

Barth Society will meet in Philadelphia November 18-19, 2005

Our meeting in Philadelphia will feature a Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session will be **Mike Michelin**, Wycliffe College, Cobourg Campus, Canada, who will speak on the subject of “Karl Barth: Scriptural Exegesis as Ecclesial Practice” and **Edwin Chr. Van Driel**, Yale University, who will speak on the subject of “Karl Barth on the Eternal Being of Jesus Christ” (*CD II/2*). This session is listed as AM18-106 in the AAR program and will be held in **LH-Congress A/B**. The **Saturday morning** session will be held in **LH-Congress B** and is listed in the AAR program as AM19-21 and will feature a panel discussion of **Mike Higton’s** *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (T & T Clark, 2004). The session will be chaired by **George Hunsinger** of Princeton Theological Seminary. The panel participants will be: **Mike Higton**, University of Exeter; **Jason Springs**, Princeton University; **Katherine Sonderegger**, Virginia Theological Seminary; **Ronald F. Thiemann**, Harvard Divinity School.

Announcing the First Annual Karl Barth Conference: “Thy Word is Truth”: *Reading Scripture Theologically with Karl Barth*, at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, **Sunday, May 21 to Wednesday, May 24, 2006**

This Conference will be sponsored jointly by: **THE CENTER FOR BARTH STUDIES**, Princeton Theological Seminary, **THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA** and **SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**, Princeton Theological Seminary

To request a brochure and registration form, please send your contact information to **Clifford Anderson** at barth.conference@ptsem.edu or write to: Center for Barth Studies, P.O. Box 111, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries, Princeton, NJ 08542-0111. Brochures and registration forms will be mailed in January 2006.

The following quotes from Barth’s Letters and Table Talk may be of interest as food for thought.

In a letter to Prof. Georges Casalis on August 18, 1963 Barth wrote concerning the Theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955):

“Georges, I am a little disturbed that you seem to set such high store by Teil. de Ch. I had to write a letter about him yesterday to my fine daughter-in-law in Indonesia, née Frommel, who seems to be even more captivated by that man and his work than you, and who hopes that by way of his scientific observations, philosophical constructions, and religious visions, she will be able to reach the heart of her father, who has a total aversion to the church, theology, missions, etc. Always apologetics at the root of Gnosis! For having read the book *Le milieu divin* (and having no desire to read further), it seems unmistakable to me that in T. de C. we have a classic case of Gnosis, in the context of

which the gospel cannot possibly thrive. The reality that is supposedly manifest there, and that we are supposed to believe, is the deity of evolution—naturally decked out with the name of Jesus Christ, as always happened and still happens in Gnostic systems,” Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoevesandt, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 119-20.

In the letter to his daughter-in-law Marie-Claire Barth dated August 17, 1963 Barth wrote:

“As concerns T. de C. I let myself be oriented first by the book *Le milieu divin*. Now it seems at first quite harmless . . . But then . . . he moves on at once from his scientific observations to the unfolding of visions of a cosmos that is rising up from darkness to light; to the

concept of a gigantic development in whose context Christ too plays an important role at certain places—but in such a way that he too must accept being evaluated and understood in terms of the context. This is precisely what Gnosis in every age has done with Christianity . . . Anthroposophy is doing the same today, and so is the Bultmann school with its existential theology (which has strangely reached its climax with the *Honest to God* of the rosy-cheeked Bishop Robinson of Woolwich and the hundreds of thousands who swallow it) . . . Always new and giant snakes by which the poor gospel of the Old and New Testaments must let itself be gulped down—and always with lofty eulogies on the way this will help to spread it among the children of the world. Believe me, dear and good Marie-Claire, the *Milieu divin* of your T. de C. is a giant gnostic snake of this kind—a giant snake compared with which the brave rationalism and moralism of Brunner's eristics is a harmless blind-worm. If I said No! then as loudly as I could, do I not really have to do so now?" Barth, *Letters*, 116-17.

Over forty years ago, the following question was asked of Barth: "Is not the need for revelation, as distinct from revelation itself, given in experience? That is, is not Augustine right when he says, 'Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee'? And is there not a place for correlation as in Tillich?"

His answer is as follows:

"If we experience a need, do we not know something regarding *what* we need? I cannot accept a division between revelation and the *need* of it. The need is only experienced by those who know revelation. God's answer awakens the question. You cannot seek God before you have found Him, and you cannot find Him before you are found by Him. *Then* you see the real question. There are many false questions, you know. In regard to the quotation from Augustine, remember that his *Confessions* were written during his Platonic period. What or who is 'Thee'? Is it Pascal's God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Or is it the Platonic reminiscence: we remember our profound unity with God and we have no rest until we return to the beginning of our existence? In his *Confessions* there is always the question whether Augustine is not really writing as a philosopher. Concerning your last question, I see no good way to find a correlation between philosophical questions and theological answers. If God is what Plato or my friend Paul Tillich calls God, then there is a correlation. But if God is He who speaks through prophets and apostles, then the solution is not so simple and easy to find. As I have said before, I have a holy respect for a good philosopher—and I admire my friend Paul Tillich. But I do not think he is writing Christian theology. In this natural realm there is no such thing as a 'creature' or a 'Creator'. If I understand myself as a creature, then I understand my limits and He who limits

me: God the Creator. We are either in this circle of knowledge or we are not. That is the question of revelation or faith," *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, Recorded and Edited by John D. Godsey, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), 28-9.

The following sermon by George Hunsinger of Princeton Theological Seminary addresses the important connections between violence and falsehood.

Violence Finds Refuge in Falsehood George Hunsinger Princeton Theological Seminary September 26, 2005

The Readings: Psalm 5:1-12; Isa. 59:1-15; Rom. 6:3-4

Today I want to lift up a biblical theme that has not received the attention it deserves. It is the powerful theme that violence finds refuge in falsehood. I myself first became aware of it through Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian novelist. In accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972, Solzhenitsyn included these words:

Violence, less and less embarrassed by the limits imposed by centuries of lawfulness, is brazenly and victoriously striding across the whole world, unconcerned that its infertility has been demonstrated and proved many times in history. What is more, it is not simply crude power that triumphs abroad, but its exultant justification. The world is being inundated by the brazen conviction that power can do anything, justice nothing. . . .

But let us not forget that violence does not live alone and is not capable of living alone: it is necessarily interwoven with falsehood. Between them lies the most intimate, the deepest of natural bonds. Violence finds its only refuge in falsehood, falsehood its only support in violence. Any man who has once acclaimed violence as his METHOD must inexorably choose falsehood as his PRINCIPLE. At its birth violence acts openly and even with pride. But no sooner does it become strong, firmly established, than it senses the rarefaction of the air around it and it cannot continue to exist without descending into a fog of lies, clothing them in sweet talk. It does not always, not necessarily, openly throttle the throat, more often it demands from its subjects only an oath of allegiance to falsehood, only complicity in falsehood.

This connection was undoubtedly one that Solzhenitsyn learned to make from bitter experience. But since he is a

Christian, he would also have learned it from Holy Scripture. Today we saw it ourselves in Psalm 5:

You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful. . . . For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues. (Psalm 5:6, 9).

It was also evident in the reading we heard from Isaiah:

For your hands are defiled with blood; . . . your lips have spoken lies. . . . Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood. . . . The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. . . . Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. (Isa. 59:3, 7, 9, 14)

When we turn to the New Testament, we find this theme appearing in Rom. 3 at the very end of Paul's long and searing indictment of human sin. Paul seals his case by quoting from God's word:

Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive. . . . Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths. (Rom. 3:14, 16)

Let me give one last example. Just before Peter was to lie by denying Jesus again for the last time, we are pointedly reminded by the Gospel of John that Peter had previously resorted to violence by cutting off a man's ear with his sword (John 18:26). The clear implication, I think, is that Christ himself is denied whenever our lies lead us into violence, and whenever our crimes of violence are covered up and denied by lies.

In his famous essay on "Politics and the English Language," written in 1946, George Orwell was incisive in making the same connection.

In our time, [he wrote] political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of the political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.

Orwell then gave examples of how political speech becomes a cover for violence:

Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle

machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.

And what about today? What phraseology do we need if we want to name things without calling up mental images of them? Perhaps it would run something like this:

An invasion is engineered on false pretenses, hundreds of thousands are killed or maimed, no one is safe in the streets; homes, hospitals and mosques are blown up; water, electricity and other services are cut off; civil society is destroyed, half the population is left without means of livelihood, prisons are filled with people picked up off the streets, detainees are tortured and humiliated, cities are targeted and destroyed, and the insurgency is blamed on outside elements. This is called "bringing democracy to Iraq."

"Political language," concluded Orwell "—and with variations this is true of all political parties . . . —is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."

Dear friends, you have all been baptized (or nearly all of you). Do you not know that when you were baptized you were baptized into the death of Christ? As a great theologian once said, the death of Christ was the death of death. Do you not know that you have died to death — and to all the things that make for death? Come to the water! Do not choose death but life! And do you not know that when you died to death you died to falsehood—and to all that falsehood teaches? Come to the water! Do not yield yourself to falsehoods, and do not go along with those who do — even when they hide their falsehoods under a show of piety. Of all bad men, said C.S. Lewis, religious bad men are the worst. Come to the water! And do you not know that when you died to falsehood, you died to brutality and bloodshed? Insofar as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Come to the water! Live in conformity with your baptism into Christ! Choose life, choose truthfulness, choose peace—and the things that make for peace!

I would like to conclude by reading a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, entitled:
Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but
 that is all that I shall do for Death.
 I hear him leading his horse out of the stall;
 I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
 He is in haste; he has business in Cuba,
 business in the Balkans,
 many calls to make this morning.
 But I will not hold the bridle
 while he cinches the girth.
 And he may mount by himself:
 I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip,
 I will not tell him which way the fox ran.
 With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where
 the black boy hides in the swamp.
 I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death;
 I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends
 nor of my enemies either.
 Though he promise me much,
 I will not map him the route to any man's door.
 Am I a spy in the land of the living,
 that I should deliver men to Death?
 Brother, the password and the plans of our city
 are safe with me; never through me
 Shall you be overcome.

Dear friends, we face difficult days ahead, and one day
 you shall die. But let that be all that you shall do for
 Death. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of
 the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Christian Theology and the Bible section of the
 SBL will have a session on Saturday, November 19
 from 1-3:30 PM in Room 103-C in Penn
 Convention Center

Rusty Reno, Presiding
 Douglas Harink, Israel in Barth's 1922 Römerbrief
 Katherine Sonderegger, Doctrine of Inspiration and
 Reliability of Text in Barth
 Kathryn Green-McCreight, A type of the One to
 Come: Barth's use of Typology
 Joseph Mangina, Barth and the Apocalypse
 James Buckley, Respondent
 Each gets 25 minutes

The *T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* which is now
 listed as a Related Scholarly Organization of the
 American Academy of Religion in the AAR Program
 Book will meet at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel in the
 Anthony Room, from 1-3:30 PM on Friday,
 November 18.

This year's speaker will be **Andrew Purves**. He will
 present a paper entitled: "'I yet not I but Christ:'
 Galatians 2:20 and the Christian Life in the Theology of
 T. F. Torrance."

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to report that our efforts have met with
 success. Hearty thanks to everyone who responded last
 year by paying their annual dues!

In cooperation with Princeton's Center for Barth
 Studies and the Special Collections division of the
 Princeton Seminary Libraries, the KBSNA can announce
 the beginning of an annual Barth Conference. It will be
 held each year in Princeton at the end of May. (See our
 announcement elsewhere in this Newsletter.)

Our conference needs to be entirely self-funding.
 Much depends on your keeping your dues payment up to
 date.

The future of Karl Barth in our cultural, academic,
 and ecclesial setting has always depended significantly
 on the wonderful conference programs that were
 organized by those who have gone before us, many of
 whom are now retired. It now falls to us to continue
 where they left off. We have a goodly heritage. May I
 urge you once again to bring your dues up to date for the
 current year? Thank you.

Sincerely,
 George Hunsinger,
 President, KBSNA

ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES

Everyone interested in joining the Karl Barth Society
 of North America is invited to become a member by
 sending your name, address and annual dues of
 \$15.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

Professor Paul D. Molnar
 Editor, KBSNA Newsletter
 Division of Humanities—Bent Hall
 St. John's University
 8000 Utopia Parkway
 Queens, New York 11439
 Email: molnarp@stjohns.edu

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

*The Karl Barth Society is grateful to St. John's
 University, Queens, New York for underwriting the
 production of this Newsletter.*