

## Foreword

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LIKE THE DOGMATICS IN WHICH IT IS ARGUABLY THE DRIVING FORCE, Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is a magisterial but incomplete achievement. Why magisterial? Partly because of its sheer scale and artistry. Partly because Barth understood very clearly at a critical point in the history of Protestant theology that it is from trinitarian teaching that Christian dogmatics derives not only the entirety of what it has to say about God, but also what it has to say about the relation of God and creatures; others before him in the modern Protestant tradition had let the doctrine of the Trinity loose in this way (Dorner's seriously neglected *System of Christian Doctrine* is a case in point), but Barth did so with consummate skill and sense of occasion. Partly, again, because of the descriptive depth of what Barth has to say. Throughout the *Dogmatics* Barth exercised a capacity for astonished portrayal of the substance of trinitarian teaching—not only in the doctrine of reconciliation, considered by many to be his most satisfying account of God's triune being, but also in the early treatment in I/1 which, despite its stiffness at certain points, contains some of the finest passages of dogmatic writing Barth ever produced. Barth is very far indeed from the flat-footed Latin trinitarian he is sometimes judged to be by those hoping to find in his teaching something more agreeable to social trinitarian sensibilities.

If Barth's trinitarian achievement remains incomplete, it does so, I think, for at least a couple of reasons. One is that, despite powerful countervailing currents in his conception of Christian doctrine, Barth was at some points so committed to the identity of God's being and God's outer works that he risked saying too little about the *opera Dei ad intra*. Precisely where, and to what extent, and for what reasons, and with what benign or malign results, his doctrine of the Trinity is

affected by this are matters of contemporary dispute; but that it is so affected is incontrovertible. Second, it should be asked whether Barth's sense of dogmatic proportion and placement may sometimes have been less than secure, with the result that the second article is too expansive and is allotted too many dogmatic tasks. Earlier readers of Barth sometimes worried that Christology swamped anthropology—a concern which may be largely laid to rest when we keep in mind Barth's interest in moral theology. But there are perhaps occasions when, *malgré tout*, Barth concentrated with such loving attention on the temporal mission of the Son that he passed too swiftly over the “whence” of that transitive divine act in the eternal plenitude of God's triune processions. *Perhaps*: only the most delicate reading of Barth, alert both to the scope and the details of his writings and to his peculiar rhetoric and modes of argument, would be adequate to reach a judgment.

Whatever the judgment may be, Barth's trinitarian theology continues to be a commanding presence. The essays which follow, with, after and beyond Barth, testify both to the fact that interpretation of one of Barth's doctrinal convictions is an open matter, and to the seemingly inexhaustible resourcefulness of what he has to say.