

Michael Bourgeois, Robert C. Fennell, and Don Schweitzer, eds. *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019.

The United Church of Canada (UCC) and various Anabaptist bodies have for some time collaborated in mission and justice work, yet there never has been an official theological engagement between the two traditions. Both are relatively new to the theological scene; the UCC is a young denomination, and Anabaptist theologies only emerged in large part following Harold Bender's 1944 *The Anabaptist Vision*. The result is a general unfamiliarity with convergences and divergences between these two rich, lively traditions. In *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, a range of scholars provides an historical account of UCC theology from its 1925 inauguration to the present. This volume offers a way (absent an official dialogue) for ecumenically-minded Anabaptists to explore the theological similarities, differences, and ambiguities between the traditions.

While the volume's historical approach may at times prove dry to an Anabaptist ("What has Toronto to do with Winnipeg?"), the treatment of doctrine and other key statements provides context for understanding contemporary UCC theology. Twelve core submissions draw chiefly from the UCC's four subordinate standards (its ultimate standard is Holy Scripture)—*The Twenty Articles of Doctrine* (1925), *A Statement of Faith* (1940), *A New Creed* (1968, revised 1980, 1995), and *A Song of Faith* (2006)—plus other texts to chronicle the UCC's understanding of key doctrinal matters.

John Young's introductory chapter places "the UCC's theological trajectory in the broader context of North American Protestant thought" (2), constellating it with liberal theology, neo-orthodoxy's influence on the denomination in the mid-20th century, and its turn in recent decades to liberative and contextual theologies. More narrowed contributions, such as Sandra Beardsall's survey of sin and redemption, concretely demonstrate how cultural trends have impacted UCC theology. From its opposition to "alcohol consumption, Sunday sports and theatre, and gambling" to its self-understanding as a sinning church in recent decades (119), Beardsall documents how being a church "vigorously engaged with its culture" has resulted in a consistently clear denunciation of Canada's sins, private

or corporate, and a contextually malleable doctrine of sin. The impact of Canadian culture on UCC theology permeates the whole book, a phenomenon that invites dialogue with the heirs of the radical Reformers.

Other contributors, such as HyeRan Kim-Cragg, use doctrinal tools to interpret historic moments in the church. Writing on theological anthropology and sanctification as “grow[ing] into one’s full potential” (206), Kim-Cragg narrates historical moments when the denomination “grew into” that potential, such as the first ordination of a woman in 1936 and the 1988 recognition of the full membership of gay and lesbian Christians (as they were then called) and their eligibility for ministry.

In large measure the essays skilfully paint a clear picture of the shape and situatedness of UCC theology. However, the volume is weakened when contributors veer into their own constructive projects and step beyond the stated aim to recount “how UCC perspectives on certain doctrines have developed over the years” (1). Kim-Cragg, for instance, briefly covers her interpretation of the UCC theology of sanctification before devoting most of her chapter to recounting historic moments when the denomination, in her view, “lived towards sanctification” (206). While an intriguing approach, this sheds little light on how the UCC understands sanctification as expressed in its doctrine. Harold Wells, giving an account of the denomination’s understanding of creation, decries its early “classical theism.” He defines it as “a doctrine of an all-controlling, unchangeable, and invulnerable deity” and dismisses it as incongruent with human experience and rightly replaced with new models of divinity (79). His claim that early UCC theology is representative of his own take on classical theism is both mistaken and reductionist; early UCC documents produced nuanced, thoughtful reflection on classical themes like aseity and sovereignty while upholding them. Detours into personal constructive projects do not adequately represent the denomination’s theological identity nor clarify its doctrinal development.

Nevertheless, as Christian discipleship faces unique challenges in the face of secularism, and as denominations like the UCC and Anabaptist churches learn how truly good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in greater unity (Psalm 133:1), this volume is an invaluable resource in coming to know our siblings in Christ more deeply and fully. At a time

when Christian bodies find themselves working together by necessity, *The Theology of The United Church of Canada* reveals what the UCC brings to the table.

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George Hunsinger, ed. *Karl Barth, the Jews, and Judaism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.

All but three of the essays in this volume were originally delivered at “Karl Barth, the Jews, and Judaism,” a conference held at Princeton Theological Seminary in June 2014. This publication is one of two arising from the conference that George Hunsinger edited and contains essays by senior scholars. The other, *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian?* (T&T Clark, 2018), includes essays by younger scholars.

David Novak’s provocatively titled essay, “How Jewish Was Karl Barth?” takes Barth’s interpretation of Micah 6:8 (“It has been told to you, O mortal, what is good...”) as its starting point. Novak aims to show “*how* Barth thought *like* a Jewish thinker thinks” (1), finding parallels in Barth’s exegesis of Micah 6:8 with rabbinic interpretations of the same passage. The second essay, “Karl Barth and the Jews: The History of a Relationship,” is by Eberhard Busch, Barth’s assistant for many years. Busch notes that a primary consequence of Barth’s theological affirmation of the unity of “gospel and law” was his affirmation of the “inseparable bond” between Jews and Christians (27). Busch shows how this was an especially significant affirmation to give in the 1930s and how Barth’s opposition to many forms of German Protestant anti-Judaism was a direct result of this theological starting-point.

The third essay is a transcript of a dialogue between Novak and Busch (moderated by Hunsinger). The dialogue is an example of how a Jewish theologian/philosopher and a Christian theologian, both heavily influenced by Barth, respond to questions on themes Barth prioritized, including divine election, Law and Gospel as revelation, the question of Jewish and Christian unity, and natural theology.