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BOOK REVIEW

Christopher R. Hanna. *Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal: Timothy George as a Historical Theologian*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022. xiv + 162 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9781666748451. \$26.00.

Timothy George has been an important voice in evangelical historical theology, and his book *Theology of the Reformers* (1988; rev. ed. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013) has been read by many both inside and outside the classroom. Having had such an influence on the evangelical world, one may rightly ask, “What is George’s vision and method for historical theology?” and “What are the influences on his thought?” These are the main questions taken up in this volume by Christopher Hanna, Dean of Theological Studies at Highlands College, Birmingham, Alabama.

After a foreword by David S. Dockery and Hanna’s acknowledgement, the book opens with an introduction in chapter one. Here, Hanna offers a brief survey of George’s influence followed by Hanna’s purpose for the book. The book’s aim is to set forth “George’s understanding of historical theology by describing and analyzing the key figures that shaped him” (5). These figures are George Huntston Williams, David Steinmetz, and Jaroslav Pelikan, and Hanna dedicates a chapter to each of them where he provides a brief biographical overview followed by the ways in which they shaped George’s thought.

Before turning to Williams, Steinmetz, and Pelikan, however, Hanna first presents a biographical sketch of George in chapter two. This chapter overviews the introduction to the three key figures that influenced George’s thought and also details some of the key events in George’s life that shaped him as a historical theologian. George studied at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and then Harvard University. Next, he taught at

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and finally spent the remainder of his career working at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. He spent the majority of his time at Beeson as the Dean, retiring from this role in 2019, and was named the Distinguished Professor of Divinity in 2020.

Chapter three presents the life and thought of George Huntston Williams, a professor that George studied under at Harvard University. Hanna highlights Williams's influence on George through Williams's emphasis in three key areas. First, Williams's view of church history as a field of theology is seen in George's methodological approach as a historical theologian. Second, Williams's ecumenism is displayed in George's involvement with the evangelicals and Catholics together. And third, Williams's social activism is seen in George's work on *The Manhattan Declaration*.

Chapter four is on David Steinmetz. George met Steinmetz when he was serving at Harvard as a visiting professor. Hanna argues that Steinmetz influenced George in his engagement with Reformation studies, historiography, and the history of biblical exegesis. Hanna also mentions how George "looked to Steinmetz as an example of a committed churchman, a beloved teacher, and a scholar" (80).

Chapter five looks at Jaroslav Pelikan. Although George never had Pelikan as a teacher, he was shaped by him through his numerous writings. According to Hanna, George was influenced by Pelikan in his understanding of Christian doctrine, in the value he placed on the church's creeds, and in his vision for major works of historical theology.

Finally, chapter six presents a synthesized vision of George's historical theological method, which Hanna presents based around the description of the Church in the Nicene Creed—"oneness (ecumenism), holiness (renewal), catholicity (Christian doctrine), and apostolicity (biblical exegesis)" (124). Hanna also points out how George's historical theological method influenced the seminary curriculum at Beeson Divinity School, where the emphasis is not on history and theology as separate courses and streams of study, but as integrated together in what the school calls "History and Doctrine." Thus, at Beeson, History

and Doctrine is one stream of study, with both history and doctrine being studied together.

Following the conclusion to the book there is an afterword by George, an appendix on the works of George, a second appendix on the works of Williams, Steinmetz, and Pelikan, and a bibliography.

The aim of the book is clearly set forth in helpfully and clearly showing that George was influenced by these three figures. However, Hanna could have looked to offer more thorough analysis of the ways in which George built on the influence of these three scholars and in the ways in which his thought diverged from them. Thus, the thesis could have been strengthened through further primary source research that compared the works of these scholars with the works of George. In order to illustrate this point, I will offer two examples.

First, in the chapter on George Huntston Williams, Hanna presents that George was influenced by Williams's ecumenism. On one level, such an influence is clear. However, Hanna could have further examined the ways in which the specifics of George's ecumenism was influenced by Williams and the ways in which his thought was dissimilar as well. It is one thing to say that George was indebted to Williams in that they both were involved in ecumenical research and had a "strong interest in the Catholic church" (53); it is another thing to show the specific theological areas of dependence and divergence. Consequently, a look at primary works of Williams in contrast with specific comments of George would have provided a helpful dialogue. Such a comparison would offer a narrower understanding of the ecumenical legacy that George adapted from Williams.

Secondly, Hanna could have also looked to provide a closer look at the historical theological method of George in comparison to the method of Steinmetz in their Reformation studies. Hanna highlights that Steinmetz influenced George's work on the Reformation, but again, it would have helped to have more specifics. Did this come across in the specific Reformers that George was influenced by? Hanna mentions of the class George took on Steinmetz called "Calvin and the Reformed Tradition" (76)—in what specific ways might the readings, lectures, and

discussions from that class have influenced George's work on *Theology of the Reformers*?

I offer these two examples to show the potential ways in which Hanna could have offered more critical analysis to further expound the aim of his book. The argument and purpose of the study is successfully laid out and defended, but I do think more specific areas of influence could have been provided in places if more primary sources were directly engaged and presented in comparison to George's thought.

One comment stylistically is that the book is comprised heavily of quotations, sometimes making the book read like a collection of quotes pieced together. This makes the writing in places seem a bit disjointed. The book may have benefited if more paraphrases were used and less quotations, thus allowing for more of Hanna's voice rather than his relaying of the voices of others.

Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal is a helpful, quick read on an important twentieth and twenty-first century evangelical figure. It is also a welcome starting place to learn about Williams, Steinmetz, and Pelikan. Moreover, the call for the use of historical theology in seminaries today is a welcome admonition, one evangelical schools would do well to heed. Hanna has helpfully used the life and influences of George in a way that challenges readers to rethink how we do historical theology in service of the church and academy.

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