

December 9 **Karl Barth** Pastor and Theologian, 1968

Born at Basel, Switzerland, on May 10, 1886, Barth studied at several prestigious universities including Tübingen, Germany. After completing his studies, he served as pastor in two Swiss centers, Geneva and Safenwil. The events of the First World War led Barth to critically question the dominant theology of the day, which, in Barth's view, held a too easy peace between theology and culture. In his Commentary on Romans, published in 1918, Barth reasserted doctrines such as God's sovereignty and human sin, central ideas which he believed were excluded and overshadowed in theological discourse at that time. With Hitler's rise to power, Barth joined the Confessing Church and was chiefly responsible for the writing of the Barmen Declaration(1934), one of its foundational documents. In it, Barth claimed that the Church's allegiance to God in Christ gave it the moral imperative to challenge the rule and violence of Hitler. Barth was himself ultimately forced to resign his professorship at Bonn due to his refusal to swear an oath to Hitler. In 1932, Barth published the first volume of his thirteen-volume opus, the Church Dogmatics. Barth would work on the Dogmatics until his death in 1968. An exhaustive account of his theological themes and a daring reassessment of the entire Christian theological tradition, the Dogmatics gave new thought to some of the central themes first articulated in the Commentary on Romans. In the first volume, "The Doctrine of the Word of God," Barth laid out many of the theological notions which would comprise the heart of the entire work, including his understanding of God's Word as the definitive source of revelation, the Incarnation as the bridge between God's revelation and human sin, and the election of the creation as God's great end. Karl Barth was one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. Pope Pius XII regarded him as the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas. This assessment speaks to the respect Barth received from both Protestant and Catholic theologians and to his influence within both theological communities

Collect Almighty God, source of justice beyond human knowledge: We thank you for inspiring Karl Barth to resist tyranny and exalt your saving grace, without which we cannot apprehend your will. Teach us, like him, to live by faith, and even in chaotic and perilous times to perceive the light of your eternal glory, Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, throughout all ages. *Amen.*

Lessons

Jeremiah 30:23–31:6

Look, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not

turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this.

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God."

Psalm 76:7–12

7 What terror you inspire! *who can stand before you when you are angry?

8 From heaven you pronounced judgment; *the earth was afraid and was still;

9 When God rose up to judgment *and to save all the oppressed of the earth.

10 Truly, wrathful Edom will give you thanks, *and the remnant of Hamath will keep your feasts.

11 Make a vow to the Lord your God and keep it; *let all around him bring gifts to him who is worthy to be feared.

12 He breaks the spirit of princes, *and strikes terror in the kings of the earth.

John 8:34–36

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.