6-2012

Review of The Conversation of Faith and Reason: Modern Catholic Thought From Hermes to Benedict XVI

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Recommended Citation


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"creative tension" between the quest for complex subjectivity and history, which may only yield "the continual process of rethinking ourselves in the light of community and within the context of the world" (91).

Reflecting his indebtedness to Charles H. Long’s Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion (1986), P. critically interrogates the cultural production of religion and argues for an "ethic of perpetual rebellion" (90). Herein lies both the strength and weakness of P.’s project. His dedication to Long is explicit. However, it is not easy to discern where P. departs from or develops Long. P., and all of us may yet need to go "back into the water" for the reorientation Long commends through our common African ancestors.

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Nichols’s project here has two aims. The first is to introduce English-speaking readers to a post-Kantian trajectory of thought on the relationship between theology and philosophy. N. traces this trajectory from Georg Hermes (d. 1831) through a synthesis of sorts in John Paul II’s encyclical Fides et ratio (1998) to its culmination in Benedict XVI. He discloses the trajectory through "a series of soundings" (not, N. admits, exhaustive treatments) of authors who, in his view, "set in every essential the terms of the debate between faith and reason" (ix): Hermes, Günther, Bautain, Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Kleutgen, Leo XIII, Maritain, Gilson, Blondel, and Balthasar.

While the book gives theological newcomers an introduction to aspects of the work of certain complex (and now somewhat forgotten) 19th-century thinkers, N. is less successful in achieving his second, constructive aim: to show that "of all the mediations of faith and reason—and thus theology and philosophy—set out in this study, Etienne Gilson’s is the most satisfying" (207). But such a sweeping claim cannot be sustained in so few pages. Moreover, N.’s English-speaking Catholic readers on this side of the Atlantic will be surprised to see Lonergan barely mentioned and then described as holding a position that Lonergan emphatically rejected (178–79), while Maréchal, Rahner, and Tracy are not even mentioned in a footnote. Such omissions also mean that the book’s title promises far more than it delivers.

Even though N. also provides important and fascinating biographical information about his authors (especially Kleutgen), Gerald McCool’s Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method (1989) remains the more complete and reliable introduction to the leading issues and authors for English-speaking readers.

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Josephus’s works include more than 300 letters; embedded letters feature prominently in the Herod narratives (War 1 and Antiquities 15–17) and the Life, where Josephus cites 62 letters from Agrippa II to assert the truth of his report of the war between Rome and the Jews. Olson analyzes Josephus’s letters by focusing on their narrative functions and interconnections with their contexts. He uses narratology and intertextuality as his main tools, and takes a broad perspective by comparing Josephus with epistolary practices in classical and Hellenistic Greek literature. The title’s first key words highlight Josephus’s role as narrator as well as important aspects of the letters: they enhance drama, they lend authority to Josephus as a character in his own narrative and to his interpretation of the events, and finally, they are tricky because they sometimes create ambiguity in that their content and tenor reflect a perspective different from the