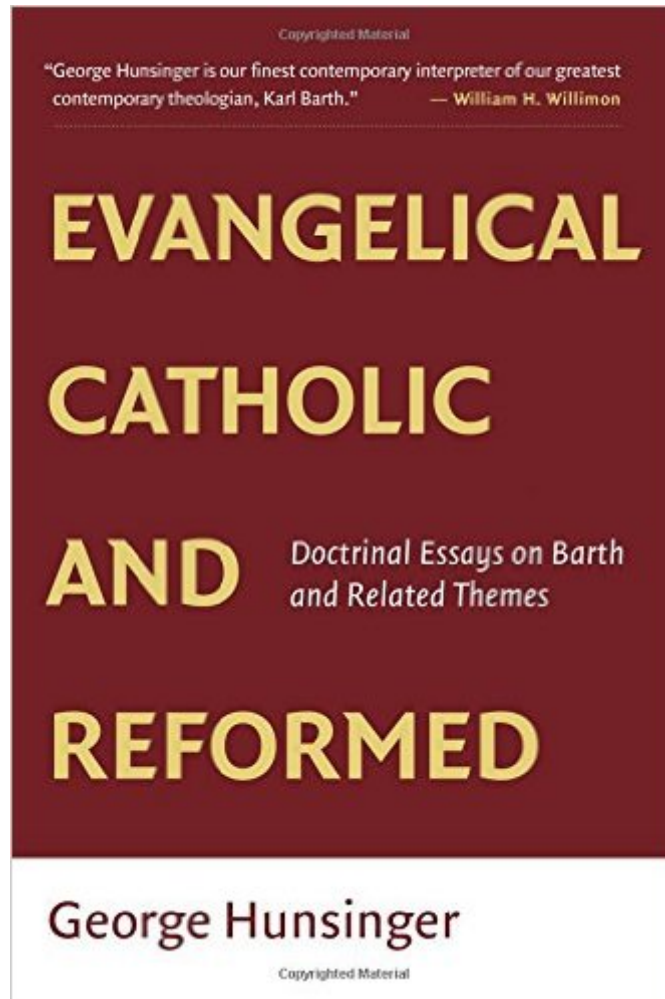


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Evangelical, Catholic, And Reformed: Essays On Barth And Other Themes



Synopsis

In this book prominent Barth scholar George Hunsinger presents fifteen essays on Karl Barth's understanding of Christian doctrine across a wide spectrum of topics, concluding with suggestions as to how Barth's theology might fruitfully be retrieved for the future. Hunsinger discusses Barth's view on such subjects as the Trinity, creation, natural theology, Christology, justification, and time and eternity. As he delves into Barth's theological substance, Hunsinger highlights ways in which Barth's work was evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed, illuminating the ecumenical aspects of his thought. No other volume explains Barth's views on this range of topics with such scope, depth, and clarity.

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Customer Reviews

George Hunsinger has made a name for himself as an able interpreter of the theology of Karl Barth, and so he continues in his latest, *Evangelical, Catholic and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes*. The essays included range from trinitarian dogma to Biblical interpretation, Barth's engagements with Schleiermacher and Brunner to Luther and Calvin, justification and sanctification to resurrection and election. Most of the major loci of dogmatics are addressed throughout the course of the book. If there is a unifying purpose throughout, it is summed up in the title, namely, that Barth is best read as a theologian who was simultaneously evangelical, catholic, and Reformed. He was evangelical "more nearly in the European than the American sense. That is, it was more nearly confessionalist than conversionist, being oriented essentially toward the Protestant Reformation, to which he attempted to provide a new interpretation" (xiii). Moreover, he

was catholic in his adherence to Nicaea and Chalcedon, as seen especially in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity and the substance of his Christological thinking. This provides the ecumenical base of Barth's thought, which is rightly accentuated in Hunsinger's own reading. Lastly, Barth understood himself as a theologian in the Reformed tradition, running from Calvin, through Schleiermacher, and up to his contemporaries. The particularly reformed aspect of his dogmatics is of course his doctrine of election, though, it is more its centrality rather than the actual form of it that lands him within the Reformed tradition. I think very few could take Hunsinger to task for not successfully having demonstrated these three marks as being applicable to Barth. Now, of course, many may wonder whether it was every really in doubt that these markers fit Barth's theology. Indeed, it seems that his identity as a reformed thinker has become unquestioned in recent years, and the evangelical substance of his thinking is widely recognized. It is only his catholicity that has been challenged. So in this regard, Hunsinger's volume may be an important contribution to Barth studies. He points to the ecumenical substance that appears in Barth's central dogmatic affirmations, and calls on interpreters to read Barth in light of these. This is most obvious in his treatment of the trinity where he maintains that Barth does not historicize the being of God, and that God's being in act cannot be reduced to God's being is his act. This revisionary reading of Barth has grown popular in recent years, and in my view, Hunsinger demonstrates that as an interpretation of Barth, it misses the mark. Barth does nothing to jeopardize the perfection and sufficiency of God's being apart from creation. Thus, for Hunsinger, the post-Barthian theologian who has been most in line with Barth's own thinking on the trinity is T.F. Torrance, over Moltmann, Pannenberg, or Jungel (who all in some way claim affinity with Barth in their historicizing moves). Beyond just being a textual interpretation of Barth, this volume serves the church's own doctrinal thinking in some important ways. Perhaps most importantly on the doctrine of the trinity, as expressed above. Though, his typology of Christologies as being low, middle or high, rather than "from above" or "from below" seems a needed contribution as well. Perhaps my favorite essay though was "Uncreated Light: From Irenaeus and Torrance, to Aquinas and Barth." This again features Hunsinger's ecumenical concerns, and argues suggestively that, In short, on this reading the differences between Aquinas and Barth [on knowledge of God] can be regarded as more nearly a matter of emphasis than of substance. Both, in effect, made the necessary affirmations, not only that "God is light," but also that "God is unlike any light that we know." Nevertheless, differences in method led inevitably to different inflections. Where negation was essential for the one, eminence was decisive for the other. Theology after Aquinas and Barth might do well no to remove this tension but to operate dialectically between the two. (79) It would certainly be a major achievement to effect some

kind of rapprochement between Barthians and Thomist, for they well represent the heart of Roman and Protestant division. "It is almost always better to read Karl Barth than to read about him" (302). Indeed, this no less remains the case here, but so far as reading about Barth goes, this is pretty stellar work. The great merit of Hunsinger's volume is that it serves as a kind of orientation toward the reading of Barth himself. It is not a replacement of Church Dogmatics (how could it be?), but rather, it a kind of guide by which to work through it; it is a coming up for breath in-between strokes. As long as interest in Barth continues to proliferate, we will do well to have interpreters as skilled and sensitive as Hunsinger. Highly recommended! NOTE: This book was provided free of charge in exchange for an honest review.

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