

ecclesiological wisdom' (p. 124) but thinks it may as appropriately be considered 'the prelude to a new phase in Christological controversy as the conclusion of an earlier one' (p. 129).

But of one thing Skarsaune is sure: scholarship has seen the collapse of Rudolf Bultmann's ready dismissal of the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ as 'easily traced to the contemporary mythology of Jewish apocalypticism and the Gnostic myth of redemption' (so Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, tr. by Schubert M. Ogden, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 1-3).

'Few scholarly positions,' comments Skarsaune, 'have had to endure such treatment in recent research as has this Bultmann myth, which has disintegrated and virtually disappeared from debate' (op. cit., p. 132). Skarsaune comments, 'If any relatively certain conclusion can be drawn from the last few decades of research regarding the background of New Testament Christology, it is the acknowledgment that handy, 'available myths, with the same structure as the confession of Christ that could easily be transferred to Jesus, just are not to be found in spite of the fact that many have searched for them' (p. 132).

In summary, Christian belief in the reality of

the incarnation arose among Jews. The Hellenistic environment denied that gods could actually become human beings, although a few select humans might become divine. The Hebrew environment maintained the sharpest possible separation between God and the creation; every compromise of it was blasphemy. Moreover, the philosophical tradition of those who refined the doctrine was anti-mythological and considered theology to be a cognitive enterprise. Judaism had many messiah-candidates, but the incomparable claims made for Jesus Christ are to be traced not to the cultural environment but to the life and deeds of Jesus himself (p. 133). Behind the incarnation-Christology was the fact that 'Jesus' I is identical with the Wisdom or Logos of God, which is identical with God's own salvific and creative intention through which the world was created' (p. 134). Yet the early church insisted that Jesus was 'a completely human being...a truly human I.' Chalcedon declared that - without commingling them - 'both Jesus' divinity and humanity are intact' (p. 134).

Carl F.H. Henry  
Arlington, VA, U.S.A.

EuroJTh (1992) 1:1, 87-89

***Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth***

Nigel Biggar, ed.

Mowbray, London & Oxford, 1988; 215pp, £25.00, hardback; ISBN 0 264 67173 2

**SUMMARY**

This book brings together nine essays written for a commemorative conference held at Oxford in 1986. The essays cover a wide range of topics in Barth's theology. The writers are critical, but they are united by the conviction that while the way forward in theology today may lie beyond Barth, it certainly lies through him. There is little in it of great interest for the specialist, but several essays are worth recommending, especially those by Williams and Gunton.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Ce livre présente neuf essais écrits pour une conférence commémorative tenue à Oxford en 1986. Ils couvrent toute la gamme des sujets relatifs à la théologie de Barth. Les auteurs sont critiques, mais sont unis par la conviction que, si la voie de la théologie actuelle mène peut-être au-delà de Barth, elle passe certainement par lui. L'ouvrage apporte peu qui soit de grand intérêt pour les spécialistes, mais plusieurs des chapitres méritent recommandation, particulièrement ceux de Williams et de Gunton.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

Das Buch enthält neun Aufsätze, die auf einer Konferenz zum Gedenken an Karl Barth 1986 in Oxford gehalten wurden. Sie decken ein weites Spektrum der Theologie Barths ab. Die Verfasser sind kritisch doch vereint durch die Überzeugung, daß der Weg heutiger Theologie zwar über Barth hinausführen muß, ohne aber an ihm vorbeigehen zu können. Für den Spezialisten ist das Buch allerdings von geringerem Interesse, obwohl einige Aufsätze, insbesondere die von Williams und Gunton, empfehlenswert sind.

May 10, 1986 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of this century's most prolific and (arguably) most significant theologian, Karl Barth. The book before us brings together nine essays written for one of several commemorative conferences, held at Oxford, by leading British, American and Canadian theologians and ethicists.

The essays cover a wide range of topics in Barth's theology - the nature of theology as conceived by Barth and its relevance to church life, the doctrine of creation, religious and moral epistemology, politics and ethics. The writers are critical but they are united by the conviction that while the way forward in theology today may lie beyond Barth, it certainly lies through him. Barth ought not be ignored. Not all of the



essays seem to have been intended for the same audience however, and that gives the book an uneven quality. Some are written on a level appropriate for the introductory student of theology (e.g., A. McGrath's essay on the development of Barth's theological method); others presuppose in the reader a close acquaintance with the most recent developments both in theology generally as well as in Barth research (e.g., C. Gunton's essay on Barth as an anti-foundationalist in theological epistemology). The result is a book which is neither fish nor fowl. There is little in it of great interest for the specialist in Barth studies (the essays by Rowan Williams and Colin Gunton provide noteworthy exceptions). Still, there are several essays worth recommending to specialist and non-specialist alike.

In his essay 'Barth, War and the State', Rowan Williams undertakes the kind of analysis which Barth scholars need increasingly to be involved with today. Noting that Barth's ethics of war in *Church Dogmatics* III/4 is deeply flawed by its failure to address the unique situation created by modern, nuclear armaments, Williams argues that there are resources to be found elsewhere (specifically, in Barth's doctrine of the state) which can be drawn upon to amend his reflections and bring them up to date. Not only is this kind of reworking a helpful and creative use of Barth's theology; it helps us too to understand why Barth saw unequivocal opposition to nuclear arms to be a confessional matter by the late 1950's – i.e., as a question to which the church's response was a matter of its very being and life. The supposed gap between Barth's theory and his practice is narrowed considerably by Williams' searching analysis. This is a valuable essay and one which should be required reading for all those interested in thinking through theologically the proper limits of the state.

Colin Gunton draws heavily upon the work of Michael Polanyi and Ronald Thiemann to argue that Barth's development can be seen as a not wholly successful attempt to replace Enlightenment epistemology (which trades heavily on spatial imagery for depicting distance between subject and object) with a 'post-critical' (Polanyian) view which stresses a relationship of reciprocity between knower and known; i.e., knowledge is not simply a conformity of mind with reality ('realism') or of reality with mind ('idealism'). The metaphor of spatial distance is replaced by the metaphor of 'indwelling'. We live *in* the world and we live in a linguistic community which provides us with the conceptual tools needed for articulating our

relation to the world. A further characteristic of this post-critical theory is that it is anti-foundationalist. It rejects every attempt to justify knowledge by appeal to foundational axioms (neutral, self-evident and universally accessible assertions whose truth is known by all intuitively). While this rejection of universally accessible external checks on truth claims might seem to lead to relativism, Gunton attempts to avoid this conclusion by appeal to internal criteria of justification. A dogmatic proposal can be tested by its content, if not by external foundations. By this test of content, I take Gunton to mean something like the adequacy of propositions for articulating certain core ideas received and handed down by the Christian community. He is a bit fuzzy on this point.

Gunton contends that whereas Barth's stress on the wholly otherness of God in *Romans* II was reflective of the Enlightenment epistemology of spatial distance, he later replaced this view with a more post-critical theory (beginning with the book on Anselm in 1931).

This is an interesting proposal and one deserving of further discussion. There are however, some troubling features in it. When Gunton says of the relation of God and the creature in CD II/1 that it is now an 'ontological' rather than a *spatial* otherness of God which comes to expression' (p. 76), I would suggest that he has aptly described Barth's conception in *Romans* II. The 'distance' (if I may be permitted a pun) between *Romans* II and the book on Anselm is not as great as Gunton suggests. Secondly, I am not yet convinced that the contrasting epistemologies sketched by Gunton are adequate for interpreting Barth's view of the knowledge of God – at any stage of his career. It is particularly the anti-foundationalism which is problematic. As George Hunsinger has recently shown, Barth's religious epistemology has certain characteristics in common with foundationalism ('Beyond Literalism and Expressivism,' *Modern Theology* 3 (1987), 209–23). Gunton's essay will be demanding for the lay reader but it provides an initiation to an important discussion.

J.B. Webster offers a fine exposition of a posthumous work of Barth's, *The Christian Life* (originally planned as part of the ethics of reconciliation in CD IV/4). The specific theme treated here is Barth's rich and subtle handling of human freedom *vis-à-vis* the divine. A good number of popular misconceptions to the effect that Barth had no room for freedom would be challenged by reading this essay.

Nigel Biggar addresses himself to problems



raised by Barth's ethics. Specifically, he responds to two criticisms frequently directed to Barth's talk of ethics as response to the divine command. The first is that Barth is an ethical charismatic who treats the divine command as a private revelation. According to this line of criticism, Barth is essentially an irrationalist, to be categorized with Spiritualists of the left-wing Reformation. The second charge depends upon the first: Barth's theology precludes a normative ethics. In response, Biggar shows that the hearing of God's command is not to be detached from a prayerful reading of Scripture within the context of the Church. This text and this context act as checks on privatism. Biggar goes on to show that Barth actually engages (covertly!) in a soft form of casuistry. So Barth's theology is not at all lacking in a normative ethics. What Barth does do is to leave a certain salutary gap between rule and case so that an absolute casuistry (with the attendant risk of self-justification) is rendered impossible. Room is thus left for God to speak anew; to apply the rule to our situation in such a way that the rule is qualified by the fresh command. The net result is that ethical principles serve as a preparation for hearing the command of God but they are not a substitute for that hearing.

It is to be hoped that a second edition of this informative and interesting volume will eliminate the misspellings of German words which occur from time to time, as well as Alister McGrath's mistaken attribution of H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Kingdom of God in America* to his brother, Reinhold. Notwithstanding such blemishes, the book is well worth recommending to anyone who cares about the future of theology.

**Bruce L. McCormack**  
University of Edinburgh  
Scotland

## RÉSUMÉ

L'ouvrage contient des conférences prononcées en Australie en 1989. Le titre, *le Gouvernement divin*, use d'une formule de substitution pour «Royaume de Dieu», ceci pour souligner l'approche nouvelle de la question dont ce livre fait la tentative. L'ouvrage est destiné à un large public, mais contribue néanmoins aux études plus avancées sur l'Évangile de Marc. Il est utile, intéressant, stimulant.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Vorlesungen wurden 1989 in Australien gehalten. Der Titel 'Göttliche Regierung' stellt eine Alternative zu 'Reich Gottes' dar, um den neuen Zugang zu dieser Frage zu unterstreichen, den das Buch versucht. Das Werk wendet sich an ein breites Publikum, trägt aber dennoch zur wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Markusevangelium bei. Es ist ein sehr nützliches, interessantes und gedanklich provozierendes Buch.

This work is a collection of lectures given by R. T. France in 1989 at Moore Theological College, Sydney. Although a measure of acquaintance with NT scholarship is assumed, on the whole the work is accessible to the vast majority of readers – it is clear, down-to-earth and readable. The book reflects a desire to convey the results of specialist discussion 'to a wider public in an intelligible non-technical form, as a positive contribution to Christian faith and living' (p. viii).

The phrase 'divine government' is offered as an alternative to the traditional expression in NT studies, 'the kingdom of God.' The subtitle makes France's emphasis clearer yet: God's active 'kingship' instead of a static 'kingdom' is in view. For France the plethora of various current understandings of 'the kingdom of God' and the unfortunate popular trend to make 'kingdom' an adjective warrant new and fresh approaches to this central concept in the teaching of Jesus.

The introduction sets out the aims of the work in terms of the historical Jesus and the evangelist's *Sitz im Leben*. We are told, 'The primary object of this book is to enquire what Jesus of Nazareth had in mind when he launched this powerful slogan [i.e., 'the kingdom/kingship of God'] on the world' (p. 2). This task is not attempted on a 'pan-synoptic' basis but by studying Mark, the earliest of the Gospels. Further, the focus on a particular concept does not eliminate the need to 'read Mark whole' (p. 6); we can only do justice to Mark's account of Jesus' teaching on God's kingship when we read specific texts against the backdrop of the broader narrative. As the chapters

EuroJTh (1992) 1:1, 89–90

## ***Divine Government: God's Kingship in the Gospel of Mark***

**R. T. France**

SPCK, London, 1990; vii + 135 pp., £6.95, paperback; ISBN 0 281 04471 6

## SUMMARY

These lectures were given in Australia in 1989. The title 'divine government' is an alternative to 'Kingdom of God', in order to underline the fresh approach to this question which the book attempts. The work is designed for a popular readership, but it also contributes to the scholarly study of Mark's Gospel. It is a very useful, interesting and thought-provoking book.