

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Religion Faculty Works

Religion

---

7-1-1985

### Review Of "Christian Dogmatics" By C. E. Braaten

P. Linwood Urban  
*Swarthmore College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-religion>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

P. Linwood Urban. (1985). "Review Of "Christian Dogmatics" By C. E. Braaten". *Anglican Theological Review*. Volume 67, Issue 3. 285-287.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-religion/342>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

Virginia. One might wonder about the inclusion of Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and West Virginia, but they were included because "each resembled more than it diverged from regional patterns." (These sixteen essays plus a concluding chapter, "A Survey of Southern Religious History," were published by Mercer in 1983 under the title *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*.)

Another major category is denominations. These are subdivided into generic (12); large and major (14); moderate size and major (23); and small (22). A third category is doctrines and theological movements with currency in the South.

The *Encyclopedia* includes a number of biographies of religious and literary figures. Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, and Walker Percy are "treated in the context of what they took from Southern religion and what they gave back."

Especially interesting are the "sacred places" of the South, such as Tulsa, Sewanee, and St. Augustine. These are described with particular attention to the Southern "sense of place." Another category pays attention to such aspects of Southern religious practice as music, architecture, and theology.

Public figures of religious significance, such as James Madison and Jimmy Carter, are discussed, as well as public events such as the civil rights movement and the Scopes Trial. Articles on offices, titles, and jurisdictions discuss such terms as elder, priest, bishop, deacon, brother, province, diocese, synod, conference, and canon.

The last category, special features, treats (among other things) roadside signs, Bible chairs, and the electronic church. An appendix has two essays on the colonial period (1607–1787) and the recent period (1940–present). A 14-page index makes the book very useful.

This is a very significant volume, required for every reference shelf. My only criticism is that there is no index of contributors.

DON S. ARMENTROUT

*School of Theology, University of the South  
Sewanee, Tennessee*

*Christian Dogmatics*. 2 vols. Edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, 624 and 640 pp. \$24.95 each, \$45.95 set (cloth).

Six theologians have collaborated to write a "usable" Christian dogmatics. In addition to the editors, the contributors are Gerhard Forde,

Philip Hefner, Hans Schwarz, and Paul Sponheim. The work is divided into twelve *loci* that focus on the great themes of Christian theology, such as the triune God, the knowledge of God, the person and the work of Christ. The decision to bring together six authors in this single project reflects the conviction that sound dogmatics is the product of the Christian community and not solely the work of individuals. In spite of the authors' shared Lutheran perspective, they sometimes disagree. Still, their work does have a basic unity and is a candidate for a universal *consensus fidei* for our time.

While a section of each *locus* is devoted to historical study of Christian thinking on the issue in question, this is not a history of Christian thought. Rather it is a proclamation, and as such it is an act of ministry directed primarily to seminary communities, challenging them to a deeper understanding of Christian faith. They find especially challenging the Reformation doctrine of justification, with its insistence on the primacy of God and reliance on his initiative rather than on human attempts to bridge the gap between the human and the divine.

As the contributors understand it, Christian dogmatics "aims to clarify the contents of Christian faith for those who already believe" (I, 9). It is thus not a missionary or evangelistic endeavor. It is faith seeking understanding (I, 16), faith using reason to elucidate its content (I, 18). An essential part of that content is the finality of the revelation of God in Christ. "The Christian faith claims to represent the absolute, ultimate, unconditional, and everlasting *truth* of God in the once-for-all event of self-revelation in the person and history of Jesus Christ" (I, 23).

This is a learned work. The authors are clearly at home in the classical literature of the subjects discussed and speak from years of thoughtful study. There is no doubt that these essays will prove helpful to many. To be sure, there are some historical inaccuracies. Since this is not a history of doctrine, and since these slips do not seriously undercut the authors' purposes, they are to be regretted but need not be labored. More regrettable is the use of many technical terms that, even when explained, place heavy demands upon the reader. The discussion often seems pitched for doctoral candidates who already have considerable background rather than for first-year theological students. For example, summaries of complex issues sometimes assume knowledge not directly in evidence.

Equally discouraging are phrases like "kairoitic knowledge of *telos*" (I, 219) and sentences like "While Paul knew of the dialectical character of existence between actualization in anticipation and still outstanding fulfillment, he was occasionally affected by the eschatological fever of impending eschatology" (II, 498). The lavish use of metaphor is also likely to discourage readers. In commenting on the traditional doctrine of

the fall, one author opines, "The difficulty here is that what is claimed is claimed on an insufficiently ample basis: Biological connection lacks the tensile strength to support such a prison house of personal bondage" (I, 425).

Such lapses are a real pity because, in spite of them and the general tone of Christian triumphalism, there is much good, solid, helpful, and thoughtful discussion in these essays. Readers who persevere will find enlightenment.

LINWOOD URBAN

*Swarthmore College*  
*Swarthmore, Pennsylvania*

*Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church.* By Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. New York: Crossroad, 1984, xix + 326. \$19.50 (cloth).

This is a book of uncommon erudition and depth of theological acuity. It is also a difficult book, presenting the reader with (often unnecessarily) complex argumentation and terminological perplexities. But if such professional/technical obstacles reduce, as they are sure to, the number of those who bravely make their way through Schüssler Fiorenza's prose, they in no way diminish or detract from the importance of this book.

This importance lies, first of all, in the incisive skill with which Schüssler Fiorenza criticizes what has in Roman Catholic academic circles come to be known as "fundamental theology," i.e., that approach to dogmatics which began initially as a response to the perceived scepticism of the Enlightenment and subsequently developed into a defensive apologetic seeking to rescue specific dogmatic assertions (such as the historicity of the resurrection) from the challenges put to them. The probative posture of fundamental theology soon gave way, however, to the historical-critical method and radical reinterpretations within the theological schema emerged. But even these reinterpretations, which replaced a reliance upon extrinsic authority with a more transcendental/existential approach, are finally inadequate. If the "empty tomb," for instance, can no longer be appealed to as "proof" for Jesus' resurrection, neither can an attempt to interpret the resurrection as the fulfillment of the "meaning" of Jesus' life and death be theologically satisfactory. A radical shift in