

and further readings help readers to get a deeper knowledge of the specific arguments treated in the book.

In sum, this publication can be deemed to be a good basic reading for students interested in Christian faith and related matters.

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**Embedded Grace: Christ, History and the Reign of God in Schleiermacher's Dogmatics**, Kevin M. Vander Schel, Fortress, 2013 (ISBN 978-0-8006-9997-0), x + 247 pp., pb \$59

Kevin M. Vander Schel's patient and considered study of Friedrich Schleiermacher's dogmatic work, *The Christian Faith*, explores this familiar text according to the terms of a broader question about the intellectual conditions, and theological trends, surrounding its origins in the first decades of nineteenth-century Prussia. In his first two chapters, Vander Schel explains how the majority of Protestant German thinkers working in this period were able to identify themselves as belonging to one of two firmly-bounded schools that had reached the point of impasse, namely Rationalism and Supernaturalism. And yet, writes Vander Schel, Schleiermacher himself was unwilling to define his own work according to the categories used by either of these groups. Indeed, not only was he sharply critical of Rationalism's call to reformulate the content of Christian teaching, so that it fell into line with that knowledge of nature and the moral law which is discernible to human reason. He also took issue with the Supernaturalist vision of an unmediated divine revelation – the notion, in other words, that God can communicate Himself to human beings in such a way as to bypass, or cut across, natural laws and processes. Instead, Schleiermacher sought to avoid the ostensible dichotomy between nature and grace – or between the knowable world and the supernatural – which was thus displayed in the approaches taken by both schools, and which had, Vander Schel notes, been inaugurated by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

It is by elaborating the alternative models, imaginative patterns, and modes of expression which Schleiermacher employs to describe the God-world relationship, that Vander Schal provides an important corrective to the portrayal of Schleiermacher which remains commonplace in Anglo-American scholarship. That is, a portrayal which is still shaped by Karl Barth's suggestion that he was a cultural accommodationist, and which also tends to incorporate a litany of derogatory epithets:

theologian of (interiorized) experience; subjectivist; man of the Enlightenment. In such a way as to begin untangling him from this bundle of simplistic labels, Vander Schal explains in his third chapter how Schleiermacher resisted the idea that theology could or should be assimilated into the structures of study employed in the nineteenth-century university. For here, a burgeoning 'Wissenschaftsideologie' accompanied a vision of human knowledge as an encyclopedic system, toward which the work of all university researchers – no matter what their discipline – could contribute. Schleiermacher did not of course hold that theology was opposed either to philosophical enquiry or to the investigations of natural sciences, and Vander Schal confirms that he was in fact a crucial figure in bringing about its 'scientization' (Verwissenschaftlung) during the period. Indeed, theology is – Schleiermacher argued – foremost a 'positive' historical discipline, rather than a speculative one. Attending critically to the practices, habits, and structure of the Christian church, while employing knowledge and techniques built up within the natural and human sciences, can be edifying for the faith community. And yet, Schleiermacher was also adamant that theological enquiry cannot assume a wholly historical or natural foundation, and he took up this view at the same time as he gave his dogmatic work a christocentric shape. As Vander Schal makes clear, it is Schleiermacher's understanding of Christ's divinely ordered redemptive activity – alongside his confession of Christ as the divine Word made flesh – which forms the basis for his conviction that theological language must in some sense contain reference to a 'supernatural' element. An element, in other words, which can in no way be reduced to categories of human knowledge and investigation. 'Time and again', Vander Schal explains, Schleiermacher 'insists that the entire structure of his system is the grounding fact of redemption through Jesus of Nazareth, who inaugurates the Reign of God in human history' (p. 9).

Having established Schleiermacher's academic and historical context, the steady and unbiased exegesis of *The Christian Faith* which Vander Schal conducts through Chapters Four and Five of his book is an exemplary introduction to Schleiermacher's dogmatics both for the general reader and for the student. For specialists, however, it is his appraisal of Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics* – a set of lectures which are rarely mentioned in Anglo-American scholarship – which renders the work an important and rich addition to the discussion about Schleiermacher's role in shaping theology as a modern discipline.

In Chapter Six, for instance, Vander Schal argues that the *Christian Ethics* represent the 'practical' side to Schleiermacher's dogmatic system. As such, they foreground his conception of the Christian life as inherently social in character – as opposed, that is, to the notion that this life begins and rests in the cultivation of an individual's inner 'feeling'. Indeed, it becomes clear in this section how Schleiermacher understood

a believer's faith in Christ to entail a corresponding set of faithful actions, and that in this way, he could define Christian ethics as a descriptive rather than a prescriptive discipline. Instead of aligning himself with mainstream contemporary approaches to *Christian Ethics*, which referred to the abstract notion of obeying a 'universal moral law', Schleiermacher's own work took as its origin the conviction – grounded in scripture – that Christ's call initiate a new life, freed from slavery to sin, and born again into a state of blessedness.

Vander Schel's book is a careful and well-researched study of the intellectual and theological backcloth to Schleiermacher's dogmatic project – one which successfully highlights Schleiermacher's dissatisfaction with the categories used by his contemporaries to describe the relationship between God and the world. Nevertheless, for those readers who are already well-familiar with Schleiermacher's mature work, the fact that this study is not a creative or constructive project, but rests firmly at the level of neutral historical analysis, functions, at points, as a frustrating cap upon a discussion which is fit to open out, in order to include questions about Schleiermacher's relevance to the theology practiced in the present day. Vander Schel's unwillingness to put Schleiermacher's work into dialogue with contemporary theologians is perhaps best symbolized by his reference to Barth and Brunner as 'recent' critics (p. 78). And it is striking that he nowhere offers a critical appraisal of Schleiermacher's work, or suggests ways in which his contribution to the shape of theology has left a difficult legacy. In his conclusion, he references the biblical scholar David Friedrich Strauss, who critiqued Schleiermacher for failing to offer a theological method, or a dogmatic system, which was properly scientific in character. Schleiermacher's approach – as Vander Schel's book has made clear – rests on the confession of Christ's 'supernatural' revelation. He affirmed the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ as the breaking-in of the Being of God into history, and portrayed the incarnation as an event which established a new level of human society, nature, and practice. As such, Strauss protested, it is not possible to define Schleiermacher's dogmatic work as a historical science, and indeed the implication is that an enquiry so inflected with a gesture toward the supernatural can take up no proper place in the modern scientifically ordered university. With this in mind, it would have been fascinating to hear Vander Schel's contribution to the current discussion about the role of theology, and of theologians, in the wider academy.

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