered that this attempt to save religious faith by making it irrational was disastrous. The probable effect upon thoughtful men of asking that they believe the incredible would be the repudiation of faith altogether. If

revelation occurred, it must come through our human faculties and share the strength and weakness of these faculties.



### **Letter from Torrance**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 14, 1952, p. 4

### **Theology of Karl Barth**

New College, University of Edinburgh,  
April 11, 1952

SIR,—I have read with astonishment the account in your columns of the recent Gifford Lecture in St Andrews, in which Professor Brand Blanshard is reported as describing the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner as the “theology of crisis” and criticising it as “this attempt to save religious faith by making it irrational.” It seems difficult to believe that a philosopher as great as Professor Blanshard should still perpetrate this antiquated blunder and be so plainly unaware of the writings of these Swiss theologians.

A more rational and responsible evaluation has recently been given by the Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who regards Karl Barth as the greatest protagonist of the Protestant Church and who pleads with the Roman Church to take their measure of him in the most serious way.

In his recent work, “Karl Barth, Deutung und Darstellung seiner Theologie,” von Balthasar takes careful account of the development of Barth’s theology, which falls into three main stages: 1, The early period reaching its climax with the first edition of his “Romans” in 1918, when he was still under the influence of the idealist philosophy; 2, the nineteen-twenties, which saw a thorough revision of his “Romans” and the first volume of his projected Dogmatics when Barth had come under the influence of Kierkegaard and his theology became dialectical and realist; 3, at the end of that decade,

however, came the really decisive change when, in his study of Anselm, Barth swept aside the language of Kierkegaard and existentialism and emerged, as he said, out of his egg-shells.

Ever since then the theology of Barth has been the theology of analogy in which Christology plays the dominant rôle. It is more than thirty years ago since that important change took place, and all the enormous volumes of his “Kirchliche Dogmatik” have been published since then. These are the volumes in which Barth has taken issue in the most massive way with the theology of Rome, and from which von Balthasar has admittedly learned so much. It is a pitiful tragedy, however, that the American philosopher has not apparently peered beyond the egg-shells of the young Swiss thinker!

One would like to recommend Professor Blanshard at least to read Karl Barth’s study of Anselm, “Fides Quaerens Intellectum,” published in 1931. In that little volume we are given a clear account of Professor Barth’s teaching about the relation between faith and reason which informs the whole of his dogmatic theology. There Barth holds to the basic point that reason is unconditionally bound to its object and determined by it, and that the nature of the object must prescribe the specific mode of the activity of reason. Faith is this reason directed to the knowledge of God, and involves a rational apprehension which answers appropriately to the object given. Here the object is unique and incomparable. What is expected of theology, therefore, is that it should exhibit the kind of rationality which corresponds with this unique object of thought. This is, in fact, the rational objectivity which characterises faith, and which utterly repudiates that *salto mortale*, the sacrifice of the intellect.

That the Gifford lecturer should attribute to Karl Barth a view which all his writings for thirty years have resolutely opposed is particularly surprising to-day when Barth stands out in Europe as the great protagonist against irrationalism, and against existentialism which, particularly in the hands of a new school of interpreters, headed by Professor Rudolf Bultmann,

of Marburg, is producing a radical reinterpretation of the Bible that we can only regard as a menace to the Christian Gospel.—I am & c.

(PROFESSOR) T. F. TORRANCE.



### **Letter from Blanshard**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 16, 1952, p. 6

### **Theology of Karl Barth**

The University of St Andrews,  
April 14, 1952

SIR,—Professor Torrance has expressed “astonishment” that in one of my Gifford lectures at St Andrews I should have described the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner as an irrationalist theology. His astonishment can hardly be greater than mine when I find this description denied.

The best way, of course, is to go to the writings of these men and read their own words. Let me cite a few of them. First a few from various books by Brunner: “Revealed knowledge is poles apart from rational knowledge. These two forms of knowledge are as far apart as heaven is from hell.” “Biblical and natural theology will never agree; they are bitterly and fundamentally opposed.” (“Revelation and Reason,” 16, 65.) “*The* theological problem as well as *the* Church problem is this – to deliver modern man and the modernised Church from the illegitimate self-sufficiency of reason ...” (“The Word and the World,” 126.) “Of the truth of God it must ever be said, since it is God’s truth, that it is foolishness unto human reason.” “This pride, this claim of reason to be the court of last appeal, the superior judge of truth, constitutes sin; it is the heart of sin.” (“Theology of Crisis,” 43.) Incidentally, Professor Torrance expresses surprise that I should have referred to this school as “the theology of crisis”; the phrase is Brunner’s own

description, and the title of one of his books. Such expressions as the above could be multiplied many times from Brunner's writings.

Barth is, if anything, more extreme than Brunner. He began his Gifford lectures by repudiating the very possibility of a rational knowledge of God through natural theology. "I certainly see – with astonishment – that such a science as Lord Gifford has in mind does exist, but I do not see how it is possible for it to exist. I am convinced that so far as it has existed, and still exists, it owes its existence to a radical error ... it cannot really be the business of a Reformed theologian to raise so much as his little finger to support this undertaking in any positive way" (5–6.) Again, "It is forced down my throat that the Dogmatic theologian is under the obligation to 'justify' himself in his utterances before philosophy. To that my answer is likewise 'No.' ... Dogmatics runs counter to every philosophy, no matter what form it may have assumed ... our activities of thinking and speaking ... cannot possibly coincide with the truth of God ..." ("Credo," 185–6.) Professor Torrance will recall that Barth's famous break with Brunner was largely on the ground that Brunner had shown a weakness for natural theology, while he, Barth, thought it should be treated with contempt and scorn. "If you really reject natural theology, you don't stand and stare at the snake while you let it stare you down in return, hypnotise you, and then bite you: when you see it, you take a stick to it and kill it." ("*Nein! Antwort an Brunner,*" 13; my translation.)

If statements like this do not justify calling a man an anti-rationalist, it is hard to conceive what would. Professor Torrance suggests that Barth's anti-rationalism belongs to an earlier stage that he has long out-grown, and refers to a work of 1931 as giving his mature opinion. But every quotation I have made from him is subsequent to that date.

When Professor Torrance describes Barth as a defender of reason, he can only be using "reason" with a special meaning and a very different meaning from that of the philosophers.

He thinks it enough if he shows that faith for Barth “involves a rational apprehension which answers approximately to the object given.” But what if “the object given” – namely, God – is taken as “the absolutely other,” which defies all the categories of natural reason? To “answer appropriately” to such an object, reason, as we know it, must simply die and be born again as something else. If one claims to believe in reason, it should surely mean the reason used in common-sense and science, for example, the science of natural theology. Barth maintains that God stands over against such reason as utterly and hopelessly impenetrable. That, to me and, I think, to most philosophers, is what irrationalism means.—I am &c.

BRAND BLANSHARD.



**Letter from Rev. D. W. Greenfield**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 18, 1952, p. 4

**Theology of Karl Barth**

34 Warrender Park Terrace, Edinburgh.

April 16, 1952

SIR,—Kingsley asked on a memorable occasion, “What, then, does Father Newman mean?” The answer was the “Apologia.” Barth’s reply to such a question would certainly lack that clarity which we associate with the great cardinal, and therefore it is not perhaps surprising that Professor Blanshard and Professor Torrance should have understood him differently. They are not alone in that.

To the uninstructed, however, it may seem that the professors are arguing at cross purposes. Professor Blanshard appears to accuse Barth and his school of “irrationalism”; but by “irrationalism” he only means that Barth denies that a knowledge of God can be obtained by the reason used “in commonsense and science.”

But if in this sense Barth is “irrational” he stands in good company. I can think at the moment of no considerable theologian who believed that the whole truth of God could be reached by reason. Even the English deists accepted revelation, and the distinction which St Thomas Aquinas draws between natural and revealed religion is well known. Barth stands in the succession of all theologians, Reformed and Roman, in his assertion that salvation is of faith.

It is true that Barth in denying that there is any place for “natural religion” goes further than many theologians. Yet the comparative sterility of Gifford lectureships, of which complaint was recently made in your correspondence, seems to show that “commonsense” helps us little towards our knowledge of God. Indeed, all the work of the very distinguished thinkers who have lectured under this foundation amounts to nothing more than a prolegomenon to Christian theology.

We may go further and say that even the scientist and the philosopher, no less than the poet or the artist, are “irrational.” As has been often pointed out, most of the greatest discoveries have been due to a *saltus fidei*.

It appears to all come down to a use of terms, and the question would rather appear to be, “Canst thou by searching find out God?”—I am &c.

(Rev.) DAVID W. GREENFIELD.



### **Letter from Torrance**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 19, 1952, p. 6

### **Theology of Karl Barth**

New College, University of Edinburgh,  
April 18, 1952

SIR,—I should like to thank Professor Blanshard for taking the trouble in the midst of his Gifford Lectures to reply to my letter.



It is clear that his charge of anti-rationalism against the theology of Karl Barth involves a particular view of reason, but he cannot claim that it is a view generally accepted by philosophers to-day, by Professor MacKinnon or Professor Ryle, for example. There are, however, three distinct if inseparable issues which should be laid bare.

1. A philosophical issue between an idealist view of reason, and a realist and critical view. Philosophically, Karl Barth stands within the European tradition of critical philosophy, of which his brother Heinrich Barth, Professor of Metaphysics in the University of Basel, is perhaps the most distinguished representative on the Continent. With him Karl Barth is in profound agreement.

But to come to this university, Professor John Macmurray, like Heinrich and Karl Barth, is concerned to point philosophy and theology away from a substantial to a functional view of reason, and when he says that “reason is the capacity to behave in terms of the nature of the object, that is to say, to behave objectively,” he is using language almost identical with that of Karl Barth – and no one would surely wish to call Professor Macmurray an anti-rationalist!

Against this view Professor Blanshard appears to think of reason as behaving in terms of its own nature, in terms of the categories of its own understanding. It is against that autonomous, self-sufficient reason, reason turned in upon itself, that the citations from Professor Emil Brunner given by Professor Blanshard are directed. That is, they are directed not against reason as such, but against a diseased “rationalism.” Professor Karl Barth prefers to call this “heresy” (in the literal Greek sense of the word) as the self-willed reason that chooses to go its own way and refuses to be determined by its object. Far from being anti-rational, this is to champion reason against an irrational subjectivism.

No doubt it is true, as Mr Greenfield points out to-day, that Professor Blanshard and I are arguing at cross purposes, to a certain extent at any rate, though the very citations Professor

Blanshard has made from both Barth and Brunner and the use he makes of them indicate a very superficial and indeed a mistaken reading of these theologians.

2. A scientific issue. It is surely an elementary principle of science that the nature of the object must prescribe the specific mode of the activity of reason, and that reason must answer appropriately to the object given. It would be utterly unscientific and irrational, for example, to transpose into the study of living organisms the specific mode of rational activity that obtains in the study of physics and the particular categories that arise in that connection. That is why Karl Barth insists that the theologian must pursue his theological science without seeking to justify his undertaking before the bar of natural science or philosophy or the so-called natural reason, for it would be quite unscientific and irrational in theological science, where we are concerned with God as the object of knowledge, for reason to behave either in terms of its own nature or in terms of some other object alien to that particular field of study.

What theology demands, therefore, declares Karl Barth, is a ruthless scientific criticism of the activity of reason and of the reasoner himself to ensure that here in theological science he is behaving rationally, that is, that here his reason is conforming properly and obediently to the object given. All science, be it theology or physics, is characterised by humility and a readiness for the most ruthless self-criticism. That is precisely why Barth is so critical of rational activity in theology, in order to be as rational and responsible as possible.

It is because Karl Barth has carried this ruthless, scientific criticism throughout the whole of his “Kirchliche Dogmatik” that scientists in other fields are showing such increasing interest in and understanding of his work, not least those in the natural sciences – see the letter by an American physicist from the University of Minnesota published in the “Kirchenblatt” (Basel), March 27.

3. A religious issue. The great difference between theological and natural science concerns the difference in the nature of the object. The object of theological knowledge is God infinite and eternal, “always Subject.” As Barth puts it, not “the absolutely other” (a notion which Barth cast away many years ago), but the living God who gives Himself to us and reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, and summons us to obedient conformity to Him. In Christian theology, therefore, reason is summoned to behave in terms of Jesus Christ, or as the New Testament puts it, to conform to His image in love.

Here the ruthless criticism, mentioned above, is spoken of as self-denial and taking up of the Cross, and that ruthless criticism is directed toward the theologian and his rational activity to insure that he behaves consciously in terms of the nature of the object, i.e., that he is obedient to the living Christ.

It is here, of course, that the Christian doctrine of sin enters in, for sin is self-will, the attempt of reason to behave in terms of itself and its own norms instead of behaving in terms of the love of Christ. It is understandable that the autonomous reason should here be “offended” at the Cross, and that the preaching of the Cross should be “foolishness” to him.

If that is the real reason why Professor Blanshard calls Karl Barth’s view of reason anti-rationalism, then it is clear that the real issue does not lie between Blanshard and Barth, but between Blanshard and the Christian Gospel. But even apart from this offence at the Cross which makes foolish the wisdom of this world, as St Paul puts it, surely it would be a highly unscientific and irrational way for reason to behave if when directed to know the living God it refused to answer appropriately to His Self-revelation, but insisted instead that God must conform to the categories that reason had acquired elsewhere in “common sense and science.”—I am &c.

THOMAS F. TORRANCE.



## **Letter from Blanshard**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 22, 1952, p. 6

### **Theology of Karl Barth**

University of St Andrews,  
April 20, 1952

SIR,—Professor Torrance’s courteous letter of April 19 suggests that the issue between us over the “theology of crisis” is a very complex one. It seems to me quite simple.

The question is whether Brunner and Barth are to be called anti-rationalists. I hold that they are, on the ground that both have over and over again, and in the most explicit terms, denied that the standards of natural reason, the reason used by scientists and philosophers, are valid for the knowledge of God. Professor Torrance agrees that they deny this, but thinks this insufficient to justify the name of anti-rationalist. They really believe in reason, he says, if only we take “reason” broadly enough. What is the broader meaning he proposes? It is conformity to the object. Since Barth and Brunner believe that the mind can in some sense conform to God, they may be said to believe in a rational knowledge of Him.

Now with all respect to an able theologian, I think this is juggling with words. That Brunner and Barth do believe in such conformity I agree. But whether it should be called rational or not depends on the nature of the object conformed to. If that object requires that, to conform to it, we must accept both sides of a contradiction, to call such conformity “rational knowledge” seems to me perverse. And yet that is precisely what conformity does require by those authors’ explicit admission. Brunner says that at some points the teaching he accepts, “regarded purely from the theological and intellectual point of view, is an irreconcilable contradiction.” And Barth insists that our thinking “cannot possibly coincide with the truth of God.” Now to describe as “rational” a kind of

knowledge that to our natural reason is not only unintelligible but self-contradictory, is to empty the word of all its normal meaning. The reason whose competence Barth and Brunner are here denying is not reason in some technical sense, the reason, for example, of certain schools of philosophy; it is the reason every man does and must use if he is to think coherently at all.

Furthermore, if mere conformity to an object is enough to make our response to it rational, we should have to rewrite the theory of knowledge. We should have to include as rational knowledge the ineffable *rapport* of the mystic, the Buddhists's absorption in Nirvana, the musician's response to an aria, and, I suppose, the child's response to a command. Even Schopenhauer's irrationalism, since it provided for an adjustment to the irrational Will would, so far, be a form of rationalism. This is stretching a meaning beyond the breaking point.

And what is to be gained by so stretching it? You will never convince the philosopher by these verbal conjurings that Barth and Brunner really believe in reason as he does, and you are likely to lose the support of others. The new theology has made its way largely because of its boldness in repudiating reason openly. Instead of trying to meet philosophy and science on their own grounds, as liberal theology did, it has sought to turn the tables on them by rejecting the authority of their rational standards in the field of religion. This was a courageous move which, whether sound or not, did give some hope of keeping the rationalists at bay. But to offer the Barth-Brunner theology to philosophers as a rational account of things is to invite them to swarm down on you like devouring locusts. And Professor Torrance will agree with me that they may be a dreadful pest.—I am &c.

BRAND BLANSHARD.



## Letter from Torrance

published in *The Scotsman*, April 23, 1952, p. 6

### Theology of Karl Barth

New College, University of Edinburgh,  
April 22, 1952

SIR,—It is increasingly clear from Professor Blanshard's good-natured replies to my criticisms that the issue between us is not a simple one, as he maintains, but involves the whole philosophical debate of modern times, particularly since Wilhelm Dilthey, about the relation between knowing and being, thinking and acting, logic and history.

Professor Blanshard still maintains apparently the old idealist view of a natural reason which exists independently of the objectively given world and which bears within itself the condition of understanding the truth (and naïvely assumes that every other philosopher agrees with him!), but this is the very view which has been subjected to such devastating criticism by modern metaphysics and science (as well as by theologians like Barth and Brunner) on the ground that it fails utterly to meet critical metaphysics and science on their own grounds.

The very fact that my criticisms appear to him only like a “juggling with words” shows that Professor Blanshard sits so securely in his idealist parlour that real argument with him is hardly possible, except on his own idealist presuppositions. Otherwise one can only call in question his whole philosophy. That, of course, is not possible to do here, even if it be in the columns of a daily newspaper of the dignity and culture of *The Scotsman*, but there are several points that require further clarification.

Long ago, in Edinburgh University, David Hume, in his “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,” taught us to observe the distinction between ectypal and archetypal analogy when he protested against projecting into theology the ectypal analogies drawn from the world of nature as though

they were archetypal. That is precisely the protest that Karl Barth has raised in the whole field of natural theology. For him the objective revelation of God in the historical Christ is archetypal and governs all our theological analogies, though ectypal analogies may be drawn from the world of nature to articulate faith but not to construct it.

A volume of Hume's "Dialogues" was first thrust into my hands when I was a student by Professor Norman Kemp Smith with the remark that it would destroy a lot of bad theology! If only David Hume could be resurrected and brought back as a Gifford Lecturer!

Further, what does Professor Blanshard mean by "mere conformity to an object"? In his discussion of Anselm's "faith seeking to understand the Truth," Karl Barth points out that the rationality of faith involves a three-fold ratio, in the rational experience of faith, in the rational conformity of faith to its object, and in the ratio of the Truth itself which is fundamental. That is the view which Barth took over from Anselm and it needs no commentary to bring out the radical misinterpretation of Barth's teaching here shown by Professor Blanshard's letters.

The great difficulty about theological knowledge is its bi-polar character: that knowledge of God must be expressed in terms of what it is not. That bi-polar character is nowhere more evident than in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and of the knowledge of God not as He is in Himself but in the form of Man, in Jesus Christ who is both God and Man. It was because they were anxious to face that fact honestly (to behave consciously in terms of the nature of the object!) that Barth and Brunner became dialectical theologians.

That did not mean that "they accepted both sides of a contradiction," as Professor Blanshard mistakenly assumes, but that they recognised the importance and depth of paradox in the human expression of the truth and that they were prepared to say "yes" and "no" at crucial points of an issue where a scholastic distinction would falsify the truth and where a logical synthesis would only force an abortive unity

against the facts. As theologians neither was content to remain “dialectical,” and it is many years now since that stage was left behind. Brunner moved back in a scholastic direction in the drawing of distinctions, but for Barth progress has been different. His massive mind has refused to allow the distinctions of expression to have the same depth, and depth in being, that they are allowed with Brunner, for they do not correspond to distinctions in reality – e.g., the distinction between revelation in creation and revelation through the Word. Accordingly Karl Barth has sought to evolve a new method of theological exposition in which, while seeking out in Anselmian fashion the full rationality of faith in obedience to the Truth, he tries to formulate and communicate it as a whole. That is why the “Kirchliche Dogmatik” has become so enormous in bulk.

Throughout all this rational theological activity Barth is acutely aware of what Professor Dorothy Emmet has called the “analogical relation to the Transcendent” – the fact that the nature of God is such that He always transcends the concepts and analogies in terms of which we seek to articulate our faith in Him. That is what Anselm called *humilis sapientia*, which he opposed to the *insipiens superbia* of the reason which has never learned to wonder.—I am &c.

THOMAS F. TORRANCE.



### **Letter from Blanshard**

published in *The Scotsman*, April 30, 1952, p. 6

### **Theology of Crisis**

University of St Andrews,  
April 28, 1952

SIR,—In several long letters published in your columns, Professor Torrance has taken me to task for calling the theologians Brunner and Barth irrationalists. I offered in reply a series of passages from their own writings in which



it was maintained: (1) that our natural reason does and must break down when it seeks a knowledge of God, and (2) that God is so different from the world that His nature is bound to present itself to our reason as “foolishness” and even self-contradiction. To my mind these statements were conclusive. For what could irrationalism mean if not that the real is, to our reason, unintelligible and incoherent? And yet Professor Torrance holds that “Barth stands out in Europe as the great protagonist *against* irrationalism.”

What is his ground for this view? This: that if we redefine reason to mean conformity with an object, we can make Barth out to be a kind of rationalist, even if such conformity means the abandonment of the laws and standards of natural reason. To this my answer is that such conformity is merely meaningless: it is not reason, but the suicide of reason. A kind of knowledge which soars so high as to have left mere logic behind has simply evaporated as knowledge.

Professor Torrance tries to convey the idea of what such knowledge might be by references to “archetypal and ectypal analogies,” “three-fold ratios,” and the distinction between *humilis sapientia* and *insipiens superbia* which suggest that he is trying to cross from reason to non-rational knowledge by a bridge of degrees. But listen to Brunner himself on all this (I take Brunner rather than Barth because he puts the position far more clearly): revelation, he says, is “what no man can know, what is in no kind of continuity with our human ideas, no, not even with the best and highest we possess;” it is “the end of all objectivity ... or, rationalism;” it is “something which is distinguished not gradually or quantitatively, but qualitatively, from anything which man can know ...” (“The Word and the World.” 45, 75, 17.) Could there be a flatter denial of the interpretation Professor Torrance is offering for the theology of crisis?

When I suggest that the issue is simple and clean-cut, he replies that it “involves the whole philosophical debate of modern times,” and invokes a series of impressive names running from St Anselm’s day to our own. I should be appalled

at the prospect of embroiling myself with this galaxy of saints and sages. And surely it is unnecessary. My argument is one that any reader of this journal can understand and judge, whether he has ever heard of St Anselm or not. It is this: Whoever says that reality does and must flout our reason is an irrationalist; Barth and Brunner plainly say this; therefore they are irrationalists.

Professor Torrance thinks it dogmatic to hold that the real must conform to the standards of our reason; he suggests that if I say this, it is because I am an idealist, and everyone knows that idealism is dated. Now he is much surer that I am an idealist than I am; it is a name I never claim for myself, however much I owe to this great school. And if he is suggesting that the rationality of the real, in the sense of its self-consistency, is a doctrine peculiar to Idealists, I am nonplussed again; for the doctrine is held as firmly by the arch-enemy of idealism, Moore, as it was by Bradley himself; indeed it is held by all philosophic schools except that of skepticism.

This is significant. It suggests where Barth and Brunner really stand. Their theology, like that of Newman and Pascal, is built on despair of human reason. They hope by renouncing reason to save religion. It is a bad exchange. If you do not accept both, you will end with neither.—I am &c.

BRAND BLANSHARD.

[This correspondence is closed.—ED.]

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> London: Allen & Unwin, 1939, 2 vols.
- <sup>2</sup> My father did not transfer to the Chair of Christian Dogmatics until 1 October 1952.
- <sup>3</sup> In a letter dated 10 December 1991, *The Scotsman* granted me permission to re-print the letters in the context of an article. My father's death on 2 December 2007 prompted me finally to do this, and I am grateful to my wife Morag (who always got on excellently with my father, one direct person to another) who did most of the work.