

beings called to co-create with God through their work? And if so, what does this say about God as Creator, and about Creation itself?

Ratzinger's decision to present a Catholic understanding of the Creation and Fall accounts is also a draw-back of the work. Why not an ecumenical understanding? Apart from the appendix, the four homilies could very well pass for a "Christian understanding" of the Creation and Fall accounts anyway.

All in all, this is a book worth reading. For the theologian as well as for the pastor, it is well worth reflecting upon.

José Vieira Arruda

McGill University

---

*The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology.* By William Stacy Johnson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. ISBN 0-664-22094-0. Pp. 217.

---

William Stacy Johnson, recently named the W.C. Brown Chair of Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Austin, Texas), has written this volume as part of the Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. It is addressed to "scholars, pastors, and laypersons." Those persons most responsible for inspiration in this work include Johnson's dissertation supervisor (1992) Richard R. Niebuhr of Harvard University; Gordon D. Kaufman (*In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology*, 1993); Barthian scholars George Hunsinger and Bruce L. McCormack; and Walter Lowe (*Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason*, 1993).

Johnson proposes and guides a re-thinking of Barth's theology as an invitation to "nonfoundationalism." Nonfoundationalism refers to a method of thinking which invites a criticism of thinking itself. It sets "aside all appeals to presumed self-evident, non-inferential, or incorrigible grounds for...intellectual claims...reject[ing] the idea that among all...beliefs there is a single, irrefutable 'foundation' that must be protected from critical scrutiny and upon which all other claims are grounded" (3). The argument is presented in three parts with three chapters each.

In the first part, we are shown three views of Barth's theology: the first of "mystery" as the only "foundation" in Barth's early theology; the second (aimed at those who believe Barth's theology demands that revelation be more of a proof than an indication of mystery) of Barth's theology as a theology questioning foundations; and third, a review of Barth's development of triune act, his "perfections" of God, and his treatment of election.

Part 2 is an examination of the triadic pattern at work of "God for us," "God with us," and "God in and among us," as these three characterize the acts of creation, reconciliation and redemption. The "triadic pattern" is "a pattern in which there are three points of reference: a beginning point, an ending point, and a midpoint suspended between them" (6).

Part 3 moves into a discussion of the goal: the human ethical response to God's willingness to act in creation, reconciliation and redemption. In this third part, there is a particularly satisfying discussion of Barth's treatment of *sacrament* (166-70). Johnson shows how baptism and the Lord's Supper do not measure up to what is for Barth the one sacramental *event*.

Johnson's use of visual aids in *The Mystery of God* is especially persuasive with regard to the claim that Barth's theology is, for the most part, a vision of openness. These visual aids are in the form of simply drawn figures with which Johnson can not only *explain* (for example, that Barth conceives of reconciliation as the present, suspended position between creation and redemption), but also *show* (in this case, the suspension itself).

A further benefit occurring by means of Johnson's figures is pedagogically excellent: it has to do with the reinforcing power of a picture. Pictures are sealed in the memory in a way that words are not. Once a certain theological construct is sealed in the memory with a picture, the *next* construct—in this case a set of threes from Barth—is more easily assimilated. With the points of creation and redemption appearing as horizons in the same figure, I as the viewer of a *picture* can begin to visualize a multi-dimensional, open view of Christian experience.

An extremely important mental picture for Johnson is Barth's own "wagon wheel" metaphor for theology (5, 13, 20, 31, 40, 42, 186). The wheel's open centre represents the divine-human relationship. Identification of the centre is possible through confession of Christ, and yet confession does not proceed *into* the core in the way that sacramental event proceeds *from* the core. Though theology would place itself in the very centre, the centre is "beyond accessibility" (14). Theology is more appropriately positioned at the wheel's "spokes," which represent questions pointing towards triune mystery. Since the wheel has no outer rim, questions from outside the realm of theology are welcomed inward, onto a directed and yet "decentering" rotation. Thus, according to Johnson's interpretation of Barth's wagon wheel, theology is a "decentering" (postmodern) activity.

Through Johnson's book (especially through his figures that supplement the explanations), I believe I have grasped something of a postmodern theological methodology for the first time—or at least for the first time effectively. This book holds great worth for all readers of Barth, and for the vision of an open, postmodern theology.

Lisa E. Chronis

McGill University

---

*Whose Historical Jesus?* Ed. William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins. Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-88920-295-8. Pp. 337.

---

This volume of twenty-four essays in Historical Jesus Research is marked by an unusual variety in form, content and authorship. Fourteen of the essays in-