

THE FINALITY OF THE GOSPEL: KARL BARTH AND THE TASKS OF ESCHATOLOGY, edited by Kaitlyn Dugan and Philip G. Ziegler. *Studies in Reformed Theology* 43. Leiden: Brill, 2022. 229 pages. \$57.00 (paperback).

This collection of essays was originally presented in 2019 at Princeton Theological Seminary for the annual conference of the Center for Barth Studies. The topic of Karl Barth's eschatology was occasioned by the hundredth anniversary of the first edition of Barth's *der Römerbrief* (1919)—the book widely recognized as launching a revolt in modern theology against the tradition of nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism. With the optimism of the nineteenth-century destroyed by the catastrophe of the First World War, Barth turned to Paul's Epistle to the Romans. With the newspaper in one hand and the scriptures in the other, Barth delivered not only an attack on liberal theology but also reopened the question of eschatology and the end of all things in Jesus Christ. The essays that Dugan and Ziegler have assembled are not isolated to interpreting Barth's commentary, but explore the topic as it emerges across Barth's writings. There is a certain irony in the fact that eschatology lies at the heart of Barth's theology, and yet his death in 1968 preempted the completion of the *Church Dogmatics*, and therefore Barth's mature reflection on the last things.

The late Christoph Schwöbel commences the book, following the editors' introduction, with a series of reflections upon Barth's eschatology and its relevance for contemporary discussions of the human future. The challenge of transhumanism, artificial intelligence, and interplanetary exploration all inform various secular eschatologies to which Barth's theology might give an answer. Kenneth Oakes takes up Barth's use of the Old Testament. Barth calls this eschatology in the "Time of Expectation," and Oakes identifies significant areas of congruity between Barth's view of the Old Testament and New Testament witness to the last things. In particular, Oakes uncovers what Barth sees as the Old Testament's vivid "universalism"—perhaps there even more apparent than in the New Testament.

Susan Eastman examines Barth's theology of hope as presented in his 1922 lectures on 1 Corinthians in Göttingen. There, Barth speaks of the "Custody of Hope" to which Christians are entrusted, being incorporated into the resurrection of Christ. Hope in this case is not, for Barth, simply one possible human orientation among others, but is a reality established by the risen Christ that reshapes human agency even in the penultimate

time in which Christians await the fulfillment of the promise of resurrection. This chapter includes some wonderful engagements with the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Gerard Manley Hopkins as well. John M. G. Barclay supplies a reading of Barth's comments on the last things in his engagement with Romans 13. Barclay proposes that one's objections to Barth's interpretation cannot simply demur on the level of systematic theology, but must return to the text of Romans and supply a better interpretation. Barclay's is an especially nice addition because it indicates new areas in which systematic theology and biblical interpretation might enrich one another.

Grant Macaskill similarly challenges biblical scholars to engage theological interpretations of scripture like Barth's—in this particular case, Barth's account of idolatry. Here, Mackaskill uncovers in *der Römerbrief* and the *Church Dogmatics* an account of idolatry which does not so much stipulate the nature of idols themselves, but rather accounts for the orientation of the human subject who is himself idolatrous. Beverley Roberts Gaventa also approaches Barth's exegesis of Romans from the perspective of contemporary biblical scholarship by advancing an engagement with and critique of Barth's eschatological reflections on Romans 9–11. Gaventa wonders with Douglas Harink whether Barth universalizes humanity in Christ to the extent that Barth lurches into supersessionism, thus obscuring the enduring uniqueness of Israel as the object of God's saving action.

Douglas Campbell investigates Paul's account of the future. Here, he advances a unique version of annihilationism in which Paul might imply a limited resurrection where only those “in Christ” are raised. He punctuates this chapter with some of Barth's own late-career reflections on the question of universalism, which caution that any rejection of universalism must not do so by artificially limiting the grace of God in Christ. Christoph Chalamet offers a chapter on Barth's lectures on the doctrine of redemption given at the end of 1925 and the beginning of 1926. Despite the fact that the “theology of hope” would not emerge for a number of decades, already in the 1920s, Barth is at work delivering an eschatology of this world's redemption. While Christian hope looks toward an unmitigated future victory, Barth's account does not leave behind the possibilities of hope for the present as well.

The book concludes with three more essays. Christiane Tietz delivers a moving reflection upon Barth's preaching in the wake of the death of his son Matthias in a climbing accident. Nancy Duff's chapter on the ethics of medically-assisted dying commends Barth's rejection of

suicide and euthanasia, but contends that some medical interventions available today for the dying might constitute the ethical acceptance of death our enemy—undertaken in the hope of Christ’s triumph. Philip Ziegler concludes the volume with some remarks on Barth’s doctrine of Satan in which the devil embodies an inscrutable third agency of God which opposes God’s “Yes” in Christ but meets its final end in the cross. This volume contains much insight on Barth’s theology which will benefit preachers and teachers looking for fresh insight about the letters of Paul, especially Romans. Some might decline the adventurous claims of Campbell about the annihilation of the wicked, while others might side with Barth over Duff on the permissibility of medically-assisted dying. Even so, this book is recommended for pastors, students, and scholars looking for resources on the end of all things and the relevance of Barth’s witness to such questions.

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