

Book reviews

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Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 214. \$15.54.

Tracey Rowland's *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* astutely introduces us to the theological, cultural and ecclesiastical forces which shaped the thought of Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger and which continue to guide him now as Pope Benedict XVI. Far from the then simplistic curiosity in 2005 when Ratzinger was elected pope as to whether he would be a mere continuation of or a more conservative version of John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła), Rowland's carefully researched volume sees that both Ratzinger and Wojtyła desired to engage modernity and postmodernity with a culture of love, not death; while Wojtyła tended to use modern cultural terms and then repackage them with the Christian gospel, Ratzinger spoke straightforwardly, using 'overtly Christian, unmutated, directly Scriptural' language (p. 154).

Ratzinger's role in and after Vatican II reveal a theologian who, influenced by Augustine, Aquinas, H. de Lubac, H. von Balthasar, R. Guardini *inter alia*, desired to engage what he saw as an increasingly humanistic culture, not by accommodating Christianity to the terms and presuppositions of the culture (*contra* K. Rahner, E. Schillebeeckx, H. Küng), but by a clear presentation of the faith and tradition. Embedded in this was his belief that at the core of Christianity is not merely a moral system (*contra* Kant), but a deep encounter with the triune God; in other words, Christianity is about revelation. Rowland cites a letter Guardini sent to Paul VI in 1965 as a summation of Ratzinger's own belief and approach *vis-à-vis* modern culture: 'what can convince modern people is not an historical or a psychological or a continually modernizing Christianity but only the unrestricted and uninterrupted message of Revelation' (p. 146).

With regard to the church's liturgy, specifically the implementation of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) and its desire to inculturate worship, Ratzinger, consistent with his ecclesiological emphasis on the sacramental character of the church and the revelatory nature of the faith, affirmed the goals of that conciliar decree while underscoring the necessity for organic development to occur within particular contexts tethered to and ultimately shaped by the diachronic tradition.

A chapter titled, 'Modernity and the Politics of the West', described Ratzinger's political theory as one not desiring a return to pre-Enlightenment

social order, but rather a call for the rule of law solidly established in a regard for 'the *logos* inherent in creation' (p. 122), which requires an integration of the contributions of both the Hellenic and Hebraic cultures, not the severing of the two (*contra* G. Bruno, Galileo, M. Luther). Influenced by German philosopher Robert Spaeman, Ratzinger believes that Christianity is not one of many in the pantheon of social, political or philosophical systems, but that the Christian faith provides the very 'precondition for its (the State) own existence' (p. 113).

Ratzinger approves of the anthropology of the conciliar text in *Gaudium et spes* and the attendant relationship of scripture, revelation and tradition (chapters 2 and 3). That humanity becomes fully human in Jesus Christ: history is regarded as the unfolding mystery of the triune God's revelatory relating to humanity.

In sum, Rowland is to be commended for her lucid scholarship and for her careful attention to the nuances and complexity of Pope Benedict XVI. Her volume is an important contribution not only to understanding Ratzinger the theologian, but also the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II and the challenges and opportunities the church, specifically, and the Christian faith, generally, face in the early twenty-first century.

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Francesca Aran Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. viii + 356. £65.00 (hbk).

In *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited*, Murphy criticises narrative trinitarian theologies, including 'story Barthians' such as Lindbeck and Frei, 'grammatical Thomists' like Herbert McCabe and the American Lutheran 'story Thomist' Robert Jenson (p. 6). While her argument is complex, the thesis is simple: God is not a story. By making this claim, Murphy is calling for renewed attention to Christian metaphysics – or, 'realism revisited'.

She argues that narrative theologies, which aim to descriptively tell the story of God, in fact turn God into a story because they are ultimately foundationalistic. With the emphasis on 'how we know' rather than 'what we know', they create an enclosed and self-referential world not connected to real existents such as persons and events. As a consequence, these theologies have a weak sense of personhood, both divine and human. Whether the Trinity is understood as a descriptive narrative or an analytical sentence, Father,