

I highly recommend this book, especially for anyone interested in current debates about evolution and how evolutionary understanding interfaces with Christian theology.

Michael L. Cook, S.J.
Gonzaga University, Spokane

Theology and the End of Doctrine. By Christine Helmer. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014. Pp. xiv, 417. \$35.

Helmer, a leading Schleiermacher scholar, has ventured into a more constructive mode with this volume, one that assesses the state and recent history of Protestant theology. Most centrally it is a work of mediation. H. wants to mediate the divide between church and academy, theology and religious studies, and, perhaps most ambitiously, between Barthians (including the Yale School) and Protestant liberal theology.

H. says the book's purpose is "to inspire a revitalized interest in doctrine after decades of contentious dispute that, among other things, has served to isolate doctrine from serious engagement beyond a small circle of theologians" (1). The twist in H.'s argument comes later: rather than accept neo-orthodoxy's narrative about the threat of modernity, H. lays part of the blame at its feet: "I will argue that those who sought to protect doctrine from what they deemed modernity's assaults have brought doctrine to its present-day challenge" (7). H. thinks that doctrine comes to an end when it cannot say anything new. Hence the need to revisit claims about the historical and cultural contingency of theological statements, and to suggest that Schleiermacher has something to give contemporary theology that Barthianism, especially the Yale School variety, cannot.

The book's most satisfying chapter, "From Ritschl to Brunner" (chap. 2), offers a historical reconstruction of the (mis-)reading of Schleiermacher that has come to dominate 20th- and 21st-century Protestantism. The standard Barthian narrative has it that modern theology, hatched by Schleiermacher in his 1799 *Speeches*, was not equipped to protect Christian theology from the dangers of modernity. This impotency was most starkly revealed on the eve of World War I, when leading Protestant theologians, including Barth's teacher Wilhelm Herrmann, could not distinguish the gospel from the culture. Beginning with his *Der Römerbrief* (1919), Barth particularly, and dialectical theology more generally, saved German Protestantism from being swallowed by the surrounding culture. H. adds significant nuance to this narrative by retrieving lines of argument from known but too often unread figures like Albrecht Ritschl, Max Reischle, and Emil Brunner. In H.'s retelling, Brunner, not Barth, "shaped the way Schleiermacher's understanding of religion and theology was viewed in the twentieth century" (55). Brunner, along with Barth, created the dialectical theology in which God's word was mainly understood in the negative: a nonhuman word, totally other than words humans encounter.

It is far from H.'s intention to write Barth out of the narrative. The first part of chapter 3 (62–88) takes up Barth's approach to doctrine. H.'s Barth is the prophetic, dialectical Barth: "Theology maintains that its primary reality is God; God's word remains the

divine prerogative to judge human words” (88). Theology is also an open-ended enterprise that continually begins again in an effort to render faithfully the irruptive force of God’s word into an ever-changing, ever-evolving human history. H. then shows how the Yale school, represented by Bruce Marshall, exchanges Barth’s dark prophecies for what she calls “the epistemic-advantage model.” Rather than seeing Marshall’s effort as preserving the most essential biblical truths by tethering them to creedal statements, H. laments that Marshall has construed doctrine in such a manner that “there is no place for novelty in theological development.” More starkly, she declares, “At this point, doctrine has come to an end,” for it has become “a self-enclosed system incapable of communicating to others on the outside” (105).

Chapter 4 constructs a theological epistemology by leaning heavily on Schleiermacher. Here H.’s fluency with Schleiermacher comes through, and she reminds readers that Schleiermacher played a key role in 19th-century biblical studies. Above all, H. aims to show how the right theological epistemology permits an openness to a broader range of theological *loci*, which contribute to a broader and richer construction of new doctrine. Chapter 5 continues in this mode, offering an olive branch to religious studies by suggesting that theology use social science, especially ethnology, more liberally. H. also takes theologians and scholars of religion to task for closed-mindedly refusing to grant the other discipline any legitimacy.

Even though this work has Protestant theology as its subject matter, it is still striking how profoundly Protestant the book is. H. describes doctrine early in the book, but sometimes when she talks about doctrine later on, the term becomes interchangeable with theology. Words like *magisterium* do not appear in the book. While it is possible to have a plurality of theologies but a uniformity of doctrine, H. does not seem to find such a compromise satisfactory. Moreover, in a book that spends much time discussing how God is mediated to humans, there is a conspicuous absence of any sacramentology; the focus remains fixed on word and language. This is not so much a complaint as an observation on the supremely Protestant shape of the book.

These points aside, I suspect this book will appear frequently—and deservedly—on graduate syllabi that deal with contemporary systematic theology. It is thoughtful and careful. More importantly, H. challenges a narrative about the last two centuries of Protestant theology that has too often gone unchallenged. H. has proven herself to be an important voice in contemporary theology, and we should be grateful should we continue to hear from her.

Grant Kaplan
Saint Louis University

Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures. By Paul J. Griffiths. Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2014. Pp xi + 408. \$69.95.

Griffiths has written a major work on the traditional theme of the last things, a comprehensive account largely based on tradition, though not without significant