

## REVIEWS

**Matthias Gockel. *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. (229 pp.) [ISBN: 0-19-920322-9]**

Amongst Barthian scholarship today a battle rages between so-called ‘traditionalists’ and the so-called ‘revisionists’. The former read Barth as consistently maintaining the freedom of the immanent Trinity and thus read his doctrine of the election of Jesus Christ from that perspective. The latter regard the Trinity as coming to be as a result of the election of Jesus Christ. The ‘traditionalists’ are most ably represented by George Hunsinger, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, the ‘revisionists’ are most ably represented by Bruce McCormack, also of Princeton Theological Seminary. While this debate may seem very ‘in-house’ and esoteric, it does have significant and important implications. On the one hand, traditionalists would argue the revisionists threaten the freedom of God to be God and independent of his creation, while the revisionists would have us believe the traditionalist view fails to reckon with the Christological implications of the faith and fails to properly discern the nature of God.

The present work is a revised version of Gockel’s PhD thesis completed under the supervision of Bruce McCormack. As such one rightly expects it to echo the thesis McCormack first made in his 1997 work *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, in which he argued that in 1942 Barth’s doctrine of election underwent a wholesale revision in the *Church Dogmatics*. Gockel’s work is a defence of this reading of Barth, as he traces Barth’s doctrine of election through the various phases of (supposed) doctrinal development. In addition, Gockel brings Barth into systematic comparison with the theology of Schleiermacher on election, arguing, against the received tradition, that the two are closer than previously thought. Given this context for writing, Gockel’s work is an important and interesting contribution to the ongoing debate and essential reading for those wanting to enter the discussion.

Gockel highlights how Barth and Schleiermacher are close together in their appeal to a single divine decree, and in other ways, although Gockel is careful not to flatten out the differences that do remain. The essential claim is that Barth's doctrine of election is not yet christocentric: this, argues Gockel, only really comes to light in the exposition of election in the *Church Dogmatics* where,

'...Barth's approach...at once preserves and christologically sharpens the teleological understanding of reprobation and election in his earlier position. The theocentric emphasis of Schleiermacher's and his own earlier revision of the doctrine is replaced by a christocentric emphasis: Jesus Christ not only reveals but also constitutes God's gracious choice as the self-determination to be God for His people and the determination of humankind to be the people of God' (p. 169).

Gockel's study is well researched and written and provides a very good overview of the issues from a unique standpoint – Barth's doctrine of election in dialogue with Schleiermacher. As already indicated, the thesis that Barth substantially changed his mind on the doctrine of election is contested but this work provides an indispensable voice in the ongoing debate, one not to be missed when trying to work out for oneself what Barth said, let alone what he meant.

### **Myk Habets**

**Steven M Studebaker, editor. *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent*. Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2008. (xiv + 207 pp.) [ISBN: 978-1-55635-843-2]**

In February, 2007 McMaster Divinity College convened the first Pentecostal Forum, bringing together respected Pentecostal scholars from North America to present papers and engage in critical dialogue. This work represents the published papers of that forum, consisting of an introduction, seven substantial chapters, and an epilogue by Clark Pinnock. Respected heavyweights within Pentecostal scholarship are represented by Frank Macchia, Roger Stronstad and