

***Barth Society met Online December 9, 2020***

Our meeting held in conjunction with the AAR featured a Wednesday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 5:30 P.M. This meeting was held virtually because of the pandemic. This year the **theme** of the meeting was **Barth and nationalism**. The goal was 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 today. There were three presentations and one response.

**Angela Hancock, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary** (/users/hancock-angela-pittsburgh-theological-seminary) presented a lecture entitled: **"Preaching to Citizens?: Karl Barth's Critique of Nationalism and the Politics of Proclamation."**

**Matt Jantzen, Hope College** (/users/Jantzen-matt-hope-college) presented a lecture entitled: **"Karl Barth and the Cold War: The Doctrine of Providence Between East and West."**

**Alberto La Rosa Rojas, Duke University Divinity School** (/users/la-rosa-rojas-alberto-duke-university-divinity-school) presented a lecture entitled: **"Participation in the Indwelling God: Toward a Theology of Home."**

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

***Barth Society will meet in San Antonio November 19 and 21, 2021***

On Friday, **November 19** the **Karl Barth Society** of North America will meet in the **Grand Hyatt-Republic B**. This meeting is listed in the **Program Book** as **P19-303**. The session will take place from **4:00 PM-6:00 PM**.

**Sarah Jobe, Duke University** will present a lecture entitled: *Preaching Basel Prison: The Personal and Political in Barth's Judged Judge*. **Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary** will present a lecture entitled: *The Bible as Holy Scripture*. **Keith Johnson, Wheaton College** will preside.

On Sunday, **November 21** the **Karl Barth Society** of North America will present a **Virtual Session** from **9:00 AM-11:00 AM**. This is listed in the **Program Book** as **PV21-143**. The theme of this meeting is: **Engaging Barth in Conversation, Volumes 1-3**. **Keith Johnson, Wheaton College**, will preside.

Members of the Barth Translators' seminar of the Center for Barth Studies will present papers engaging with the three volumes of the recently published **Barth in Conversation** series by Westminster/ John Knox Press. The papers will include discussions of the translation process as

well as the content of the conversations. The presentations will be followed by an open discussion.

**John P. Burgess, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary**

*Barth in Conversation: Fascism, Communism, and Evangelical Freedom*

**Matthias Gockel, University of Basel**

*Introduction to the Barth in Conversation Series*

**Paul Nimmo, University of Aberdeen**

*Karl Barth and the Baptism Controversy*

**Oliver Keenan, Blackfriars, Oxford**

*Theology and/as Conversation: Barth's 'Gespräch' as Dogmatic Pedagogy'*

**Cambria Kaltwasser, Northwestern College**

*Theology as Friendship in the Barth Conversation*

**What follows are summaries of the lectures presented at the KBSNA on  
December 9, 2020**

**“Preaching to Citizens?: Karl Barth’s Critique of Nationalism and the Politics of Proclamation”**

**Angela Dienhart Hancock  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary**

Professor Hancock began her lecture asking if it was time for an “emergency homiletic” in the United States. She suggested that it is time since everyone is worried about something especially with regard to the “political situation.” Given the many possible options for responding, why might one choose a sermon?

Hancock noted that every year on the first day of her preaching course she would ask the students to describe a memorable sermon; many struggled to think of something specific. Sermons are ephemeral, last a short time and their empirical results are not always easily seen. Whatever one’s attitude towards sermons, however, she maintained that “the pulpit can be an occasion to resist evil and hold fast to what is good.” Preaching then might

be construed as a “little move against destructiveness.”

Hancock thus argued that “the rhetorical dynamics of the political context do necessitate an emergency homiletic,” that is, one that “resists the destructive speech habits that meet us with every tweet.” She claimed that not everyone would turn to Karl Barth for “homiletical resistance” since he has been a controversial figure “in contemporary North American homiletics.” Having focused on God and the Bible, some thought that he ignored people and claimed his theology led to polite or possibly even cowardly silence. Against this, Hancock asserted that from 1932-3 Barth taught about preaching and that his teaching discloses a very different trajectory.

After offering a brief account of what she identified as the “dysfunction in the United States today,” she considered two possible ways preachers might respond: the way of *confrontation* and the way of *invitation*. By mining the historical, political and rhetorical

context of Barth's "emergency homiletic" she then offered some important features for today concluding that Barth's approach challenges both the way of confrontation and the way of invitation while "retaining a dimension of each."

### **American Outrage**

While democracy entails conflicts, those who support a "deliberative democracy" think people should reason together to reach a mutually acceptable decision about public issues. That ideal, however, seems missing in today's political conflicts.

After outlining past times in American history when people "lashed out at one another" by engaging in "mud-slinging, insults, racism, blasphemy, xenophobia, sexism, hostility to immigrants, prophecies of doom, and downright lies," Hancock argued that today "the hate speech we tolerate at the margins has moved to the center of power." Today people argue from within their own enclaves and label those outside with whom they disagree not simply as mistaken or incorrect, but "stupid or evil."

One political scientist, Morgan Marietta, suggested that people have "sacred" ideas in the sense that they are non-negotiable such that sacred rhetoric is then used to defend certain sacred values with no possible political compromise. However, Hancock claimed that sacred rhetoric was detrimental to public debate because people on different sides saw the other as their enemy. Othering language can lead to violent results such as occurred in Pittsburgh with the synagogue attack last October.

Some preachers, Hancock noted, respond to the rhetorical world of politics either by embracing "absolutist political rhetoric themselves" or by "overtly or tacitly suggesting that saving souls is all that matters." The former approach, as the way of confrontation, is tempting she said.

### **Defending the Wall and Punching Nazis**

Next, Professor Hancock mentioned a book entitled *Preaching in the Era of Trump* noting that

the publisher's website stated "It's up to preachers to make the church great again by leading it to embrace and embody God's concern for those whose lives are at stake in a Trump administration." She then spoke about the fact that prophetic preaching can and does come from both the left and from the right, though the latter is more organized. She noted that a group founded by James Dobson entitled "Watchmen on the Wall" with "Watchmen Pastors" put out "Sermon Starters" for preachers. Every one of them she said, "was full of absolutist rhetoric" referring to "us and them, good and evil, wrong and right, faithful and unfaithful." She also stressed that similar rhetoric can be found on the left as when a recent article suggested that preachers needed to become more aggressive in the pulpit. The author spoke of "rendering churches dangerous places for racist, fascist or proto-fascist expression." Preachers should, in other words, be "'punching Nazis' homiletically" so as to "protect our 'black, brown, and Jewish brothers and sisters.'" This thinking leads to the notion that preachers should be "shaming attendees who express palingenetic, populist, nationalist and/or white supremacist views, thus homiletically 'punching Nazis' and call out the vestiges of . . . 'micro-Fascism' in the pews."

The author of the article, Andrew Wymer claimed that preaching could never be non-violent so that "any homiletical practices that might include grace toward political enemies is dismissed" by him. This is clearly a method of confrontation.

### **From Confrontation to Invitation**

Professor Hancock next mentioned a 1979 essay by Sally Miller Gearhart which argued that the traditional concept of persuasion "is rooted in a patriarchal conquest/conversion model of communication." She preferred creating conditions through rhetoric that would "create an atmosphere in which change might occur" instead of one in which someone would have to yield to "the authority of a superior."

Her essay, Hancock said, was negatively received, but over time other feminist rhetorical scholars revised and developed some of her ideas proposing an “invitational rhetoric.” This would create a climate of equality without domination as opposed to the conquest/competition model. In this way speakers would encourage others to “try it on without judging or denigrating the experiences of others.” In this view the goal is not “conversion” but “understanding.”

Recent critiques of this approach claim that invitational rhetoric cannot work in the context of inequality. In such circumstances the goal is “radical social change” rather than understanding. Still, Hancock noted that those who advocated “invitational rhetoric” also are committed to social change. Rhetorical preaching employing invitational rhetoric would invite and not manipulate, condemn or shame; it would not be absolutist, authoritarian or confrontational. Both invitational and confrontational preachers however see themselves as resisting powerful political and social forces. Hancock emphasized that what is missing from both perspectives “is an account of God’s agency.” And that is what Karl Barth’s “emergency homiletic” offers.

### **Karl Barth’s emergency homiletic**

Hancock stated that Barth spoke of rhetorical pathos in connection with German church support for the war and the “grim aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution.” This referred to passion for a political cause and Barth heard a kind of absolutist pathos coming from German nationalists who blessed the war effort and “from revolutionaries, overthrowing their oppressors.” Instead of responding with absolutist rhetoric, Barth sought to “deprive them of their pathos.” By taking the “eternal significance” of their political zeal off the table, Barth offered a “strategy of resistance” by meeting their conservative pathos with “the ‘Great Positive Possibility’—love of the other—rather than offering a “pathos of revolution, which returns evil for evil.”

For Barth, political judgments were always “provisional, relative, partial attempts to discern what is

good.” The deepest resistance Barth thought involved both *means* as well as ends; his resolve was tested by the events in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s.

After discussing the various forms of propaganda during the years of the Weimar Republic and noting that the press was instrumental in promoting the idea that Germany was in crisis, Hancock asserted that from 1931 to the end of the Republic, violence and “an all-out war of words” escalated as depression ensued. By the early 1930s conversations included borrowings from and reactions to the popular ideas of the Nazis. Sermons of the period indicated, among other things, endorsements of National Socialism. The Bible was used by some to illustrate what they already believed. Preaching itself became a kind of propaganda: “They wielded the Word of God as a weapon to achieve political (in many cases nationalist) ends.”

This is the rhetorical situation in which Barth presented his “emergency homiletic.” In 1932 Barth was already teaching a full load, but the professor teaching the required homiletics course was a Nazi sympathizer and Barth felt compelled to intervene. So, he volunteered to teach a year-long course at the University of Bonn. He worked to “de-center the young preachers in attendance” by urging them “to lay down their weapons and their agendas, to listen with empty hands and open hearts for an unsettling Word from the Lord.” Barth sought to oppose the idea that Protestant preachers should be propagandists in control of their subject, since they were in fact servants of the Word. They therefore should not preach with “an unquestioned agenda” like tyrants.

This effort at deconstruction was aimed at a vision of the preacher as humble, open, courageous, diligent, prayerful, disciplined, flexible, loving and hopeful. Preparing a sermon should be done with “open hands, willing to be called into question.” One should not just “play a part” or “imitate others” but rather “be one’s self.” Most of all they should not partake of “the poison of partisan-speak.”

Engaging in free speech at the “dawn of a totalitarian regime” was the kind of resistance Barth engaged in.

Basic to sermon preparation for Barth was interpreting Scripture focusing on God’s story with humanity instead of on “Volk, nation, and race.” He stressed that preachers should allow their “dearest thoughts” to be called into question” so they can speak to people as those who “belong to God” and are addressed and called by God. While Barth has been suspected of quietism “when it comes to the present,” the record of “the Sermon Exercises” offers a different picture. For Barth “A Word truly preached and heard today cannot harden into a possession to be wielded like a weapon tomorrow. Preachers, for Barth, must always begin again from the beginning, listening with empty hands” to the Word of God.

### **Between confrontation and invitation**

In the final portion of her lecture Professor Hancock argued that like the approaches of confrontation and invitation, Barth’s “emergency homiletic” took the form of “resistance” over against “particular socio-political dynamics.” She stressed that the “conservative Watchman” or the “Anti-Fascist Nazi Puncher” could “find no traction in Barth’s approach to the matter.” The humility that Barth encouraged stands opposed to “a homiletic of authoritarian instrumentalism, of right or left.” She said Barth’s actualistic understanding of revelation left room for “temporary, passionate, vulnerable prophesy from the pulpit,” but that the work of listening to the prophets and apostles is never complete. Barth assumed that “resistance to destructive forces” included both means and ends. She said that “In situations of absolutist, adversarial, and demonizing speech, mirroring reinforces existing dynamics rather than disrupting them. Barth’s stress on humility, openness and self-criticism did not mean that the preacher does not have a responsibility to say something “that, by God’s intervention, functions with authority.” It is however an authority of witness that derives from the prophets and apostles. Finally, while the rhetoric of invitation invites persuasion with the intention of changing

others, a “post-persuasion” approach would encourage transformation instead. Following Barth, one would not set out to “change, control, or manipulate hearers,” but to bear witness to the Word of God. Perhaps Barth’s stress on the fact that “only God is God” might encourage “persuasion of a different order.”

### **Conclusion**

Hancock concluded by wondering how applying Barth’s approach might work “given the rhetorical dynamics of the present.” She suggested that spending time with the biblical text and resisting partisan language might lead to “fresh and vibrant” witness. She wondered “what it would sound like to deprive bullies of their pathos.” She asked: “If Twitter features the demonization of individuals or groups this week, rather than demonizing Twitter right back, what would it sound like for a preacher to ignore that, but instead to methodically, gracefully show the humanity of those who have been degraded.” She said that her hope for the future of democracy rested on the hope that people on both sides of the political spectrum could find a way “to talk to each other about the things that make for a just and generous society.” She noted that Eric Holder’s remark that “When they go low, we kick them” got it wrong, while Michelle Obama’s remark that “When they go low, we go high” got it right. For Hancock “A genuine rhetoric of resistance does not consist in taking up absolutist speech in our pulpits to defeat absolutism but precisely in depriving it of its pathos.”

### **Matt Jantzen Hope College**

Professor Jantzen began his lecture noting that recent studies of Barth’s doctrine of Providence treated it in several ways: 1) “as an intervention in the history of Reformed theology;” 2) “as a theological experiment in personalist philosophy;” and finally 3) as a “lengthy, theological prayer.”

Despite the light these views have shed on providence in CD III/3, Jantzen maintains that their common weakness is that they do not consider the political dimension of Barth's account of that doctrine. They needed to give a better sense of the "people, events, and circumstances." None of these "otherwise helpful studies" indicate that when Barth wrote CD III/3 in 1948 and 1949, he traveled to Hungary during the communist takeover, engaged in debates about Communism with Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr and gave a controversial opening address at the founding of the World Council of Churches. He also published a major essay on the developing Cold War conflict.

With all of this in mind Jantzen's lecture offered his attempt to recover the political significance of Barth's doctrine of providence in sections 48 and 49 of CD III/3. He did this by reading those sections "against the background" of Barth's political writings from the same time period. He claimed that Barth's doctrine of providence could be seen as a "critique of a providential nationalism tied to Western, Christian civilization" that made National Socialism appealing to Germans in the 1930s and also threatened to overtake Western Christianity in the midst of the developing conflict between East and West by the end of the 1940s. Jantzen said he intended to explore the connections between Barth's essay, "The Church Between East and West" and his account of providence in section 49 of the CD which was written at the same time.

After his visit to Hungary Barth's views were publicly criticized by Brunner and Niebuhr. Barth strongly defended his views about the dangers of Western anti-communist ideology. In the piece entitled "The Church Between East and West" Barth illustrated the close connection between his political and theological views noting that world history and salvation history "are bound together in Jesus Christ." Because of this he held that the church was called to be active in the political sphere while remaining "free and independent in its political work and witness." That is why Barth opposed linking Christianity with "anti-communist ideology."

Barth further maintained that the dispute between Russia and America, which involved much of the world, led each side to accuse the other of inhumanity based on false assumptions. The West held that the East treated humanity "like an economic automaton" and held a "demonic faith in social progress," while the East claimed that the West was hypocritical with its spiritual view of humanity and its belief in democracy which prevented them from recognizing that their lives were actually "dominated by the power of 'anonymous capital.'" Barth's response to this took place from within his view of divine providence.

Barth maintained that because world history and salvation history only connect in Jesus, who as a Jew is partisan of neither East nor West, one could not identify the cause of God with either side. Instead of having to choose between East and West, Barth believed the church must find "a third way." Barth realized that he was open to criticism regarding Communism since Christians clearly had opposed Nazism which subverted human freedom and would also oppose other movements that would do the same.

However, Barth made a distinction between National Socialism which was a clear-cut political and spiritual menace "with no trace of reason" and the conflict between East and West. Barth showed no love for Communism with its "totalitarian atrocities," and admits that Communism was a "genuine, if failed, attempt to address 'the social problem' that plagues the West." Still, he held that as long as the West could be accused by the East of inhumanity through capitalist exploitation, the cause of God could not be identified with the cause of the West.

Also, while Russian Communism was openly godless, National Socialism was grounded on something more dangerous, that is, a false godliness. Barth held that Communism has never attempted to reinterpret Christianity or to clothe itself in a Christian garment; it simply was "brutally, but at least honestly, godless."

However, the Nazis replaced the real Christ with a “national Jesus.” And that is a worse crime. What Barth wanted to avoid at all costs was any attempt to identify loyalty to Jesus Christ with an “unquestioning identification with Western capitalist civilization.”

Barth noted a further distinction between Nazism and Communism. While his speaking out against Nazism was unpopular at the time, he thought that speaking against Communism would only encourage useless talk against the East. Barth thought Christians should be suspicious when they are encouraged to believe that their duty did not require intellectual effort and self-sacrifice, but that it instead seemed “to flow perfectly in sync with the rip tide of Western anti-communist hysteria.”

Barth’s criterion for making these distinctions regarding his opposition to National Socialism and Communism was Jesus Christ himself, the incarnate Word. His humanity, Barth thought, illuminated the West’s inhumanity regarding “the social problem” and prevented the church from identifying “the cause of God with the cause of the West.” His strong and thorough opposition to Nazism rested on its attempt to subvert the church’s only proper criterion, namely, Jesus Christ himself. National Socialism adopted a “national Jesus,” and in rejecting the Jews it thereby rejected the Jewish Jesus and therefore God himself who was revealed in him. It was thus anti-Christian at its foundation. That is not true of Communism. For Barth, political action centered on Jesus means speaking “the truth of Christ in the midst of lordless powers.” That is what Barth urged the church to do in face of Nazism. This differs from the “cheap, idle, and useless” chatter “requested of the church in the East-West conflict.”

Barth therefore offered a christologically reconfigured doctrine of providence as a “critical lens” through which one could see the key differences between National Socialism and Communism and offer a way to make intelligent political judgments about the role of the church in the East-West conflict. In this light his doctrine of providence

can be seen as an attempt to oppose any distortion of the doctrine by replacing Israel and Jesus himself with Western humanity as the center and goal of God’s providential activity in world history. Barth opposed this idolatrous view of providence with his own Christological correction.

He thus argued against any idea that the subject of providence was any sort of anonymous omnipotent deity since God’s true identity was revealed in and by the incarnate Word himself. Barth held that generations of Protestant theologians who followed this approach failed to ask what such a view of lordship had to do with Christ himself. The older Lutheran and Reformed view of providence Barth thought was a “Trojan horse, containing a dangerous void at its very center.”

Because of this the doctrine of providence was regularly detached from its proper center in Christ and functioned simply and generally as a framework for “divine world-governance.” The result of this was that “modern European humanity idolatrously claimed for itself the place previously occupied by the Christian God.” It thus saw itself as the goal of God’s providential activity and this finally led to the belief that one could find God’s providential care of history in history’s own “immanent demons” instead of God alone. The result was that providence could become a favorite word of Hitler in that distorted form. That is why, in the name of Jesus Christ, Barth flatly rejected any attempt to equate divine providence with world history. When Jesus Christ is placed at the center, as Barth insisted must be the case, then the abstract view of providence espoused by the “orthodox theologians” would be replaced by a clear recognition that Jesus Christ is the proper subject of world history such that no other subject—“whether a leader, a nation, a people, or a race—may lay claim to that title.”

In §49 of CD III/3 Barth discusses three aspects of the Reformed doctrine, namely, *conservatio*, *concursus*, and *gubernatio* and reconstructs these in the light of the properly

Christocentric center of the doctrine. Barth firmly rejected any notion of providence as referring simply to a supreme being guiding history. Barth's concept of divine rule was shaped by God's covenant with Israel which was fulfilled in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. That particular God had to be both the starting point and criterion of any properly Christian view of providence. To grasp God's governance of the world, then, one must look to the crucified Jesus himself. Barth consistently sought to undermine any attempt to equate God's governance of the world with any sort of "pseudo-Christian ideology." For Barth, "God laughs at all our attempts to see His rule with the eye of our human reason, let alone at our efforts to take the throne and play the part of world-ruler ourselves. This divine laughter rings out over the folly of all our crude or refined imperialisms." (CD III/3, 160). Jantzen concluded that Barth's account of God's ruling offered a "theological basis for political resistance against those who try to make themselves world-rulers in the place of Jesus Christ." Unless this is clearly seen and acknowledged, divine rule would lead directly "to the political and economic totalitarianism which has caused us so much anxiety today both in its Western and also in its Eastern forms." (CD III/3, 172-3).

This reconstruction of the doctrine of providence then led Barth to argue for this "third way" in a world in which "turning against the 'boar' of Russian Communism meant exposing oneself to the 'wolf' of Western capitalism." Barth sought to embrace instead "a Christological politics of 'genuine humanity.'"

### **Alberto La Rosa Rojas Duke University Divinity School**

Alberto La Rosa Rojas began his lecture by explaining that stories of home shape our lives and provide us with a sense of who we are while "orienting us toward a horizon of action in the world." Following Natalia Marandiuch, La Rosa Rojas noted that "the goodness of home consists in its power to create and sustain human subjectivity." But he also noted that this desire for home

could lead toward evil ends as happened with National Socialism in Germany. Thus, the most popular film in Germany in the 1940s was entitled "Homecoming." That film was part of Nazi propaganda used to justify occupation of Poland with the slogan: "Back Home to the Reich." This led to a "dangerous and even fearsome connotation among many Germans even to this day."

While Barth would have been aware of this use of homecoming, he nevertheless used "home" as a "recurrent motif" in his writing according to La Rosa Rojas. It was suggested that Barth's own experience with homecoming and exile might have influenced this approach. In his own life Barth had an enduring love of his hometown of Basel. But he was raised in Bern where his father taught at the university, and he never felt quite at home there. Also, his deportation from Germany after refusing to sign an oath of loyalty to the Nazis left its own mark on Barth. While he taught at various German universities between 1921 and 1935 and was at home there, he was forced to return to Basel which he loved under strained circumstances. Another political event influenced Barth's view of home as well. That was the making of the state of Israel in 1948. La Rosa Rojas suggested that when Barth wrote that "[Christ] is the first and supreme Guest and Stranger who found no room in the inn and still cannot find any," in 1967, he might have been thinking of the millions of Jews who could not find refuge in Europe or in the USA during the Holocaust.

The notion of home was a key image in two of the most famous sections of Barth's doctrine of Reconciliation: *Der Weg Des Sohnes Gottes in die Fremde*—"The Way of the Son of God into the Alien/the Foreign/the Far Country" in §59 and *Die Heimkehr des menschensohnes*—"the Homecoming of the Son of Man" in §64. La Rosa Rojas maintains that Barth's use of home in these sections of the CD illustrates a dialectic in which home "is always viewed through the optics of exile, belonging through rejection, and citizenship through alienation."



It is proposed that, when seen through the lens of a preferential option for the poor, the Christological dialectic of home functions for Barth as a summons to the church to a vocation of embodied and political participation on behalf of those who are on the margins as they struggle to find a home in the world.

After noting that Christian home-talk has traditionally functioned as a biblical motif with regard to the Heavenly City of God or the New Jerusalem, it was noted that for theologians such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Calvin it functioned eschatologically. For them, “the desire for home is ultimately a desire for the creature's eschatological fellowship in the Triune God.”

For Barth it was Christology and not eschatology that shaped his view since for him it was always Christ's concrete life that gave content and meaning to the Scriptural witness. Without denying that the notion that home signifies a mode of participation in the Trinity, for Barth it is the concrete life, death, resurrection and ascension that offer basic meaning to the human desire and struggle for home. The rest of the lecture explained Barth's view in this part volume of the CD.

So, for Barth the incarnation referred to the way of the Son into the “far country” or into the alienation afflicting humanity after the fall. The far country is the world of evil into which God enters and which is opposed to God. The Word of God enters into this alienated world to overcome our enmity with God. This way of the Son into the far country then is the way which led to the cross; it is the way of alienation. In this way the incarnate Word “makes our struggle for home his struggle, our situation of homelessness, his own situation, and our need to return to God our home, his need also.”

Of course, Barth is not arguing that Christians are called to imitate Christ by embracing a life of alienation—a life in exile. What Barth means is that the Son embraces the creature who is alienated from God the creator. This is God's movement toward fellowship with sinful creatures to enable them to be at home with God. For Barth we are not just invited home by Christ but home itself comes

to us since in him the kingdom is near. Because in Christ, God has unconditionally loved us and brought us home, we don't need to look beyond the far country to some utopian image of paradise or some “nostalgic memory of bygone times.”

Homecoming in Christ thus concerns the healing of our creaturely self-alienation from God. We have fellowship with God because in the one man Jesus, the Son of God has returned home “to His place as true man, to fellowship with God, to relationship with His fellows, to the ordering of His inward and outward existence, to the fulness of His time for which He was made, to the presence and enjoyment of the salvation for which He was destined.” (CD IV/2, 20). Reconciliation does not involve “some utopian vision of heavenly homecoming,” but the homecoming as an event that takes place in Christ himself and is “therefore occurring in every moment of Christ's life, even and especially on the cross.” Home remains an eschatological hope for Christians. However, that does not mean that Christ has now sent us on a journey toward our homecoming. That might suggest that Christ's life, death and resurrection functioned as a “pre-condition for our homecoming.” But Christ is not just a means to this homecoming for us since our homecoming is an already accomplished reality in him. Understanding our eschatological homecoming therefore must be grounded “in the Word's assumption of Israel's history” as well as in Christ's whole life among a people. A Christian grammar of homecoming must take its cue “from Christ's deep embeddedness and love for the culture, wisdom, and history of the nation of Israel and also by his rejection from the same, even those from his hometown.”

La Rosa Rojas concluded by noting that for Barth “the revelation of humanity's homecoming in Christ summons the church as the People of God to bear witness to a certain kind of life, a life of pilgrimage.” As Christ was present among us as one who found no room in the inn and still cannot, the community is

present in a similar way because it shares in this weakness of his. In this sense the community is nowhere at home on the earth, “it can only lodge and camp here and there as the pilgrim people of God, that at best it can only be permitted to stay but not granted any rights of settled citizenship.” (CD IV/3.2, 743). What might living as a pilgrim people mean for us today in the Americas?

For Barth salvation does not mean escape from creation but God’s embrace of us creatures in our alienation and hostility toward God. Importantly, Christ did not embrace alienation and homelessness as a way of life but instead joined in solidarity with homeless and alienated creatures. Hence, the church in the Americas should “make a preferential option for the displaced. That is, the church as the body of Christ is not called to embrace homelessness, but rather to embrace the homeless, the wanderer, and the exile as Christ did. The church in the Americas is called to enter into solidarity with those on the margins and make their condition and struggle for home the church’s own.” This cannot mean confusing nationalism with “oppressive movements” which dominate others. Latin American history has had centers of power that have emerged from the margins as in Bolivia and in Puerto Rico where the Nationalist part still fights for independence from the United States. From this he concluded that “the problem is not the love of one’s homeland, people, culture, but rather as Latinx theologian Jaqueline Hidalgo observes, the problem is a history in which ‘dominant populations continually struggle to build home on the backs of others.’” In face of this violent history in which the church has been complicit, the church “will need to learn to listen and look for God’s redemptive homecoming, not in centers of power, but instead at the margins of society, where the displaced and the homeless mobilize everyday practices of faith and piety to cultivate a sense of home in the world.”

**Response: Eric Gregory**  
**Princeton University (printed in full)**

Let me thank the organizers for the invitation, and our presenters for such rich and provocative

papers. In these brief remarks, I turn to each on its own terms in a way that might draw them together for shared conversation, especially since I believe nations, and the eschatological mystery of Israel and the nations, have slipped away from theological consciousness in large part due to Barth, or at least the reception of Barth.

So, first, to Angela Hancock’s *Preaching to Citizens*. Hancock retrieves Barth’s sermon lectures in a way that draws analogies to our contemporary political and ecclesial circumstance. While praising Barth’s counsel to unleash the Scriptures anew, to allow its witness to “challenge domesticated nationalist understandings of the gospel,” she claims that Barth fails to address “the hearer of the Word of God as citizen, one called in freedom to contribute to the creation of conditions under which democracy might be strengthened.” She allows that Barth’s emphasis on critique is understandable given his political context, and I don’t take her to suggest critique or “emergency homiletics” is not needed in our own day. She is not asking preachers to go “post-critical.”

But two questions. Hancock’s framing reminds me of one of the more important books in recent discussions of rhetoric and literature: Rita Felski’s *The Limits of Critique*. Without abandoning critique, Felski issues a call to “embrace a wider range of affective styles and modes of arguments,” in order to chasten the preoccupation with hypercritical suspicion as an acid that eats away at imagining better forms of ordinary life. Felski is neither a preacher nor a theologian, but she happens to identify a thought style of many writers central to modern theology. Critics of critique have found it difficult to conceive or practice something other than the method of unmasking: “critique is contagious and charismatic,” Felski writes, “the only conceivable response to the limits of critique seems to be the piling up of yet more critique.” Welcome to the AAR!

I am no sociologist, and I doubt that a central problem with preaching in most American churches is too much critique, though there may be instances where the prophetic no stumbles for the eschatological yes. So, a first comment is to invite reflection on the relation between critique and construction, between standing against and standing for, especially given Hancock's claim (with Barth) that the church "serves people, not causes" and Barth's account of preaching as "summons to cultural activity" as well as skepticism. When, and how, concrete should a preacher be in the constructive mode tending to our common life with "epistemic fragility" in a non-instrumental way? Is it the relational habits of deep democracy that the church promotes, deferring actual practical judgments to individuals blessed with prudence, the kind of practical reasoning and habituation in virtue that many find wanting in Barth? Are more concrete judgments limited to those having a status *confessiones*, and what are the criteria for that?

It is a familiar distinction: preach text, not policies, be church, not party. In our polarized age with calls for moral clarity, it would be interesting to hear any thoughts on the marginalization of the preacher in American public life, a kind of decentering in a different sense than Barth's theological one. I recall, for example, that surveys which led up to the Iraq war, found only 20 percent of those who attended religious services regularly reported clergy taking stands for or against the war, and only 10 percent of Americans considered religion to be an important influence on their opinion about the war. I found Hancock's emphasis on sustaining American democracy notable, a part of the "little righteousness," especially given a strong Barthian challenge to that task in much of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian ethics. Are we in a moment, say a post-1619 project one, where re-imagining a national story, and its relation to a Christian one, at least looks different than the familiar Niebuhr vs. Hauerwas wrestling over Barth? What I find interesting today is the way the United States is negotiating the tensions between liberal democracy and the need for national belonging, with a growing archive of so-called liberal nationalism, efforts that defend national identity from cosmo-

politanism on the one hand and illiberal nationalism on the other (think, for example, of Jill Lepore's recent book, *This America: The Case for the Nation*).

This brings me to a second theme, citizenship and discipleship. Hancock argues that to be placed in the event "church" does not mean leaving one's civil identity behind. Against the nationalist (or at one point, "patriots and partisans"), she construes civil identity as provisional yet affirmed. But there is a bit of slippage in the paper between national identity and state identity, between the politics of a people and the politics of a government. Is civic nationalism okay, but not cultural nationalism, let alone ethnic nationalism? Here I was thinking of a book by Carys Moseley that I have found provocative for our conversation: *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Moseley has foregrounded Barth's distinction between nations and states. She argues we have been misled by the power of his critique of the false gods of liberal Protestantism, natural theology, and ontologized nationalism. It has made us comfortable with the concept of the state rather than nationhood, especially American and German theologians. By contrast, based in many of his sermons, she argues Barth's understanding of Israel, socialism and internationalism supports a providential missiology that "cautiously affirmed what the Bible actually teaches, that God has divided the world into nations and placed people to live in them for the purpose of seeking him." States protect nations; they do not absorb them, though she reads Barth's positive statements about the Holy Roman Empire as analogous to something like the EU, modeling Europe on his beloved Switzerland as a parable of the kingdom that gathers many nations (something, I might add, I think closer to Herder's view than Barth's reading of him as a German romantic). In short, nations are the context for Christian discipleship and piety. My question: is this delicate balance between affirming nations without nationalism, between oiko phobia and xenophobia, tenable, and how might that change homiletic practice?

Second, Matt Jantzen, Karl Barth and the Cold War. Can I just say I can't wait to read the book! Jantzen argues that recent studies of Barth's doctrine of providence "overlook the political dimension." Jantzen offers a contextual and intertextual reading of Barth's "critique of a providential nationalism tied to Western, Christian civilization" so as to render Barth's distinction between the threat of National Socialism and Communism, and his warnings about aligning Christianity to anti-communist ideology both theologically and politically legible as an elusive "third way." Russian communism is presented as a failed godless project that tempts cheap and easy Christian identification with capitalism; National Socialism as a "false godliness," even anti-Christ, in Barth's words, "the replacement of the real Christ by a national Jesus."

On Jantzen's reading, Barth's rejection of Manichaean thinking is fundamentally rooted in his Christological reconfiguration of divine providence, a relatively neglected locus in modern theology (see David Fergusson). Barth, according to Jantzen, was ruling out any idolatrous ground in white Western humanity replacing the elect Israel and the incarnate Jesus "as the center and telos of God's providential activity in world history."

Jantzen echoes Hancock's emphasis on "vigorous engagement" that remains free and independent, contrasting the immanent demons of History to faith in God's providence. We might call this a negative political theology, though seeing the negation in the proclamation. A standard Protestant view is nations are governed by divine providence, but they are not part of salvation history: they are temporal, not eternal. Nations are postlapsarian products of a coordinated agency between the human and the divine, even if creation and history are not necessary for divine self-realization. God saves individuals, not peoples, what counts is grace, not race, as prominent biblical scholar NT Wright controversially argues.

But you go to the SBL sessions and there is a lot of talk about ethnic reasoning, Jews and gentiles, and dangers of Israel-forgetting and Israel-denying Christianity. Early Christians wrestled with the

charge they had disturbed the way of classifying people. They made gentiles unintelligible by preaching that equality in Christ shatters all other communities for those who have another city to love (what Paula Fredriksen last week called the Massachusetts Democratic reading of Galatians 3). But there also is a lot of nation-talk in the Bible: the table of nations, the linking of divine providence to the distribution of nations, as in Acts 17, and even the assignment of angels to nations. The prophets portray the nations as a mere drop in the bucket, a little dust on the scales of divine judgment. The defeated nations count for nothing, Isaiah says, from the perspective of eternity. And yet, when God gathers "all flesh" before the divine presence, it is as nations that they assemble (Is. 42, Jer. 1, Ps. 47, Amos 9). We know the cruel use to which these images have been put, leading scholars like Willie Jennings to call for a new politics beyond the "agonistic vision of nations." Who are those nations, those peoples, those ethne, goyim, those Volk (using Barth's sense of volk as nation not race)? Again, there is a massive scholarly literature on such questions, and I am not sure how Barthians engage with it.

It would be interesting to do a philological study, comparing the German and the Greek, but my questions for Jantzen are theological. First, if world history and salvation history are bound together in Jesus Christ, where exactly is politics (and appreciation for liberal constitutional democracy "from below") in Barth's account of the "signs and witnesses" of divine government through the history of the Bible, the church, the Jewish people, and angelic appearances? The history of the nations is only a subsidiary theme of the biblical message for Barth, but how are we to understand the modality of Christ's relation to saving history and political history if both are theaters of divine self-disclosure, judgment and grace, veiling and unveiling? How would Jantzen answer, for example, Jeff Stout's question to theologians in *Democracy and Tradition*: is it possible to "discern the workings of the Holy Spirit, and thus some reflection of God's

redemptive activity, in modern democratic aspirations”? Or is that spooky secularizing Hegelianism, better to follow Augustine and offer only the tiniest crumbs of world history after the close of prophesy, even political indifference (Duke exegesis: Jantzen’s Barth vis à vis Griffith’s Quietism vs. Bretherton Pentecostal Augustinianism, and does he want to open the door to reading BLM providentially)?

Finally, Alberto La Rosa Rojas, *Participation in the Indwelling of God*. Rojas speaks to both papers: the dialectic of homecoming and exile for the pilgrim people of God, a God who has tabernacled among us, recovering time and space in a sacramental frame. He turns to two of the most famous sections of the *Doctrine of Reconciliation* and reads Barth’s strategic use of home through “the optics of exile, belonging through rejection, and citizenship through alienation.” Like Hancock, he emphasizes a church for those “on the margins in their struggle to find a home in the world.” Like Jantzen, he makes Christology rather than eschatology a primary locus, or better, corrects any eschatology detached from the Christ who made our situation of creaturely exile His own. Enchanted by the Christian story of a universal kinship, Augustine warned Christians of his day not to baptize their *Romanitas*, to see the basic unity of the human race, look to the Jerusalem above, the great melting pot of the eschatological kingdom. This journey, longing for eternity, sighing for the New Jerusalem, is not, under Barth’s correction, a homeless Platonic heart restless on its way into the far country, beyond the close of history. It is the way of the Son into the alien and foreign whose path we migrants follow. The homeless Son does not embrace diasporic homelessness: he brings and makes home to and for us. This God, woven into flesh and radical solidarity denies the opposition of “earthly” and “heavenly”: every future ray of God’s glory connects to our now, even in our COVID homes.

Much to be said, but let me end by highlighting the intriguing political conclusion Rojas makes by way of distinction. To be very reductive, Rojas opens the possibility of a “good” nationalism, emerging from the margins (Bolivia, Puerto Rico) and those

nationalisms built on the “backs of others.” Nationalism as sites of moral injury, yet also resistance to neoliberal imperial cosmopolitanism and global capital, guardians of culture and community.

I am increasingly convinced that Western theology doesn’t quite know what to say about national identity. Whether imagined or not, nations have not disappeared. None of us have lived in a world where nations do not matter. I suspect most of us might be able to preach a good sermon against Christian nationalism. But is there anything theologically significant, or even interesting, to say about nations anymore, other than a loud NO?

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For those members of the Barth Society interested in the theology of Thomas F. Torrance, there will be a VIRTUAL SESSION of the **Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship** on Friday, November 19 at the AAR listed as PV19-231 VIRTUAL SESSION in the AAR booklet.

**The Annual Lecture** *Simplicity in Fourth-century Nicene Theology and T.F. Torrance’s “Homoousion”* will be presented by **Stephen R. Holmes, University of St. Andrews** during the session from 1:00PM to 3:00PM. **Gary Deddo, Grace Communion Seminary**, will preside.

**Food for Thought:** From a Sermon by Barth at a Christmas Service at Basel University in 1957 entitled “The Great Dispensation” based on Phil. 4: 5-6, “*The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be known to God*” published in *Deliverance to the Captives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 102-5.

“Celebrating! This suggests holy days and holidays. We think of vacations, of rest and relaxation, of pausing in the rough-and-tumble and fret of everyday life. In peace of mind we shall celebrate Christmas. Let us take special notice right here that Christmas is not a short-lived affair as holidays

usually are. A true Christmas celebration is an event that penetrates our hearts and our lives. It takes possession of us and does not relinquish us any more. We breathe freely and no longer gasp. We are permanently freed from unrest.

This ‘celebrating’ is indicated by Paul when he says, *Have no anxiety about anything*. Dear friends, this is the announcement of the great Christmas holy day and holiday, of everlasting and complete vacations. We *shall* not be anxious? No, we *need* not be anxious! We can afford not to have anxiety about anything. We may accept this dispensation and make use of it. This is the true Christmas celebration. *Have no anxiety about anything*.

When we do have anxiety, we take ourselves so seriously as to imagine that we are able to solve the great problems of life by ourselves. We feel in duty bound to shoulder, like Atlas, the great burden of life and all the lesser loads, to manipulate them, master them and get them out of the way. We realize—don’t we?—that anxiety has a great deal to do with ceremonial. When we are anxious, we get ceremonial. Where there is ceremonial, anxiety lurks backstage.

Burdens and questions of life—yes, they are real. We all want so much to be happy, conceivably because we are somewhat unhappy. This *is* a problem in our life. Another one is how to discern our purpose in life, and how to live up to it. Still another question is how I rate with the people around me. Am I sufficiently esteemed? Do I get my due? How can I get along with this fellowman or that one, how can I stand him, how can I perhaps even help him? What about human existence? Is it bearable, is there any sense in being born? A very serious question indeed! He who has never considered it shall go to Sartre and Camus and learn from them how to take it seriously. What is man’s eternal destiny, his salvation or maybe his damnation?

Paul’s comment on all these questions, including the last one, is, *Have no anxiety about anything*. This is the great dispensation. It does in no way deny the seriousness and genuineness of these questions. It only asserts that we are freed from the compulsion to tackle and solve these problems by ourselves. It is not your business to procure your own happiness; it is not your business to stake out the purpose and task of your life., even less to determine whether or not you live up to it. Hands off! Quit worrying about the limitations and the results of your work. Furthermore, it is not up to you to make out your fellowman, neither in terms of his shortcomings nor in terms of his achievements. And lastly, it is not up to you to decide whether humane

existence is meaningful, let alone to gain eternal salvation or damnation.

*Have no anxiety!* This is to have a good holiday, to pause, breathe, to take it easy, definitely to enjoy vacations!”

Barth went on to say because the celebration is of Christmas, it is truly a deliverance from anxiety because it is the Lord who is at hand, that is, “The Lord who took upon himself all questions and all burdens of life, putting them out of the way to make us live with him and in him . . . *The Lord is at hand*. Not, some comforts of religion are at hand; these are but another sign of man’s inability to comfort himself. Nor is the Church at hand with its old and new teachings and theologies or with its orders and institutions and with its traditions. The Church’s existence is validated not by witness to itself, but only by witness to the Lord who is not dead, but alive who has not passed away and is past, but comes. He comes now and he comes not only to the other fellow, but to you and to me . . . The coming of this Lord is the mystery of the great dispensation.”

### **ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES**

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

***The KBSNA thanks all who have paid their dues for this year.***