

***Barth Society met in San Diego November 22-24, 2019  
And will meet online December 9, 2020***

Our meeting in **San Diego** in conjunction with the **AAR**, featured **four sessions**: a **Friday afternoon session** from 4:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M.; a **Saturday morning session** from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.; a **Saturday afternoon (evening) session** from 5:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.; and a **Sunday afternoon session** from 3:30 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. The presenters for the **Friday afternoon session** were **Han-luen Kantzer Komline**, Western Theological Seminary, whose lecture was entitled: *“Barth and Augustine”* and **Shao Kai Tseng**, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China, whose lecture was entitled: *“Barth and Actualistic Ontology.”* **Keith Johnson**, Wheaton College presided at the session. Both lectures were engaging and generated some interesting discussion. The **Saturday morning session** was held in conjunction with the **Comparative Theology Unit** on the theme: **Karl Barth and Comparative Theology: An Unexpected Dialogue**. This session featured a number of very interesting presentations that attempted to place Barth in dialogue with other religious perspectives. **Paul Dafydd Jones**, University of Virginia responded to these presentations. **Martha L. Moore-Keish**, Columbia Theological Seminary and **Christian T. Collins Winn**, Bethel University presided at the session. The theme of the **Saturday afternoon (evening) session** from 5:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. focused on *“Karl Barth’s Epistle to the Romans.”* Following upon last year’s focus on Rom. 1-4, this Session focused on Barth’s commentary on Rom. 5-8 as part of a multi-year series of sessions honoring the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of this important book and its legacy. The presenters were: **Mitchell Mallary**, University of St. Andrews, whose presentation was entitled: *“An Apocalyptic Paul within Judaism: Bridging the Gap between Karl Barth and the Guild of Second Temple Jewish Studies”*; **Sarah Stewart-Kroeker**, University of Geneva, whose presentation was entitled: *“An Eco-Theological Reading of Karl Barth on Romans 8:19-23”*; and **Andrew Peterson**, Princeton Theological Seminary, whose presentation was entitled: *“Sanctification and Moral Extrinsicism in Barth’s Romans Commentary.”* **Keith Johnson**, Wheaton College presided. The theme of the **Sunday afternoon session** from 3:30 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. consisted of a discussion of ***Dogmatics After Babel: Beyond the Theologies of Word and Culture*** (Westminster John Knox, 2018) by **Rubén Rosario Rodríguez**. This session included four panelists with a response from the author. It was well-attended and the discussion was lively. The panelists were: **Paul D. Molnar**, St. John’s University, Queens, New York; **Orlando Espin**, University of San Diego; **Cambria Kaltwasser**, Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa; and **Kevin Hector**, University of Chicago. **Rubén Rosario Rodríguez**, St. Louis University, responded. **Keith Johnson**, Wheaton College, presided and conducted the **business meeting** following the program.

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**The Karl Barth Society** will hold an **abbreviated meeting** this year **online** since the full meeting in Boston was cancelled. As always, the meeting will take place in conjunction with the meeting of the **American Academy of Religion** as part of the **Virtual Annual Meeting** on **December 9, 2020**.

## **Theme: Barth and Nationalism**

**Wednesday, December 9, 4:00 PM-5:30 PM (EST). Paul Dafydd Jones, University of Virginia will preside.**

This year we are hosting papers on Barth and the topic of nationalism. The goal is to foster a conversation about the history of Barth's engagement with the topic as well as the ongoing relevance of Barth's theology for a consideration of nationalism.

There will be three presentations.

First, **Angela Hancock, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary** (/users/hancock-angela-pittsburgh-theological-seminary) will present a lecture entitled: **"Preaching to Citizens?: Karl Barth's Critique of Nationalism and the Politics of Proclamation."** This lecture will offer reflections on Barth's homiletics in light of his engagement with nationalism.

Second, **Matt Jantzen, Hope College** (/users/Jantzen-matt-hope-college) will present a lecture entitled: **"Karl Barth and the Cold War: The Doctrine of Providence Between East and West."** This lecture recovers the political significance of Karl Barth's doctrine of creation, taking as a case study Barth's treatment of the doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. The lecture will interpret *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in the context of Barth's involvement in the East-West conflict in 1948 and 1949. In §48 and §49 of *CD* III/3, Barth enacts a "radical correction" of the doctrine of providence along Christological lines. When read against the background of the escalating East-West conflict, the political ramifications of Barth's Christological reconstruction become clear. By rooting the doctrine in the particularity of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, Barth seeks to rule out an idolatrous providential vision in which the Western, Christian subject replaces Jesus Christ as the center of God's providential activity in the world. Barth believes that this nationalist subversion of the doctrine of providence facilitated the rise of Nazism in the 1930s and was threatening to reemerge at the end of the 1940's in visions of a "Christian West" united against Communism.

Third, **Alberto La Rosa Rojas, Duke University Divinity School** (/users/la-rosa-rojas-alberto-duke-university-divinity-school) will present a lecture entitled: **"Participation in the Indwelling God: Toward a Theology of Home."** The global crisis of immigration, the imminent ecological catastrophe, and the resurgence of vicious forms of nationalism all in recent years, point toward a fundamental crisis concerning how humans envision and perform ways of being at home in the world. As signs of the times, these realities beckon the church into deeper reflection about the meaning of home in light of the self-revelation of God. This lecture is split into three parts, each of which, aims to deepen and clarify the meaning of home as a mode of participation in God. First, La Rosa Rojas plans to draw on Augustine's theology of love to argue that the human longing for home is in the ultimate instance a longing for God's indwelling presence. Second, drawing on Karl Barth (and also pushing beyond Barth towards a more constructive pneumatology), La Rosa Rojas plans to argue that home is also a mode of participating in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, through whom God makes a home in creation. Finally, in light of the doctrines of the Incarnation and of God's Preferential Option for the Poor, the

argument will conclude by claiming that home is a mode of embodied and political participation with, for, and on behalf of those on the margins in their struggle to find home in the world.

**Responding: Eric Gregory, Princeton University** (/users/eric-gregory-princeton-university).

### **Business Meeting**

**Keith Johnson, Wheaton College, Presiding** (/users/johnson-keith-wheaton-college).

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## **A Brief summary of the Friday Afternoon lectures from the fall of 2019 will follow.**

**Han-luen Kantzer Komline** gave a wonderful lecture explaining how, where and to what extent Barth engaged the theology of Augustine in the *Church Dogmatics*. Overall, she noted, that “Barth majors on Augustine’s most famous works but also devotes considerable attention to lesser known titles in Augustine’s corpus, one of which, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, is clearly a personal favorite.” She also indicated that he interacted with Augustine beyond the *Church Dogmatics* as well, when he taught at Münster in 1925-1926 and at Bonn in 1933. She mentioned that Barth famously said that he would rather talk to Mozart than to Augustine!

The most important point, however, that Kantzer Komline discussed concerned the fact that while Barth is often portrayed as a critic of Augustine, his actual relationship to Augustine was much more nuanced. Augustine’s influence was clearly present in his treatment of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and election. In connection with the doctrine of election, while Barth was critical of Augustine’s individualistic focus, he noted that Augustine at least related it to the two kingdoms rather than just two individuals. According to Kantzer Komline there was a definite Augustinian basis to Barth’s view of election which is often overlooked by contemporary interpreters. She explained that Barth carefully renovated the tradition rather than rejecting it wholesale. Barth’s engagement with

scripture, she said, led him into deeper engagement with the giants of the tradition and specifically led him to “Augustine’s teaching on Christ as most illustrious Light of predestination. Standing on Augustine’s shoulders, Barth thought he came to see this Light as even more illustrious than Calvin or even Augustine had consistently imagined.”

Kantzer Komline explained that Barth’s view of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and election were “thoroughly Augustinian,” as were his views on theological anthropology inasmuch as this influenced Barth’s view of the human need for God, creaturely participation in God, and his view of sin. Additionally, Barth frequently cited Augustine “in support of his doctrine of grace” and the necessity for prayer. Kantzer Komline also noted that Barth was critical of Augustine with regard to three issues: “the locus of revelation, the continuity between nature and grace, and the inherent character of the righteousness God grants to human beings.” Barth’s main objection in all three areas concerned the Augustinian over-estimation of the human person. He thus accused Augustine of focusing excessively on “anthropological concerns” and for being too philosophical or too metaphysical. He famously referred to Augustine’s doctrine of grace as “sweet poison” which was “unwittingly imbibed by the Reformers.”

Of course, Barth did not dispute Augustine's view of the "reach of grace," but instead criticized how he applied the doctrine of grace to his theological anthropology because, in Barth's view, Augustine overestimated "the capacity of human beings to represent sites of revelation." Barth opposed Augustine's idea that human persons could "serve as a locus of revelation" and that also accounted for his criticisms of Augustine's attempt to find analogies for the Trinity in the natural world and in the psychology of human persons as well. Barth was not thrilled with Augustine's attempt to plot a continuity between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit, especially with the idea that humans could ascend to God by their own efforts. Kantzer Komline concluded her lecture by stressing how and why Barth thought it was terribly important for us to listen to living voices from the past. For Barth, one such voice was Augustine.

**Shao Kai Tseng** next gave an excellent lecture exploring Barth's actualism. He offered a reconstruction of Barth's actualistic ontology along with its "underlying grammar" by closely exploring some key terms such as "determination," "nature," "essence," and "being" as they relate to Barth's "actualism." Tseng argued that Barth's ontology was indebted to formal Chalcedonian patterns with the result that his ontological commitments operated dialectically employing both a "substantialist grammar of being and a process grammar of becoming," but without losing sight of the fact that God himself is neither constituted by his relations with us in history nor dependent upon the processes of history to act for our benefit as the savior of the world. Tseng maintained that Barth was critical of metaphysical world views that were used in support of both essentialist and process grammar in his attempt to be faithful to the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Tseng tackled the question of exactly how to understand Barth's rejection of "substantialist ways of thinking" in his theology. He claimed that it is a mistake to see Barth's actualism as completely opposed to traditional substantialism. As might be expected, Tseng's carefully

documented argument generated some interesting discussion from those theologians who indeed espoused ideas that leaned in the direction of thoroughly opposing traditional substantialist views. Tseng explained that, in his view of sin, Barth made a crucial distinction between the "ontological category of human *nature/essence* (*Natur/Wesen*) and the existential category of human decisions, acts and world-history." In his soteriology, Barth held that both categories "are totally determinative of the human *being* (*Sein/Dasein*)" such that sin, as it concerns human being, is "entirely foreign and contradictory" to human nature or essence. Tseng held that this implied that it was therefore a mistake to understand the concepts of nature and essence exclusively as a function of existential decisions, acts or histories.

According to Tseng the misuse of these terms has led a "sector of contemporary Barth studies to conflate the ontological category of nature/ essence with the existential or historical category of actual decisions and activities." This thinking led some to claim that it is impossible and unnecessary for Barth to speak of Christ's "essential human nature" as fallen in any proper sense of the term. Tseng indicated that he agreed with those who think Barth did indeed reject a substantialist view of human nature. But he disagreed with the idea that Barth's actualism led him to understand nature as a "function of decision and act" since he thought such a view of nature "to be an exclusively historical category determined by actual decisions and activities." Tseng then explained the extensive implications of an overly actualistic view of Barth's understanding of theological categories as these relation to theological anthropology, knowledge of God and soteriology.

## **Obituary**

It is with deep sorrow that the **Karl Barth Society** mourns the loss of one of its long-time Board members, a friend, colleague and esteemed **Editor** of the **Karl Barth Society Newsletter**. On a personal note, I first met Russ in 1994 when I was invited to speak at the Karl Barth Society in

Chicago and we became fast friends. I know that I speak for many in the Barth Society when I say that he surely will be missed. This obituary was delayed from the spring of 2020 since there was no Newsletter produced at that time.

### **Russell William Palmer, Ph.D.**

Rev. Dr. Russell William Palmer passed away peacefully on Saturday, January 11, 2020 after a long illness. Russ was born on May 4, 1936 in Detroit, MI. His parents, Norris Beach Palmer and Helen Forsythe Palmer, and his brother, Allen Norris Palmer, predeceased him. He is survived by his spouse, Laurie Elizabeth Nettelmann; three children, Stephen Palmer (Lisa) of Sautee Nacoochee, GA; Catherine McCarron (Douglas) of Minneapolis, MN; and Phillip Palmer of Pittsburgh, PA; two stepsons, Brian Cook (Cathy) of Carrollton, TX, and Jason Cook (Sara) of Fairfax, VA; seven grandchildren, Sarah Palmer, Jonathan Palmer, Quinn McCarron, Claudia McCarron, Ava Cook, Nora Cook and Leah Cook; his mother-in-law, Catherine Condie Nettelmann, and the many brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, and friends he held dear.

Russ graduated from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI, Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, TX, and the University of Iowa in Ames where he earned his Ph.D. Russ was an ordained Presbyterian minister, Professor Emeritus of Religion for 37 years at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the Stated Clerk of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery for 18 years.

A Phi Beta Kappa, Russ had an unquenchable thirst for understanding the world. As a professor at the University of Nebraska, he joined an archeological dig in Israel; in the 1980s, he was a staunch supporter of the nuclear freeze movement, and for many years, he was the **Editor** of the **Karl Barth Society Newsletter**. A brilliant, yet humble man, Russ experienced joy in both the most esoteric of endeavors or the raucous excitement of a Pirates baseball game.

Passionate about teaching and social justice, Russ's finest moments were in the pulpit and in the classroom. With an incredible breadth of knowledge and a great sense of humor, he was able to inspire both parishioners and students for decades. Russ was a kind and compassionate man who lived his life in the service of others. Above all, he cherished his beloved wife, Laurie, his thousands of books, and his classical music collection. He was dedicated to his children and grandchildren and loved them beyond measure. Though he will be sorely missed, Russ will continue to be part of the memories we treasure, the stories we tell, and the love we share.

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#### **ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES**

Everyone interested in joining the **Karl Barth Society of North America** is invited to become a member by renewing or purchasing their membership at: <http://kbsna.kbarth.org/>

Alternatively, you may send your name, address (including email address) and annual dues of \$25.00 (\$15.00 for students) to:

Professor Paul D. Molnar  
 Editor, KBSNA Newsletter  
 Department of Theology  
 and Religious Studies  
 St. John Hall  
 St. John's University  
 8000 Utopia Parkway  
 Queens, New York 11439

Email: [molnarp@stjohns.edu](mailto:molnarp@stjohns.edu)

Checks **drawn on a U.S. bank** should be made payable to the **Karl Barth Society of North America**.

*Your annual dues enable the KBSNA to help underwrite the annual Karl Barth Conference and to attract key-note speakers for that conference and for our fall meeting.*

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As our readers will certainly have already noticed, there was no Karl Barth Society Newsletter in the spring of 2020 because St. John's closed its campus on March 9 for the rest of the semester. Thus, I had no access to my office where I keep the envelopes and I could not use our print shop as that was closed as well. Through the good offices of Kait Dugan, I have prepared this brief Newsletter for the fall of 2020 that will be posted online at the Center for Barth Studies. As always, we thank you for your support of the Barth Society in a myriad of ways. Thanks especially to all those who so generously have paid their dues for this year. We are looking forward to more normal times at some point next year!