

Edited by
Hunsinger
Johnson

THE WILEY BLACKWELL
COMPANION TO

KARL BARTH

Volume 2

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THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO
KARL BARTH
Volume 2: Barth in Dialogue

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Volume 1

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THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO
KARL BARTH
Volume 1: Barth and Dogmatics



Edited by
George Hunsinger
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**The Wiley Blackwell
Companion to
Karl Barth**

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The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth

Barth and Dogmatics

Volume I

Edited by

George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson

WILEY Blackwell

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To Eberhard Busch

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Preface

George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson

Readers of Karl Barth often find his work at once familiar and strange. The familiarity stems from the largely traditional subject matter of his theology. The questions, debates, and doctrines that Barth considers have been the currency of Christian theologians for centuries. He talks about recognizable topics like the triune God, Jesus Christ, the church, and the Christian life. He cites the Bible regularly, nearly 15 000 times in the *Church Dogmatics* alone, and he interacts with the work of well-known figures within the Christian tradition. All these things make Barth's theology appear accessible to new readers, as if they have found a theologian who speaks a language nearly everyone can understand. But one does not have to read very far in Barth's work before things become strange. Barth uses everyday language in new and surprising ways. He often places fairly simple claims in dialectical tension with one another to produce an unexpected and complex result. Major figures within the tradition might be cited approvingly on one page only to have central aspects of their work rejected and reconfigured a few pages later. Barth frequently produces innovative readings of Scripture that stretch the imagination. No one who reads Barth comes away without being challenged, provoked, and changed.

We edited this *Companion* with these readers of Barth in mind. Our goal was to help them better understand those parts of Barth's theology that seem strange so they can see the familiar aspects of his theology with new eyes. We sought to create a comprehensive resource that covers nearly every topic of interest related to Barth's life and work. The diverse set of scholars who participated are experts in their subject matter, and they brought great care to their work. Each chapter was composed with the aim of providing both clarity and depth to the topic. New readers of Barth should find that the chapters serve as a helpful introduction to the most important questions, themes, and ideas in Barth's work. Experienced readers should discover fresh insights and interpretations that will raise new questions and enrich their scholarship.

This *Companion* is divided into two volumes and four parts. Volume 1 explores "Barth and Dogmatics." Part I introduces "The Life of Karl Barth" through two timelines of Barth's life and a chapter-length survey of his historical and theological significance.

Part II examines “Barth on Doctrinal Theology.” The 33 chapters in this section explore Barth’s thought on key topics and questions in dogmatic theology as reflected both in Barth’s early work and his *Church Dogmatics*. Volume 2 turns attention to “Barth in Dialogue.” The 22 chapters in Part III place Barth into conversation with major figures in the history of Christian thought in order to capture a true, critical dialogue between them. Part IV explores “Barth on Major Themes.” Over the course of 21 chapters, Barth’s relationship to a variety of movements, traditions, religions, and events are explored with the goal of placing his thought in its theological, ecumenical, and historical context.

Projects of this size are the product of a community. We are grateful to editors and production team at Wiley-Blackwell both for inviting us to take on this project and for supporting our work along the way. Special recognition should be given to Rebecca Harkin, Joseph Catherine, Benjamin Elijah, Jake Opie, Richard Samson, and Sandra Kerka. They were gracious and professional at every turn. We also want to express our deep appreciation to each of our authors for their contribution to this project. Several of them put other tasks on hold, or worked on short time frames, in order to meet the deadlines associated with this project.

Special recognition should be given to Ty Kieser, who worked as an editorial assistant on this project while completing his doctoral studies at Wheaton College. Ty’s encyclopedic knowledge of this project proved to be invaluable time and again. His enthusiasm, work ethic, and joyful spirit kept this project from becoming overwhelming despite its size. In addition to bringing every chapter into conformity with the bibliographical requirements, he also raised good questions and contributed insights that made the work stronger. It was a privilege to work with such a fine theologian.

One of the best days we experienced over the course of this project was the day Eberhard Busch accepted our invitation to participate in it. The importance of Professor Busch’s contributions to Barth studies over the past 50 years can hardly be overstated. His keen mind, gracious spirit, and willingness to share his knowledge – not to mention his close personal acquaintance with Barth – have strengthened and enriched Barth’s legacy. In honor of his lifetime of work, we dedicate this *Companion* to him.

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Primary Text Abbreviations

ALA	<i>Ad Limina Apostolorum</i>
ATS	<i>Against the Stream</i>
BAP	<i>The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism</i>
CD	<i>Church Dogmatics</i>
CL	<i>The Christian Life</i>
CRE	<i>Credo</i>
CSC	<i>Community, State, and Church</i>
DC	<i>Deliverance to the Captives</i>
DO	<i>Dogmatics in Outline</i>
EE	<i>Epistle to the Ephesians</i>
EP	<i>Epistle to the Philippians</i>
ESS	<i>Eine Schweizer Stimme</i>
ET	<i>Evangelical Theology</i>
ETH	<i>Ethics</i>
FI	“Fate and Idea in Theology”
FOC	<i>The Faith of the Church</i>
FT	<i>Final Testimonies</i>
FQI	<i>Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum</i>
GA	Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe
GD	<i>Göttingen Dogmatics</i>
HCT	<i>The Heidelberg Catechism for Today</i>
HG	“The Humanity of God”
HIC	<i>How I Changed My Mind</i>
HOM	<i>Homiletics</i>
HSCL	<i>The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life</i>
KBA	Karl Barth Archiv
KD	<i>Kirchliche Dogmatik</i>
KGSG	<i>The Knowledge of God and the Service of God</i>
PRA	<i>Prayer</i>
PTNC	<i>Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century</i>
RI	<i>The Epistle to the Romans</i> , first edition
RII	<i>The Epistle to the Romans</i> , second edition

ROD	<i>The Resurrection of the Dead</i>
RSC	<i>A Shorter Commentary on Romans</i>
TC	<i>Theology and Church</i>
TET	<i>Theological Existence Today!: A Plea for Theological Freedom</i>
TJC	<i>Theology of John Calvin</i>
TRC	<i>Theology of Reformed Confessions</i>
TS	<i>Theology of Schleiermacher</i>
WGT	<i>The Word of God and Theology</i>
WTW	<i>Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1</i>

Part I

The Life of Karl Barth

Karl Barth Professional Timeline

1886 – Born 10 May in Basel, Switzerland.

1904–1908 – Studies at the Universities of Bern, Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg.

1908–1909 – Editorial Assistant for *Christliche Welt*.

1909 – Ordained 4 November by his father in the cathedral in Bern.

1909 – Assistant pastor in Geneva.

1911–1921 – Reformed pastor in Safenwil, a small industrial city in Switzerland.

1914 – In August Barth is shocked to read a manifesto supporting the Kaiser's war efforts signed by almost all of his theology professors.

1918–1919 — First edition of Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*. Barth likens himself to a man climbing a dark bell tower who, reaching out to steady himself with the rail, grabs a bell rope by mistake, thus sounding an alarm that rings through the whole town.

He writes: "The Gospel proclaims a God wholly other from humankind," a God who dwells in "another plane that is unknown."

1919 – Tambach Lecture delivered at a conference of religious socialists. Barth's break with religious socialism. He protests against "secularizing Christ for the umpteenth time, e.g. today for the sake of democracy, or pacifism, or the youth movement, or something of the sort – as yesterday it would have been for the sake of liberal culture or our countries, Switzerland or Germany."

1921–1922 – Second edition of Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*. He writes: "If Christianity is not altogether and unreservedly eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatsoever to Christ." It becomes a best seller through the present day.

1921–1930 – Professor of Theology in Göttingen and Münster.

1921 – Barth is appointed professor of Reformed theology at the University of Göttingen, and later to chairs at Münster (1925) and Bonn (1930).

1923 – Barth debates his distinguished teacher, Adolf von Harnack.

1924–1925 – *Göttingen Dogmatics* (published posthumously).

1924 – *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Beginning of the "dialectical theology" movement. Barth, Bultmann, Gogarten, Thurneysen, Merz. Dissolved in 1933.

1925 – October. Barth assumes a theology position in Münster.

1926 – First seminar on Anselm.

1927 – *Christliche Dogmatik*.

1928 – Collaboration with Heinrich Scholz. Beginnings of Barth's Anselm book.

1929 – Meetings with Eric Przywara.

1930–1935 – The years at Bonn.

1931 – *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*.

1931 – *Church Dogmatics*. Barth begins the first book of his *magnum opus*. It grows year by year out of his class lectures; though incomplete, it eventually fills four volumes in 12 parts, nearly 10,000 pages in all.

1933 – January. *Theologische Existenz heute* [Theological Existence Today]. From broadside to journal. "As though nothing had happened."

1934 – 31 May. The Barmen Declaration. Barth mails this declaration to Hitler personally.

1935 – June. Barth is forced to resign from his professorship at the University of Bonn for protesting against the treatment of the Jews and for refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Arrested and deported.

1935–1968 – Professor in Basel.

1935 – Increasing sense of isolation.

1936 – Attends lecture by Pierre Maury on "Election and Faith."

1937– Gifford Lectures. *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*.

1941 – Conversations with Bonhoeffer in Basel.

1942–1945 – Works against a Swiss law that prevented Jewish refugees from entering the country. His telephone is wiretapped by the police.

1944 – Committee for a Free Germany. Communist-led organization organized to support refugees from Germany.

1945 – Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (19 October). Written under Barth's influence but he considers it to be too vague.

1946–1955 – The postwar era: Between East and West.

1941–onward – Friendship with Hans Urs von Balthasar.

1945–1955 – Opposes German rearmament and nuclear weapons, both in general and in Europe.

1945–1950 – Works for reconciliation with Germany and stands against retribution.

1948 – World Council of Churches. First Assembly in Amsterdam. Barth delivers plenary address.

1949 – “The Church Between East and West.”

1955–1962 – Final years of teaching and activism for peace.

1956 – Bicentenary of Mozart's death.

1958 – Petition against nuclear weapons. In company with many famous nuclear physicists, Barth calls for unilateral nuclear disarmament. Declares preparation for atomic warfare a sin and a denial of all three articles of the Christian faith.

1962–1968 – The years of retirement.

1962 – Trip to the United States. Visits Chicago, Pittsburgh, Richmond, and Princeton.

1963 – Sonning Prize. Copenhagen.

1963 – Honorary doctorate in Paris. *Laudatio* given by Paul Ricouer.

1968 – Sigmund Freud Prize. Awarded by the Academy for Poetry and Speech in 1968 for the quality of his academic prose.

1968 – On 10 December Barth dies in his sleep.

Karl Barth Personal Timeline

1886 – Barth is born in Basel on 10 May.

1907 – Barth, age 21, falls in love with Rösy Munger. They plan to marry but are prevented by Barth's parents. At their last meeting they burn their letters to one another.

1909 – Barth serves as assistant pastor in Geneva. Preaches from Calvin's pulpit in the Auditoire.

1911 – Barth's parents (mainly his mother) arrange his marriage to Nelly Hoffman (b. 1893), an accomplished violinist and a former pupil in one of Barth's confirmation classes.

1911 – Barth leaves Geneva for a pastorate in Safenwil.

1913 – Barth and Nelly's wedding day (27 March). He is 27, she is 19.

1921–1925 – Professor in Göttingen.

1925 – Charlotte von Kirschbaum meets Barth. She is 24 years old, financially almost destitute, and in poor health. Barth is 37.

1925–1930 – Professor in Münster.

1925 – Rösy Munger dies of leukemia. Barth spends a day in his study grieving for her. He carries a photo of her in his suit pocket for the rest of his life. He sometimes takes it out and weeps, even into his old age.

1926 – Charlotte visits Münster and begins secretarial work for Barth. They soon realize, in joy and anguish, that they have fallen in love.

1929 – Charlotte moves in with Nelly and Karl Barth and their five children in Münster. She lives in the household with them for 35 years.

1930–1935 – Professor in Bonn.

1931 – Barth begins the *Church Dogmatics*.

1933 – *Theologische Existenz heute!*

1934 – Barth writes the Barmen Declaration.

1935 – Barth returns to Basel in July, after the Confessing Church fails to support him with a teaching post. He is officially expelled from Germany by the police in October. Charlotte follows the family into Switzerland. From there they support the German Resistance and the Confessing Church.

1935–1962 – Professor in Basel.

Early 1960s – Charlotte becomes ill, possibly with Alzheimer's disease. In 1965 she moves to a nursing home in Riehen, where she dies 10 years later. Barth visits her every Sunday, often accompanied by Nelly. Nelly continues to visit Charlotte after Karl is gone.

1968 – Barth dies in his sleep on 10 December at the age of 82.

1975 – Charlotte dies at the age of 76. Nelly honors Karl's request that Charlotte be buried in the family plot.

1976 – Nelly dies at the age of 83. All three names appear on one gravestone.

Barth is honored with a feast day on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church (USA) on 10 December.

CHAPTER 1

Karl Barth's Historical and Theological Significance

Christiane Tietz

Karl Barth allowed himself to be moved by the realities that surrounded him. It was the harsh and perplexing reality of the world that led him to ask about God in a new way. It was the poverty he confronted as a young curate in Geneva, not to mention the class divisions he encountered as pastor in Safenwil, that made him search for a hope against hope on the basis of faith (cf. Barth 1971, p. 306; GA 22, p. 730). It was the reality of World War I and the capitulation of many of his theological teachers to German zeal for the war that made him doubt their theological presuppositions and develop his disruptively “dialectical” counterproposals. It was the reality of his teaching post as a professor that made him move away from a merely dialectical critique to developing a full-scale dogmatics. And it was the reality of the Third Reich that made him lift up the relevance not only of the First Commandment as a theological criterion but also of Jesus Christ as the self-revelation of God. Although Barth argued that God and the Christian faith were not merely cultural or historical phenomena, his thinking arose in response to immediate historical circumstances that betrayed, he felt, a certain crisis of modernity (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 6f).

Barth and the other dialectical theologians were not the only ones who discerned a crisis in modernity. Many intellectuals at that time like Ernst Bloch or Paul Tillich felt similarly. But the distinctive feature of Barth and the other dialectical theologians was their return to the theology of the Reformation (cf. Ebeling 1962, p. 1). For them that meant returning to faith in a God “whose existence radically questioned the world and oneself. Only God himself and his existence were no longer uncertain” (Gogarten 1937, p. 13 rev.).

Some of their contemporaries regarded their approach as a departure from “modernity.” They suspected that here “‘modern man’ after the First World War had become weary of Enlightenment ideals and was now clinging to an idea of God that erupted from dark,

medieval depths" (Gestrich 1977, p. 1).¹ Yet Barth and his friends did not understand their approach as a withdrawal from modernity and its rationality. They claimed that their concept of God as the Wholly Other was "the theme of the Bible and the sum of philosophy in one" (Barth 2010, p. 17; cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 2f.).

Return to the Bible, Focus on "die Sache"

At the center of Barth's new views lay his return to the biblical text. Of course, the biblical text was always – and also in Barth's time – a subject of theological study. Yet because Barth regarded the historic-critical approach to the Bible as insufficient, he tried something different in his two commentaries on Paul's Letter to the Romans. The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer considered Barth's first commentary to be a milestone in modern hermeneutics, because it made clear that understanding a text means understanding "*die Sache*" or "subject matter" of the text. Here Barth undertook "a 'critique' of liberal theology which not so much meant critical history as such but the theological modesty which acknowledged that its results were already an understanding of Holy Scripture. Therefore, despite its refusal of methodological reflection, Barth's Letter to the Romans was some kind of hermeneutical manifesto" (Gadamer 1972, 481 rev.)

In his preface to the second edition of The Letter to the Romans, it not only became clearer what Barth meant by "*die Sache*" of a text but also what he regarded as the shortcomings of the historical-critical method. Barth replied to the reproach that he was an "enemy of *historical criticism*" and little more than a biblicist (Barth 2010, p. 11). First he acknowledged the full "right and necessity" of historical criticism. Then he went on to register his dissatisfaction that historical criticism ended with an "interpretation of the text which I cannot call an interpretation, but only the first primitive attempt at an interpretation" (Barth 2010, p. 11). His own aim was first to bring out "what stands in the text," yet then to think about it until "the barrier" between Paul's time and ours becomes "transparent" so that "Paul *talks* there and we ... *listen* here, until the conversation between document and reader is focused totally on '*die Sache*' (which *cannot* be different here and there)" (Barth 2010, p. 13 rev.). In focusing on one and the same "*Sache*," text and reader become present to each other. *This* is the critique that was finally necessary when reading a biblical text: relating and comparing all its statements with "*die Sache*" of which it is talking. In this regard Barth penned his famous line: "In my view, the historical critics need to be more critical!" (Barth 2010, p. 14)

Barth's perspective on the historical-critical method was a response to the dominance of historism in Protestant theology at that time (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 2). In standing against it, Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Gogarten, and Thurneysen were on the same page as Paul Tillich and Emanuel Hirsch (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 16). All of them judged that historism had made the revelation of God into an inner-worldly phenomenon. The *extra nos* of the divine Word had been abolished and preaching had

1 Gestrich's allusion here is to Friedrich Karl Schumann's *Der Gottesgedanke und der Zerfall der Moderne*, 1929.

thereby become impossible (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 16f.). Ernst Troeltsch's historical method and its norms of critique, analogy, and correlation (cf. Troeltsch 1913) had dwindled God's reality into a part of history. God's absolute otherness could no longer be encountered (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 21f.).

With his critique of historicism and his concept of the transhistorical simultaneity of *Sache* and reader (through the text), Barth had rejected a simple linear conception of time. He was convinced that the whole existence of the church depended on its simultaneity with the living Christ. In his mature view, this simultaneity was the essence of Christian celebrations like Christmas and Easter. When celebrating these holidays, Christians presupposed "that prior to our remembrance, the One whom we remember is himself in action to-day, here and now." They presupposed that *as* such events once took place definitively there and then, they *also* in some form (secondary and dependent) "take place to-day, and will take place again tomorrow" (CD IV/2, p. 112 rev.). This "realism" was grounded in Jesus Christ, the living Savior present then and present now. "He overcomes the barrier of his own time and therefore of historical distance He is present and future in his once-for-all act there and then He is among us to-day, and will be among us to-morrow, in his once-for-all act as it took place there and then" (CD IV/2, p. 112 rev.). Through his focus on "*die Sache*" – on the incarnate and present Christ who lived, died, and rose again – Barth was able to develop an understanding of the biblical text which expected that God would speak through it – not in the naïve sense of a fundamentalist biblicism but in reckoning with God's active, in-breaking presence when reading and studying the Bible.

Barth's methodological approach to the biblical text was rejected by distinguished theologians of his time. For example, in 1923 his former teacher Adolf von Harnack accused him of destroying the academic character of theology through his somehow naïve and devotional return to the meaning of the biblical text. In his eyes, Barth had turned the professor's lectern into a pastor's pulpit (cf. GA 35, pp. 55–88).

Barth's rediscovery of the Bible in fact led to a revival of biblical theology and of biblical preaching among his contemporaries. And it led to a new interest in the church, as the Bible has its decisive meaning only in and for the church. The church was the community that lived from reading the Bible and from preaching its texts. Whereas cultural Protestantism emphasized the individual and his or her subjectivity, Barth's theology brought the church back into the picture.

God as the Wholly Other

In contrast to the liberal theological approach of his time that started with the human being, and in particular with religious self-consciousness, Barth emphasized that theology had to begin with God. This emphasis was prompted by the shock of World War I, which showed Barth that all human ethical concepts such as socialism or pacifism or even "Christianity" were part of the world and were not able to overcome the world as it is. In World War I, in Barth's view, all ethics had "gone into the trenches" (GA 48, p. 186). No ethical concept was able to overcome this human catastrophe, be it the concept of the state or of patriotism, not to mention socialism or even pacifism. Not unlike

the sixteenth-century Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli, for Barth everything human was “flesh” in its nullity and transitory nature (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 47). Barth concluded that “world is world” and that all worldly gods have become “battlefield grey” (GA 48, pp. 193, 195). Only God, as he can be recognized in the life and work of Jesus Christ, is the one who brings the New. “He is entirely different from anything else which seems true and right to me” (GA 48, p. 201).

Barth’s famous critique of religion, not least of the Christian religion, arose from his understanding of God as the Wholly Other who disrupts our self-satisfied existence. For religion wants to quell this disruption. It recommends that we “trust in God as a quite attainable and helpful requisite for life Without blushing one talks about ‘Christian’ customs, families, organizations [In religion], the ‘divine’ has taken possession of God, making God into an instrumental value” (GA 48, p. 679 rev.). In religion, God is used as a means to satisfy our self-determined needs.

Barth concluded that there are no human criteria with which we can measure the immeasurable deity of God. The only criterion is this, that “God’s will” conquers us and “puts such a claim on us that we have to recognize and confess: this God is God” (GA 48, p. 202). No detached evaluation of God according to worldly standards is possible.

Therefore, only God can reveal God. And only God can authorize any human word about God (cf. GA 48, pp. 567, 595). Although Barth’s decision to begin theological thinking with God could seem self-referential, it was in fact a consequence of his insight that all other starting points for theological thinking were unable to get beyond the hopeless human situation. “Human beings as human beings cry out for God ... Not again for something human, but for God, ... for God as the redeemer of their *humanity*” (GA 19, p. 153). Theology could start only with God, because God, as the Christian church believed, had in fact revealed himself, by a great miracle, in Jesus Christ – perpendicularly from above.

Barth’s Political Critiques

It was Barth’s insight into the radical difference between God and world that enabled him to critique the politics of his time. He understood not only God’s gospel but also God’s law as different from what reason considered right (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 49). We encounter both, God’s grace and God’s law, not in history, but finally only in Jesus Christ as God’s self-revelation. As the Barmen declaration stated in 1934: “As Jesus Christ is God’s comforting pronouncement of the forgiveness of all our sins [Gospel], so, with equal seriousness, he is also God’s vigorous announcement of his claim upon our whole life [Law]” (Barmen 2). It is in fact God’s grace that judges human beings, revealing how little they live in accordance with God (cf. Gestrich 1977, p. 50).

Barth understood his own political engagement, especially against National Socialism, as a consequence of the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20: 3). Only an exclusive orientation toward God could lead to an adequate Christian life (cf. GA 49, p. 239). The totalitarianism of National Socialism revealed its true face in its disobedience against the First Commandment. From the necessity of obeying this Commandment, Barth summoned the courage to not swear an