

Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation, D. Stephen Long, Fortress Press, 2014 (ISBN 978-1-4514-7014-7), vii + 272 pp., pb \$49

This is a book about a remarkable friendship between two giants of twentieth century theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth. The former, a Roman Catholic, is famed for his preoccupation with the theology of the latter, a Protestant. The publication, in 1951, of Balthasar's *Karl Barth: Darstellung and Deutung Seiner Theologie* (published in English as *The Theology of Karl Barth*) represented a significant ecumenical event. With its emphasis on the importance of returning to the Christological center of theology (a return for which Barth himself is famous), it even anticipates, to some extent, the radical shifts of the Second Vatican Council. However, the interpretation of Barth's thought discovered within its pages has, in recent years, come under heavy criticism.

On the one hand, certain Protestant theologians accuse Balthasar of giving an inaccurate periodization of Barth's theological development, specifically his movement from a framework governed by a dialectical approach to one in which analogy took precedence. It is claimed that Balthasar misidentifies the crucial moments of change in this development. Meanwhile, other Protestant interpreters of Barth argue that Balthasar's presentation misses the thoroughly modern character of his thought, particularly its pervasive Kantian obsessions. Because of this, Balthasar is blind to Barth's greatest theological achievement: Barth, it is astonishingly suggested, 'completes Kantianism' (p. 120), solving its epistemological problems through his elaborations on the doctrine of revelation. On the other hand, a number of neoscholastic Catholic thinkers believe Balthasar's engagement with Barth had a profoundly detrimental effect on Balthasar's own theology. It led him to deny the reality of 'pure nature'. As a result, the anthropology undergirding Chalcedon collapses – or so it is suggested. In light of these criticisms, D. Stephen Long sets out to mount a defense of Balthasar's reading of Barth.

Yet *Saving Karl Barth* is more than just a defense; it attempts to present a model of fruitful ecumenical dialogue (hence the emphasis on their friendship, not just their theology) that can still apply today.

As a defense, it is convincing. After an opening chapter charting the friendship of the two Swiss thinkers up until the publication of Balthasar's book on Barth (the biographical details are one of the delights of this volume), Chapters 2 and 3 are exemplary pieces of scholarship, exploring respectively the historical genesis of Balthasar's interpretation of Barth and the subsequent collapse of that interpretation. Given Chapter 3's concern to show the lack of patience modern critics have in attending to the nuances of Balthasar's reading, one

appreciates the calm and methodical manner (though at times it is somewhat painstaking) in which Long conducts his examination in Chapter 2. Here we discover both Balthasar's fidelity and subtlety as an interpreter, taking Barth at his own word concerning the transformation of his thought (Barth's, that is) and sensitively tracing other important changes without reducing them to isolatable moments (contrary to what some of his critics claim, particularly Bruce McCormack). The second chapter also traces Balthasar's reasons for rejecting a Counter-Reformation doctrine of 'pure nature'. This is the error that Barth should have taken issue with, not the *analogia entis*, Balthasar contends. The reader is grateful to Long for taking the time to spell out the central aspects of this dispute and their importance (this is not, as one might initially believe, simply a matter of nit-picking), though occasionally the particular manner in which Balthasar defends a 'hypothetical pure nature' seems to border on the jesuitical.

After so careful a discussion of the sound historical and theological reasons for why Balthasar reads Barth as he does, one would be forgiven for anticipating a speedy dismissal of Balthasar's opponents. But as Chapter 3 examines the motives for such opposition we find the same care given to this task. Indeed, this is one of Long's great strengths. The huge mass of material the book deals with never seems to prove too unwieldy, and no thinker is brushed off without a fair hearing. The reader may particularly appreciate the moments of refreshing forthrightness here, too. Long demonstrates an admirable unwillingness to let certain phrases and ideas of Balthasar's detractors pass without question, which others might unthinkingly accept on account of their sounding intelligent (see, for example, fn. 37, p. 103, and fn. 51, p. 109). 'What does that actually *mean*?' is a question far too infrequently asked in modern theology (though one would want to ask this a good deal of Barth and Balthasar as well!). At any rate, Long makes a good case for suggesting that the accusations launched at Balthasar by both Catholics and Protestants have simply failed to read him carefully enough and, as a result, lead the modern ecumenical position toward 'the retrenchment and widening of the cleft between Catholic and Protestant positions that repeats where Barth and Balthasar began, but never arrives at where they concluded' (p. 3).

By exploring the continued friendship and theological dialogue between the two theologians after the publication of Balthasar's book, the next three chapters attempt to lead us to that place of conclusion and then point beyond it. While never gliding over the differences between the two thinkers, Long argues for a recovery of the beneficial contributions their friendship and dialogue can yield, particularly when it comes to the doctrine of God (Chapter 4), theological ethics (Chapter 5) and ecclesiology (Chapter 5). We discover how Balthasar identifies the way in which Barth's doctrine of God overcomes a

nominalist approach and better expresses God's glory. We find the two thinkers tearing down the old wall between theology and ethics, causing a theological revolution of sorts in their realization that '[n]o neutral realm of nature exists where ethics can be done as if God had not spoken in Christ' (p. 3). And, in terms of the Church, we learn how their passion to maintain the Christological center within the community of believers not only leads to some of their most problematic theological differences but also contains the seeds of ecumenical hope.

It is perhaps in its ecumenical dimensions that *Saving Karl Barth* struggles to be convincing. Not because what it advocates is not entirely commendable (friends in conversation rather than enemies in combat is undoubtedly a good model for doing ecumenical theology), but it is hard to resist a certain cynicism when one reads: 'If we first seek Christ, unity will inevitably follow' (p. 287). But which Christ? It is precisely in their so-called 'faithfulness' to Christ that different factions of Christianity split apart. In addition, would arriving where Balthasar and Barth's conversation concluded really take contemporary ecumenism any further forward? Hasn't the playing field changed too dramatically since then? Yet, looked at from another angle, what appears to be wishful thinking in these respects could be viewed as a welcome sign of hope in modern theology. *Saving Karl Barth* is a book that takes John 17:21 and Luke 1:37 seriously. For this it must be commended.

Richard McLauchlan
Pembroke College, University of Cambridge



Durkheim: Essays on Morals and Education, W.S.F. Pickering (ed.), James Clarke, 2014 (ISBN 978-0-227-17421-0), xvi + 214 pp., pb £30

Often considered as the founder of French sociological tradition later known as 'the Durkheimian paradigm', French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) wrote extensively about religions, for example in his classic book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). The fourteen lesser-known texts gathered here are shorter essays, lectures, reviews, transcriptions of public debates, and posthumous writings by Émile Durkheim. The substantial introductions and notes by the editor William Pickering bring an indispensable amount of contextualization and precision.

Perhaps the most interesting for scholars in religious studies, the first half consists of seven essays about morals and a possible 'science of morals'. All these essays have in common the demonstration of the