

# Princeton Theological Seminary's Center for Barth Studies to Host Major Conference on Theology and the US Prison System

*Special Partnership with McCarter Theatre, Princeton University, and Hidden Voices Brings Stories from Death Row to the Princeton Community*

PRINCETON, NJ, UNITED STATES, May 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Center for Barth Studies](#) at [Princeton Theological Seminary](#) will convene a groundbreaking four-day conference, [The Incarcerated God: Thinking With and Beyond Barth on the Prison System](#), to explore the theological, ethical, and pastoral questions surrounding incarceration in the

United States. The hybrid event will take place June 15–18, 2025 on Princeton Seminary's campus and streamed online. Co-organized by the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, the Prison Studies Program at Duke Divinity School, the Calvin Prison Initiative at Calvin University, and the Partnership for Religion and Education in Prisons (PREP) at Drew

“

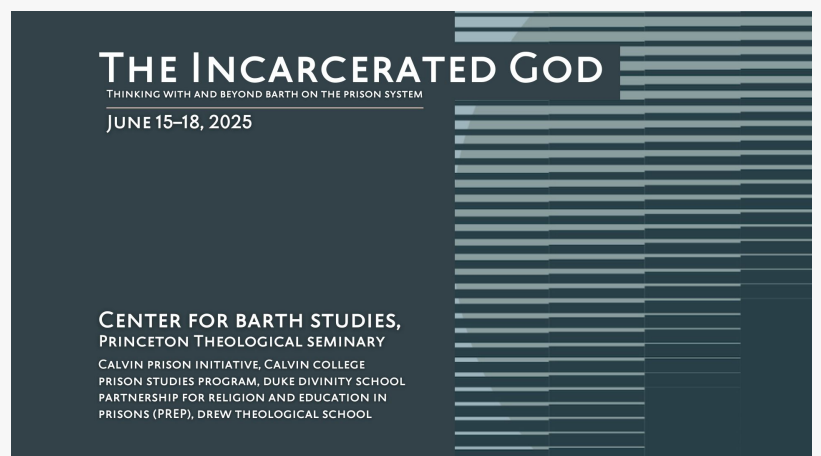
This conference asks what it means to think with Barth about systems of punishment and exclusion, and how we might move toward a more just and humane future.”

*Dr. Kaitlyn Dugan, Director of the Center for Barth Studies*

Theological School, the conference features scholars, students, activists, and artists engaging the legacy of Karl Barth alongside urgent questions about justice, punishment, and human dignity.

Founded in 1997, the Center for Barth Studies is the only North American institution dedicated to the research and advancement of Karl Barth's theological legacy. Widely regarded as the most influential Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, Barth wrote extensively about divine freedom, justice, and God's solidarity with the oppressed in Jesus Christ. The Center promotes the study of Barth's

work as a constructive resource for engaging contemporary theological and ethical challenges.



The Incarcerated God: Thinking with and beyond Barth on the Prison System will take place at Princeton Theological Seminary June 15–28

“Karl Barth witnessed to a God who radically loves the world, including and especially those whom society has sentenced to prison” said Dr. Kaitlyn Dugan, Director of the Center for Barth Studies. “Barth reminds us that the center of the Christian faith is the belief in a God revealed in Jesus Christ who was unjustly imprisoned and executed by the state for the sake of the world’s freedom. We hope that critical reflection on Barth’s theology and life experience preaching regularly in prison for nearly a decade will offer an opportunity to think theologically in new ways about the urgent and deeply theological issue of incarceration.”

The conference will bring together a diverse and dynamic mix of chaplains, prison educators, formerly incarcerated theologians, and policy advocates, who are actively reshaping theological discourse on incarceration from within and beyond the prison system. These conversations will be enriched by leading scholars and practitioners whose work engages incarceration through the lenses of liberation theology, restorative justice, prison abolitionism, and public theology.

On Monday afternoon, the conference will feature a special panel discussion with four students currently enrolled in the Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) at Handlon Correctional Facility in Michigan. The students will join the conference via livestream for a conversation with CPI graduate Shawn England, who was released from prison in December 2024 after serving more than 30 years. England will offer a response to his former professor, Dr. Todd Cioffi, senior advisor to CPI and a Princeton Seminary alum, before moderating the discussion.

Tuesday afternoon’s program will feature a powerful conversation between Tessie Castillo and Lyle C. May. Castillo is the co-author and editor of *Inside: Voices from Death Row* and *Crimson Letters: Voices from Death Row*, which she wrote in collaboration with four men currently incarcerated on North Carolina’s Death Row. Lyle C. May is a journalist, essayist, and incarcerated person on death row in North Carolina whose writings have appeared in *The Marshall Project*, *Scalawag*, *The Nation*, and numerous academic and advocacy publications.

Additional confirmed speakers include:

Benjamin F. Chavis, an entrepreneur, global business leader, educator, chemist, civil rights leader, NAACP Life Member, syndicated columnist, theologian, and author. He was imprisoned as a member of the Wilmington Ten, a group of civil rights activists who were wrongly convicted of arson during a civil rights protest in 1972.

Douglas Campbell, a Professor of New Testament at the Divinity School at Duke University, where he has co-directed the Prison Program since 2009. He also co-directs the Prison Engagement Initiative at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University.

Anisah Sabur, National Coordinator for the Unlock the Box Campaign, where she provides technical assistance to 23 states working to end solitary confinement in state and federal facilities. She is also volunteering to manage and organize the National Council for Incarcerated

and Formerly Incarcerated Women & Girls.

The Rev. Dr. Sarah Jobe, Co-Director of Prison Studies at Duke Divinity School, where she served as the Founding Director of Project TURN, Duke's in-prison education program. Sarah has 15 years of experience as a prison educator and prison chaplain.

The form of the conference has taken a different shape this year as the center plans to use artistic expression to engage with the complex topic of incarceration. To that end, the Center is partnering with Chesney Snow, lecturer in the Princeton University Department of Theater, and Hidden Voices, an award-winning arts and justice collective, to present the play *Count: Stories from America's Death Row*. Developed from years of interviews with individuals on death row, *Count* is a stirring dramatic work that challenges audiences to confront the realities of incarceration.

The production will be staged at McCarter Theatre on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, at 3:00 pm and 7:00 pm, and tickets are available through the McCarter online Box Office.

"As the child of an incarcerated parent and as someone who has been justice impacted, I have found these stories to be essential for understanding the character of our nation," reflected Chesney Snow, lecturer in the Princeton University Theater department. "In this play, we give form and urgency to stories born in America's most extreme margins, inviting us to confront the humanity of those society has condemned. This play is masterful in its craft of centering voices from the most dehumanized souls in our society to fester within our collective consciousness so that we can activate and inspire the urgent transformations required to construct some semblance of a humane world."

This year's conference and performance event is made possible by a broad coalition of partners, including McCarter Theatre, Hidden Voices, the Department of Theater at Princeton University, and local justice organizations. Meals during the conference will be catered by Macrobites, a Black-owned business led by formerly incarcerated persons. Founded with a mission to transform lives through nutrition, entrepreneurship, and community, Macrobites creates pathways for reentry and empowerment. Their work aligns deeply with the themes of the conference, offering a powerful example of what restoration and justice can look like for life beyond the prison system.

"Examining incarceration from a Christian theological perspective is not only timely but also necessary given how the Christian faith has shaped American history and its ways of thinking about harm and justice," remarked Dr. Dugan. "This conference asks what it means to think with Barth about systems of punishment and exclusion, and how we might move toward a more just and humane future, even as the United States continues to deepen its investment in punitive and carceral systems, both at home and abroad, at the expense of human dignity and flourishing."

To attend the conference or performance of Count: Stories from America's Death Row as a member of the press, please contact Linda Romano at [communication@ptsem.edu](mailto:communication@ptsem.edu).

### About the Center for Barth Studies

Since its founding in 1997, the Center for Barth Studies (CBS) has been an essential provider of information, resources, events, and programs related to the life and work of the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968). CBS is devoted to providing a space for Princeton Theological Seminary patrons, visiting scholars and students, pastors, and lay persons to engage with the work and legacy of Karl Barth both in person and online.

### About Princeton Theological Seminary

Founded in 1812, Princeton Theological Seminary equips women and men for faithful, compassionate, and competent leadership in ministry, academia, and public life—preparing them to serve Christ with integrity, scholarship, and joy.

Linda Romano  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
+1 609-497-7765  
[communication@ptsem.edu](mailto:communication@ptsem.edu)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/817259988>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2025 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.