

Rowe's published dissertation is in many respects a model of narrative criticism. Its argumentation is focused, clear and – in my mind – finally convincing. My only major criticism bears on the structure of the book which, apart from some structural consideration of Luke itself, appears somewhat arbitrary. Moreover, one wonders whether the author's largely synchronic approach to the narrative too easily precludes an exploration of how Luke employed plot as a means of developing the christological conception. All the same, *Early Narrative Christology* will undoubtedly be a lingering voice within some of the most pressing discussions within New Testament theology today.

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doi:10.1017/S0036930611000366

Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. vii+135. \$25.00.

Adam Neder begins his book with the observation that Barth's *Church Dogmatics* does not take the form of a straightforward sequential argument, but rather proceeds by way of a 'slowly moving gradual accumulation of elaborations and recapitulations on dogmatic themes; it is more like an avalanche than an arrow'. Not only is this a wonderful description of Barth's 'method', but it helps account for why so many, myself included, find it difficult to write about Barth without feeling that our very attempts to do so cannot do justice to his theology.

I am happy to report, therefore, that Neder has written about Barth's understanding of our participation in Christ in a manner which not only does justice to that particular theme but to Barth's theology as a whole. Even better, he has done the impossible, i.e. he has written a short book about Barth's understanding of our union with Christ which can serve well as an introduction to Barth's *Dogmatics*. For it is Neder's contention that union with Christ is a theme seen in every aspect of Barth's theology. His incisive and clear overview of each volume of the *Dogmatics* is one which could only be provided by someone well schooled in Barth's theology.

Neder is well aware that his focus on Barth's understanding of our participation in Christ is not what many would assume to be a primary theme in Barth's theology. He ends the book with a quite interesting comparison of Barth's understanding of our union with Christ and the Orthodox account of *theosis*. Neder is very careful to distinguish Barth's understanding of our participation in Christ from that of the Orthodox, yet he argues that Barth's views can be described in terms of deification just to the extent that, for Barth,

Christ is a history in which creatures are freed from sin not by becoming divine but by becoming genuinely human.

Neder argues persuasively that in the early volumes of the *Dogmatics* revelation is a dynamic event between the Word of God and those who receive the word which enacts a mutual indwelling. He then proceeds to develop an account of election by which God's being for us means that our being is to be enacted by an obedient response to God's decision. Jesus' life of obedience establishes the being and identity of humanity, making possible our participation in Christ. Because we are never free from disobedience, Barth avoids the language of progress in favour of repetition and perseverance to characterise our lives in Christ.

At the heart of Barth's understanding of our union with Christ, according to Neder, is his claim that the 'being of man is a history'. This emphasis in Barth is crucial as it provides a way for Barth to display our union with Christ while avoiding any claim that we might have in ourselves the possibility of a movement towards God on our own. Barth's Christology and his anthropology are, therefore, correlative; to say that the Son of God assumed a human nature is not to say that the Son of God assumed a substance which can be described apart from that assumption. For Barth there is no humanity prior to the union of God and man in Jesus, so we become human just to the extent we are made 'historic' through our participation in the humanity of God.

Neder quite rightly argues that, for Barth, our union with Christ means that Christians are 'different'. To be sure, our union with Christ is one of distinction, that is, we are united with God in a manner by which we remain independent and unique. But our union with Christ is not a privatised reception but rather a perfect mutual coordination of Christ's calling and our corresponding response through which we are made alive by becoming his witnesses.

It is at this point, however, that one wishes that Neder had spent more time on Barth's 'ethics'. It will come as no surprise that, though I think what Neder has done illumines Barth's understanding of our participation in Christ, I should have liked him to say more as to why Barth does not use the language of habit and virtue. Given Barth's emphasis on being as activity I see no reason why Barth's understanding of our union with Christ could not have been made more concrete by utilising such resources. That said this is clearly a book which can be read profitably by those who know Barth well, as well as those who do not.

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