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**Engaging Barth in Troubled Times – TH651  
Summer 2026**

**PURPOSE:**

How are Christians to think theologically in an age of ecological degradation, post-colonialism, and the resurgence of nationalism? Using Barth as a foundation and guide, this course explores a systematic theology of “deep reconciliation” that thinks about the relation of God, humans, creation, and the church in orthodox and liberative ways. It will introduce key themes in Barth’s theology while suggesting new directions for the 21st century.

**PREREQUISITES:** There are no pre-requisites for this course.

**COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of this course, students should

- obtain a deeper understanding of the methods and content of Christian theology through lectures, discussions, and readings.
- understand the main contours, development, and coherence of Barth’s theology
- explore the relevance of Barth’s theology by bringing it into dialogue with contemporary issues in church and society

**FORMAT AND CONTENT:**

*Engaging Barth in Troubled Times* is a one week 1.5 credit course that will introduce students to key themes in Barth’s theology and suggest critical additions in light of our context. Each day will be divided into two sessions covering primary readings and a particular question or theme. Students are to come to class having read the material, taken notes, and be ready to engage in class discussions. The sessions will include lectures, critical reading of texts, and discussions. Students will be evaluated based on attendance, class participation, a take-home test, and research paper. While this is a course in systematic theology it presupposes theology serves the concrete life of the church and individual formation.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Keith Johnson, *The Essential Karl Barth: A Reader and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019). Required, can be purchased online.

Please note that in class the instructor will be using the pagination of the paper copy rather than the electronic version.

These additional readings will be on **reserve** through the Populi in an electronic format.

David Abram, "The Ecology of Magic", *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1-14.

Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World", *Dialog*, 192–207.

Willie James Jennings, "Barth and the Racial Imaginary", *Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, 498-516.

Serene Jones, "This God Which is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine", *Transfigurations*, 109-141.

Sere Jones, "Trauma and Grace – Beginnings", *Trama and Grace*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, 1-22.

Catherine Keller, "'Sterile Waters': Barth's nothingness that is", *The Face of the Deep*, 84-99.

Adrian Langdon, "Jesus Christ, election and nature", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 453-470.

Bruce McCormack, "Trinity", *Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, 227-245.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Dialogue: God as Spirit and Natural Science", *The Historicity of Nature*, 61-72.

Daniel Philpott, "Four Practices", *Just and Unjust Peace*, 171-206 (suggested).

Paul Santmire, "I-Thou, I-It, and I-Ens", *The Journal of Religion*, 260-273.

Delores Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption", *Cross Examinations*, 19-32.

## CALENDAR

The instructor reserves the right to change the schedule depending on the pace of the course, though only minor changes in reading would occur.

EKB = Johnson, *The Essential Karl Barth: A Reader and Commentary*

Theme	Reading
July 13 <sup>th</sup> – Session 1  Introductions, definitions, context, directions	EKB, "Introduction: The Life of Karl Barth", 1-11; "The Task of Dogmatics", "The Word of God", "Revelation and Faith", 109-25.  Jones, "Trauma and Grace – Beginnings", <i>Trama and Grace</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ed, 1-22.
July 13 <sup>th</sup> – Session 2  Revelation: Who is God?	EKB, "The Doctrine of the Trinity", 126-136 EKB, "The Missions of the Son and Spirit", 137-148 Jennings, "Barth and the Racial Imaginary", <i>Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth</i> , 498-516

July 14 <sup>th</sup> – Session 3  Election: What is God’s plan?	EKB, “The Doctrine of Election”, 174-189. “The Election of Jesus Christ”, 190-199. Langdon, “Jesus Christ, election and nature”, <i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i> , 453-470
July 14 <sup>th</sup> – Session 4  Reconciliation: How does God save?	EKB, “God with Us”, 233-246. Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World”, <i>Dialog</i> , 192–207.
July 15 <sup>th</sup> – Session 5  Reconciliation 2	EKB, “The Obedience of the Son”, 247-264. Delores Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption”, <i>Cross Examinations</i> , 19-32.
July 15 <sup>th</sup> – Session 6  Reconciliation 3	EKB, “The Exaltation of the Son of Man”, “The Glory of the Mediator” 265-286 Philpott, “Four Practices”, <i>Just and Unjust Peace</i> , 171-206.
July 16 <sup>th</sup> – Session 7  Creation, Covenant, Difference: Why do we exist?	EKB, “Creation and Covenant”, 205-210. Keller, “‘Sterile Waters’: Barth’s nothingness that is”, <i>The Face of the Deep</i> , 84-99. Pannenberg, “A Dialogue: God as Spirit and Natural Science”, 61-72. Jones, “This God Which is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine”, <i>Transfigurations</i> , 109-141. (suggested)
July 16 <sup>th</sup> –Session 8  Christian Animism: How are we related?	EKB, “The Covenant Partner of God”, 211-223. Santmire, “I-Thou, I-It, and I-Ens”, 260-273. David Abram, “The Ecology of Magic”, <i>The Spell of the Sensuous</i> , 1-14.
July 18 <sup>th</sup> – Session 9  Divine Perfections: What is God like?	EKB, “The Reality of God”, 167-173  McCormack, “Trinity”, <i>Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth</i> , 227-245.
July 18 <sup>th</sup> – Session 10  Loose Ends and Conclusions: Towards Deep Reconciliation	
<b>August 15<sup>th</sup> – papers due</b>	Certificate and Basic Degree

September 11 <sup>th</sup> – papers due	Advanced Degree
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## EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

1. **Attendance and in-class participation (all students).** As an intensive course, 100% attendance is required for those taking it for credit. All students (certificate, basic, and advanced degree) are to come to class having critically read the material to the best of their ability and prepared to engage in class discussions. Students should aim to summarize the reading in a paragraph and come with two or three discussion points or questions.
2. **Reflection Paper (certificate only).** Students are to write a four to six page reflection paper (1000-1500 words). Pick three major themes or doctrines in Barth’s theology and reflect on the implications of this for ministry, the church, or individual Christian formation. Use materials in the courses with proper citation. Please consult the instructor if you need help picking themes. It will be due on **August 15<sup>th</sup>**.
3. **Research paper (basic and advanced degree).** Papers are to be in Time New Roman 12-point font, double spaced, in Chicago style. The paper should draw from a direct reading of the *Church Dogmatics* and engage in additional research. You may take one of the following approaches for the paper:
  - a. Explore in more detail the idea of ‘deep reconciliation’ in dialogue with Barth’s theology.
  - b. Bring Barth into dialogue with a contemporary social issue.
  - c. Explore Barth’s theology in relation to some aspect of church life or ministry.

Please feel free to contact the instructor to dialogue about paper topics. Generative AI is not permitted in writing papers (however, see VST Student Handbook for ways in which AI may be used in the research process).

**Basic Degree:** 8 to 12 pp. (1850-3000 words), with 10-15 entries beyond course readings. **Due Aug 15<sup>th</sup>.**

**Advanced Degree:** 12 to 15 pp. (3000-3500), with 15-20 entries beyond course readings. **Due Sept 11<sup>th</sup>.**

**Directed Study (3 credits):** 24 pp. (6000 words), with 15-20 entries beyond course readings. **Due Sept 11<sup>th</sup>.**

## OTHER COURSE POLICIES

1. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
2. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
3. **Assignment and Course Evaluation**
  - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
  - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
  - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
4. **Late assignments**

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment.
5. **Limitation on use of social media**

Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.
6. **Limitation on use of class material and images**

No material from Zoom classes, including screen capture pictures of their fellow students, professors, and CTAs cannot be posted to Facebook or any other social media without the express consent of the affected individuals.
7. **VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment.** If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For basic orientations to Barth, see some of these primers:

- Eberhard Busch, *Barth* (Abingdon Press, 2008).

- John Franke, *Barth for Armchair Theologians* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).
- David Guretzki, *An Explorer's Guide to Karl Barth* (IVP Academic, 2016).

For more advanced introductions see:

- Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology* (Eerdmans, 2004).
- Joseph Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).
- John Webster, *Barth* (Continuum: 2000).

### Websites:

The Center of Barth Studies: <https://barth.ptsem.edu/>

Resource Guide from the Center: [https://issuu.com/ptsem/docs/barth\\_resource\\_guide](https://issuu.com/ptsem/docs/barth_resource_guide)

The Barth Literature Search Project (database):  
[http://barthresearch.org/barth/index\\_Eng.htm](http://barthresearch.org/barth/index_Eng.htm)

### Essential Collections:

George Hunsinger and Keith Johnson, eds. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth, 2 Volumes* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020).

Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul Nimmo, *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

John Webster, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

### Others:

Aldred, Raymond and Matthew Anderson. *Our Home and Treaty Land: Walking Our Creation Story*. Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Publishing, 2022.

Clough, David. *On Animals*, vol 1: *Systematic Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2012.

Clough, David. "Using Barth 'to Justify Doing Nothing': James Cone's Unanswered Challenge to the Whiteness of Barth Studies," In *Karl Barth and Liberation Theology*, 147-159. Eds. Kate Dugan and Paul Dafydd Jones. London: T&T Clark, 2023.

Dalferth, Ingolf. *Theology and Philosophy*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.

Dupré, Louis. *Passage of Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*.

- New Have, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Farrow, Douglas. *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Gregersen, Niels Hendrik. "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World." *Dialog* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 192–207.
- Gregersen, Niels Hendrik. "Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology", *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 173-88.
- Hunsinger, George. *How to Read Karl Barth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Hunsinger, George. "The Mediator of Communion." In *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 149-151. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishers, 2000.
- Jenkins, Willis. *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013.
- Dugan, Kate, and Paul Dafydd Jones, eds. *Karl Barth and Liberation Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2023).
- Jones, Serene. "This God Which is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine." In *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, 109-141. Eds. Maggie Kim, Susan St. Ville, and Susan Simonaitis. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Keller, Katherine. *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Langdon, Adrian. *Barth and Ecotheology: The Electing God and the Community of Creation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2025.
- McCormack, Bruce. "Divine Impassibility or Simply Divine Constancy? Implications of Karl Barth's Later Christology for Debates over Impassibility." In *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, 150-186. Eds. James Keating and Thomas Joseph White. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- McCormack, Bruce. *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Molnar, Paul. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: T&T Clark, 2017.
- Nimmo, Paul. *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision*. London: T&T Clark, 2011.
- Northcott, Michael. "Do Dolphins Carry the Cross: Biological Moral Realism and Theological Ethics." *New Blackfriars* 84, issue 994 (December 2003): 540-553.
- Pârvan, Alexandra and Bruce McCormack, "Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering: Towards a 'Psychological' Ontology of God." *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 59 (March 2017): 1-25.
- Philpott, Daniel. *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Radford Ruether, Rosemary. *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
- Radford Ruether, Rosemary. *Sexism and God-Talk*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

- Santmire, H. Paul. *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
- Southgate, Christopher. *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil*. Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- Tietz, Christiane. *Karl Barth: A Life in Conflict* (New York: Oxford, 2021).
- Williams, Delores. "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption." In *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, 19-32. Ed. Marit Trelstad. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.