

*Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election:*

*A Systematic-Theological Comparison*

Matthias Gockel

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, vii + 299 pp., £47.00, hb, ISBN 978-0-19-920322-2

SUMMARY

Matthias Gockel explores the resemblance between Friedrich Schleiermacher's and Karl Barth's doctrines of election. According to the author, the similarities suggest that Barth still worked from a liberal theological framework even while he most sharply announced his abandonment of it. Gockel's contribution is to show how what is often taken to be the most radical doctrinal revision in Barth's theology is in fact already present in Schleiermacher.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Matthias Gockel untersucht die Ähnlichkeit zwischen Schleiermachers und Barths Lehre von der Erwählung. Dem Autor zufolge legen die Ähnlichkeiten nahe, dass Barth weiterhin von einem liberalen theologischen Bezugsrahmen aus arbeitete, während er scharf verkündete, denselben hinter sich gelassen zu haben. Gockels Beitrag liegt darin, dass er aufzeigt, wie das, was häufig als radikalste lehrmäßige Revision in der Theologie Barths verstanden wird, tatsächlich bereits bei Schleiermacher vorliegt.

RÉSUMÉ

Matthias Gockel examine les ressemblances entre la pensée de Schleiermacher et la doctrine de l'élection de Karl Barth. D'après l'auteur, les similarités suggèrent que la pensée de Barth se situait toujours dans un cadre théologique libéral alors même qu'il annonçait avec force l'avoir abandonné. Gockel montre comment ce qui est souvent présenté comme la révision doctrinale la plus radicale dans la théologie de Barth se trouvait en fait déjà présent dans la pensée de Schleiermacher.

\* \* \* \*

In this revision of his 2002 doctoral dissertation under Bruce McCormack at Princeton Theological Seminary, Matthias Gockel analyses Friedrich Schleiermacher's and Karl Barth's doctrines of election. The conclusion is that Barth early on engages in a Schleiermacherian reconstruction of the doctrine, and, even as he develops it according to his own theological impulses, remains close to Schleiermacher's revision of the traditional view. This has a number of implications for Barth scholarship, not least of which is how one construes Barth's divergence from Schleiermacher. It also demonstrates that even in the locus that is often understood to be decisive for Barth's 'mature' theology, there still exists fundamental continuity between Barth's early and mature theology.

The first chapter considers Schleiermacher's 1819 essay 'On the Doctrine of Election' in its historical-theological context (the unity of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia). Gockel argues that Schleiermacher

uniquely interpreted election in terms of a single divine decree that concerns God's action in Christ rather than the salvation of particular persons.

Gockel then examines the development of this revision in *The Christian Faith* with detailed attention to how the doctrine functions in and coheres with Schleiermacher's theology as a whole. Gockel explains that 'Schleiermacher supposes that the main weakness of previous models of election consisted in their correlation of divine mercy and divine righteousness with two distinct groups of people. [...] The thrust of his argument is directed against a doctrine of election that contradicts the unity of God's will' (p. 87). The difference between this more mature articulation and the 1819 essay, Gockel discerns, is that 'the earlier idea of universal predestination to receive the Holy Spirit in the event of regeneration is now replaced by the idea of a universal predestination to salvation in Christ'. Consequently, 'the process of individual regeneration is set in the larger context of the relevance of divine election for the generation of the Christian church, as the result of Christ's appearance in history' (p. 102). Throughout this treatment, Gockel redresses misinterpretations of Schleiermacher that he is proto-process theologian or a pantheist or an 'experiential-expressivist'.

Turning to Karl Barth in chapter 3, Gockel explores the doctrine of election in the 1922 edition of *Der Römerbrief*. With respect to Schleiermacher, he observes that Barth 'rejects the division between God's righteous wrath (as if it were for unbelievers only) and God's gracious love (as if it were for believers only), mirroring Schleiermacher's rejection of a division of God's righteousness and mercy in accordance with the distinction between unbelievers and believers' (p. 123). Moreover, both theologians do not tie the historical phenomena of faith and unbelief to two divine decrees – election and reprobation – but maintain only one decree that corresponds to God's redemptive will. Regarding the relationship between *Römerbrief* and *Church Dogmatics* II/2, Gockel senses several hints of what would become Barth's christological doctrine of election.

The Schleiermacherian inclination continues through Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics* even as Barth becomes 'more actualistic and less speculative' (p. 155). By the time Gockel comes to *Church Dogmatics* II/2, he is ready to call Barth's early doctrine of election a 'Schleiermacherian position' (p. 158), though this must still be seen as resemblance not dependence, for Gockel admits that Barth 'did not refer to Schleiermacher as a source' (p. 200). Concerning the development of Barth's doctrine of election, Gockel concludes that the 'teleological view of the relation between reprobation and election, which the earlier Barth shared with Schleiermacher, is affirmed' even as election is given a christological reference by Barth (p. 196). Interestingly, this christological orientation causes Barth to reconsider 'the corporate and individual aspects of election' which leads him once again down paths blazed by Schleiermacher.

I found the sentiment, peppered throughout, that Barth's and Schleiermacher's 'view is closer to the biblical view of election than the traditional individualistic view' (p. 201) unsupported, a claim now more difficult to assert in light of the challenges registered by David Gibson (see idem and Daniel Strange [eds], *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* [Nottingham: Apollos, 2008], pp. 136-167). I was also expecting a bit more sustained discussion of the issues surrounding Barth's relationship to Schleiermacher or Gockel's supervisor's thesis about the role election played in Barth's development. I suspect this is due to the fact that Gockel is engaged in a 'systematic-theological comparison' rather than a genetic study. Still, readers should understand that the bulk of the material is an exposition of Barth and Schleiermacher with relatively minor and brief discussion of the study's implications.

Nevertheless, Gockel's study is detailed and attentive. It is, above all, a theological analysis. Therefore, scholars of these two modern theologians are not the only beneficiaries. Those working on the locus of election will find much to consider as they see the doctrinal repercussions of Barth's and Schleiermacher's views surfaced by Gockel.

James R. A. Merrick, Aberdeen, Scotland

### *Liberating Texts?*

#### *Sacred Scriptures in Public Life*

eds. Sebastian C.H. Kim and Jonathan Draper

London: SPCK, 2008, xxii + 150 pp., £12.99, pb,

ISBN 978-0-281-05856-3

### *Rescuing the Bible*

(Blackwell Manifestos)

Roland Boer

Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, vi + 177 pp., £15.99, pb,

ISBN 978-1-4501-7020-8

#### SUMMARY:

Two very different books offer perspectives on how the Bible might play a role in public life and politics. One is a collection of essays offering a broadly positive vision of how non-fundamentalist approaches to sacred texts can liberate them to be, in their turn, liberating. One essay, though, suggests a darker possibility: that the Bible must be left behind to make progress. Roland Boer's book explores how to rescue what is liberating in the Bible, and incorporate it into a Marxist vision for a new worldly left. Both books explore an important question, but with significant limitations.

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Zwei sehr unterschiedliche Bücher bieten Perspektiven zur Frage, welche Rolle die Bibel im öffentlichen Leben und in der Politik spielen könnte. Das eine ist eine Artikel-

sammlung, die eine positive Vision zur Frage anbietet, wie nicht-fundamentalistische Ansätze zu heiligen Texten diese Texte befreien können, um ihrerseits befreiend wirken zu können. Ein Artikel schlägt jedoch eine dunklere Möglichkeit vor: dass man die Bibel hinter sich lassen muss, um Fortschritte zu machen. Roland Boers Buch untersucht, wie das, was in der Bibel befreiend ist, zu retten und in eine marxistische Vision einer neuen weltweiten Linken einzuverleiben ist. Beide Bücher untersuchen eine wichtige Frage – allerdings mit erheblichen Einschränkungen.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Deux ouvrages très différents apportent des perspectives sur le rôle que pourrait jouer la Bible dans la vie publique et la politique. L'un rassemble des articles qui offrent une vision positive de la façon dont des approches non fondamentalistes des textes sacrés peut les libérer pour qu'ils deviennent à leur tour libérateurs. L'une des contributions prône une approche plus négative: l'abandon de la Bible comme une nécessité du progrès. Le livre de Roland Boer cherche à mettre en lumière ce qui est libérateur dans la Bible, pour l'incorporer à une vision marxiste d'une nouvelle gauche mondaine. Ces deux livres traitent d'une question importante, mais leur apport présente de sérieuses limitations.

\* \* \* \*

Two rather different volumes here provide an interesting contrast on the same topic: what is the most helpful way to conceptualise the role of scripture in the public and political world at the beginning of the 21st century?

The six essays gathered by Kim and Draper were originally delivered as the Ebor lectures in York in 2006-07, serving as public occasions for theologians of various traditions to present overviews of their topic. The result is high-level snapshots, inevitably better at broad sketches of the terrain than detail. Thus we have Archbishop John Sentamu urging us to 'uncover the purposes of God' within the Bible, which include emphases on justice, vision, grace and change. David Ford offers some highlights of his project on *Christian Wisdom*, neatly contrasting the standard 'settlements' of religion in the public square found in France (too secular), the US (too separated) and the UK (appropriately complex), while calling for 'a minimal religious and secular framework'. Ataulah Siddiqui offers a summary of the Qu'ran as the eternal Revelation of Islam, before reviewing changing paradigms of interpretation in it as Islam wrestles with various ways of engaging with the canons of modernity. Frances Young suggests that each major religious tradition will be better enabled to find its role in a pluralist society by holding fast to its own sacred scripture. Shirley Williams gives a brief review of human rights in recent global conflicts and the disease with which the category of 'just war' has been too readily appropriated (and she includes a well-judged defence of the European Union as too little appreciated in the UK for a range of populist reasons).