

Betz, Hans Dieter, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel, eds. *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. 4th completely new rev. ed. Vol. 1: A-B. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998. liv + 1936 pp. Cloth, 398.00 DM.

It seems that at the present time there is an unusual demand for works of reference. The recent publication of the completely revised and newly written fourth edition of a major standard reference work, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) signals a publishing event of significant proportion. Unlike any other publication, the articles of all four editions of the RGG reflect the various and evolving positions in the study of the science of religion and theology and its subdivisions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite their differences in content and perspective, all four editions of RGG (1st ed., 1909-1913; 2d ed., 1927-1932; 3d ed., 1957-1965; 4th ed., 1998) share a theological perspective that continues to be characteristic of mainline German Protestant theology. With almost proverbial rigor and thoroughness RGG has once again provided an encyclopedic overview of the current state of scholarship well beyond the traditional sphere of theology, including relevant discussions of non-Christian religions, folklore, art and music, education, sociology and social sciences, economics, canon law, and philosophy. The fourth edition has been completely revised. This means that new sections have been included, i.e., on religion and the natural sciences; on church history in North America, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Africa, and Latin America; on culture, art, media, and religion. Already existing sections have been significantly enlarged (such as the sections on ecumenism, and history of religion). All articles have been rewritten, and new articles have been added. One inevitably notices a new international perspective far beyond the confines of continental Europe. While most editorial assistants of RGG still come from Germany, a good number come from the United States of America, three come from England, two from Switzerland, and one each from Brazil and Israel. The contributors of the various articles reflect an even greater geographical diversity.

It is impossible to do justice to the sheer wealth of information presented in this massive work within the limits of a short book review like this. Nevertheless, we will submit some observations.

Whereas the third edition of RGG was fairly restricted to the stance of German theological scholarship, reflecting the theological orientation and consensus of the theology in vogue in Germany after the second world war, the articles and the contributors of the fourth edition reflect a much greater international awareness and sensitivity, well beyond the German theological scene. Developments in the natural sciences and technology have not left theology untouched. The global network in trade and commerce, a new ecumenical sensitivity, as well as new perspectives and new methodological approaches in the study of religion and theology, have made it necessary to present these changes and new developments and make them available in a new reference work. This new global perspective becomes apparent in several extensive articles on religions in other continents, such as Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Arctic region. Interestingly, some of those articles, such as the one on Buddhism, are much

longer and discussed in much greater detail than some traditional Christian theological topics such as anthropology.

Although geographical diversity undoubtedly is present, one sadly misses a truly theological diversity that is so characteristic of the current theological landscape. Instead, one cannot but notice a significant continuation in the theological tradition of historical-critical scholarship that was characteristic of previous editions of RGG, albeit with a new sensitivity to the no-longer-unchallenged dominance of historical criticism. A typical example of this new approach can be found in the lengthy article on the Bible and biblical scholarship. There is a helpful and enlightening discussion on the "Bible, Scripture, and the Word of God" (1427-1429) with perceptive insights and constructive definitions. However, one is left wondering whether the argument that the authority and unity of Scripture cannot really be found in itself (1428) does justice to the biblical witness itself and to historic Christianity. To propose that the Bible has only a conferred authority and reflects only a referential unity rather than an internal unity does not seem to adequately represent the Protestant Reformers. Granted, Luther's position on Scripture is less consistent and systematic than would be desirable. To claim, however, that for Luther the Word of God is merely the oral preaching of the gospel that is to be distinguished from the Bible itself (1430) is at best one-sided and does not do justice to the rich dimension of his position. Such a perspective follows the lead of scholars such as Gerhard Ebeling and others in the interpretation of Luther and his hermeneutic to the neglect of other notable Luther scholars and clear statements by Luther himself. Luther undoubtedly saw God as the primary author of Scripture, and therefore Scripture as the Word of God (*scriptura sancta est verbum dei* [holy Scripture is the Word of God], WA 2: 649, 15), to the point where he equates the Word of God with Scripture (*Non solum enim vocabula, sed et phrasis est divina, qua Spiritus sanctus et scriptura utitur* ["Not only the words but also the diction used by the Holy Ghost and the Scripture is divine"], WA 40: 254, 23-24).

A similar undifferentiated view, akin to a neoorthodox position, is propagated in the article "Bibelwissenschaft" (1523), where the secure results and insights of scholars such as Robert D. Preus (*The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. [St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1970-72]) and more recently Richard A. Muller (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993]) on the continuity of thought between the Protestant Reformers and the post-Reformation position on Scripture are sadly missing. At times one wonders about the criteria that have led the editors to include, for example, an unbecomingly short entry of a mere eight lines on the "Albigenser," but a three-times-longer entry on "Amnesty International." Other entries, such as "Annihilation" (508) or "Abstammung des Menschen" (87-90), do not always adequately reflect the recent discussion on the subject. The latter does not even mention any creationist perspective, but proposes the evolutionary hypothesis as if it were a proven fact. Unfortunately, the translator(s) of the article on "Adventisten" [*sic*] by George R. Knight and Roswith Gerloff display a rather weak knowledge of familiar Adventist terminology, which has led to some awkward and inept translation with regards to the Sabbath (127), the heavenly

sanctuary (127), and Christ's high-priestly ministry (129). The English abbreviation "SDA" is used consistently rather than the German "STA," as should be the case in a German translation. Furthermore, one wonders what Knight really means when he speaks about a "maturation" of the church that took place in the twentieth century. Few would probably feel comfortable separating the 27 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church into two sections, as he does. The first section, according to Knight, includes those Protestant beliefs that Adventists share with other Christians on the basis of the gospel (the authority of Scripture, God the Father, human nature, salvation through grace by faith, and the rites and the role of the church), whereas the second section contains beliefs that are unique to Seventh-day Adventism (such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the annihilation and conditionalist state of the dead, the two-phase ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, the prophetic role of Ellen G. White, and the return of Christ before the millennium). Such a distinction appears to be artificial and quite subjective. While Knight is certainly correct when he states that Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a people who preach a final message to the whole world, one keenly misses any reference to the Adventist self-understanding as being the remnant church. This deficiency becomes even more obvious in light of the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the church as remnant is very different and distinct from the common Protestant ecclesiology. Unfortunately, a good number of books listed in the scant bibliography are not listed in their German translation, which would have enhanced its usefulness for the German reader. Still, the fourth edition of the *RGG* has fortified its position as the standard reference work in religion, not just for the German-speaking part of the world. No serious student of theology will be able to ignore it. Every research library should have it. The publication of subsequent volumes is eagerly awaited. Unfortunately the high price will preclude a wider circulation.

Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen  
St. Peter am Hart, Austria

FRANK M. HASEL

Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. ix + 182 pp. Paperback, \$21.00.

On June 1, 1996, a seminar took place at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, during which the major lectures were presented by five scholars from the Systematic Theology Department of the University of Helsinki, Finland, led by Professor of Ecumenics, Tuomo Mannermaa. *Union With Christ* is the published version of those lectures in English, together with responses by four American Lutheran scholars. The work introduces a radical revision of the Lutheran understanding of Luther, constitutes a major breakthrough in Luther research.

The impetus for the Finnish research was provided by the ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, begun during the Archbishopric of Martti Simojoki in the early seventies. The task was to see if a point of contact could be found on the basis of which the discussions might proceed, particularly in reference to the