

pressing intellectual challenges it faced, such as rationalism, scepticism, secularism, religious indifference, and even atheism, required philosophical and theological apologetics more speculative and theoretical than historical?

To elaborate a bit more, it would seem that Neo-Scholasticism was better equipped to deal with the dissolution of what Gilson called the 'unity of philosophical experience' than an appropriation of and reflections on doctrinal development. Development theory was for the Christian seeking understanding (and the apostolic Church), not for cultured despisers of religion. In other words, the problem Newman faced in writing his *Essay* was not necessarily the most pressing problem that the Church faced, and therefore, the Neo-Scholastic revival's side-stepping of development might have had less to do with its supposed 'either-or' approach, or its supposed lack of interest in history, and more to do with its confronting the more ultimate philosophical and theological questions at stake.

These questions notwithstanding, the scholarly virtues of Shea's work are many: a laudatory immersion in scholarship not in English, an impressive utilization of various archives, and an exemplary collation of relevant pieces of evidence that builds a narrative that now has to be reckoned with.

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A POLITICS OF GRACE: HOPE FOR REDEMPTION IN A POST-CHRISTENDOM CONTEXT by Christiane Alpers, *Bloomsbury Academic*, London, 2018, pp. x + 229, £85.00, hbk

This learned and meticulously documented book is the outgrowth of a recently completed Dutch doctorate in theology. It is both an ambitious foray into, and excellent account of, a good deal of contemporary Anglophone Anglican and Protestant theology, as well as an astute account of many aspects of the theology of the Belgian Catholic and Dominican theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx.

Christianity has for multiple centuries in the West been politically, religiously, and socially manifest in the form of Christendom, vestiges of which can be seen in part of the United Kingdom at present, where the Church of England is politically sanctioned as the religion of the state. Christendom may be simply defined as a culture with two principal features: first, it is a society in which all or most of its institutions assume the truthfulness of Christian faith; and second, it is a civilization in which the Church is socially and politically aligned with the reigning civil power, and is even able to enjoy the possibility of military protection and advancement. Christiane Alpers rightly sees that much of Europe

and North America can no longer aptly be described as locations of Christendom.

The initial chapter is very instructive because it elaborates the fairly new and inchoate theological discipline of public theology, a form of discourse about God and politics that esteems the significance of public life in a post-Christendom context. For Alpers, public theology attempts to provide ethical direction to an otherwise disoriented public; to set Christian theology as a mediator between conflicted social groups; or to empower people who are socially peripheral in societies (pp. 16–17). She provides an enlightening account of the thought of major public theologians such as Elaine Graham, Sebastian Kim, and Charles Mathewes. Still, she finds public theology wanting in that she regards it as a carryover of Christendom because it still accords Christian theology a privileged place in attempts to dissolve public differences.

The second chapter focuses on Radical Orthodoxy, and discusses in detail the theologies of John Milbank and Graham Ward among others. She concludes that Milbank and Ward have not left Christendom behind because they ‘remain within the problems of Christendom insofar as they apologetically defend Christian theology as being best able to organize the entire society’ (p. 63). Both public theology and Radical Orthodoxy, according to Alpers, seek to work out how Christian theology should ideally be involved in organizing post-Christian pluricultural societies.

In her third chapter she turns her attention to Protestant Post-Liberal theology and focuses in detail on the Christologies of John Howard Yoder and Kathryn Tanner. By the end of this chapter, and after admirably detailed discussion of the theologians upon whom she focuses, Alpers reaches the major conclusion that, despite their manifold differences, they all share the conviction that theology has a redemptive role in relation to culturally and religiously diverse societies in post-Christendom circumstances. It is theology’s task to fix problems posed by secularism, atheism, postmodernism, and multiculturalism. In this, they are all unwittingly remnants of the age of Christendom.

This book is driven to enquire whether, how, and to what extent viewpoints and cultural settings that are not Christian may be regarded as theologically significant as well as channels of divine grace in this world. In Schillebeeckx, the book finds its champion. As Alpers states forthrightly: ‘... I present Schillebeeckx as a theologian who is not so much concerned with identifying problems in order to offer theological solutions as apologetic defence of theology’s positive impact on society as he is concerned with continuously receiving the graces discernible in non-Christian positions’ (p. 124). The fourth chapter then proceeds to lay bare the principal elements of Schillebeeckx’s Christology, while the final chapter focuses on the idea that Schillebeeckx’s theology constitutes a stance in which the social and political end of Christendom may be regarded as a grace rather than as a problem to be addressed and solved by theology. The subtitle of the chapter indicates its intent:

‘A Non-Dominating Political Theology for Post-Christendom Societies’ (p. 180).

Early in her presentation of Schillebeeckx’s Christology and theology, Alpers declares: ‘I contest the most widespread interpretations of Schillebeeckx’s work, which associate his understanding of grace with creation’ (p. 126). She chimes with the view that redemption is a more significant theme than creation in Schillebeeckx’s understanding of grace and his theology more generally. Schillebeeckx was indeed a theologian who probed again and again in what sense it can be said that human beings can be saved by God. However, it is easy to overlook that Christian talk of redemption is impossible without a chronologically and ontologically prior theology of creation. In Christian theology in general, and Schillebeeckx’s theology in particular, divine creation beings into being all contingent and finite realities. It is also simultaneously the beginning of a history of salvation (or perdition!) that is directed to the consummation of all things in God—the eschaton. In this sense, protology (the theology of creation) enables soteriology, and is linked to eschatology. Christians live in faith and hope that they and the world will be saved by God, and they proclaim Christ in faith as their Redeemer, but empirically speaking, the world does not look very saved at present. The eschaton will finally reveal God’s intent for creation and God’s image in creation—human beings.

While presenting Schillebeeckx’s theology, Alpers states that Schillebeeckx has ‘a particularly pessimistic anthropology’ (pp. 142; 179). It would be more accurate to say that Schillebeeckx was never a Pelagian: he never assumed that humans, with all their sinfulness, could save themselves. Throughout his life Schillebeeckx had one great theological master—St Thomas Aquinas. From Thomas (and the *Book of Genesis*) he learned that God’s creation and human beings are fundamentally good, indeed very good. So optimistic about humans was Schillebeeckx that he entitled one of his books (in Dutch) ‘Human Beings as the Story of God’. The epilogue of that book, which ends Schillebeeckx’s trilogy on Christology, presents a condensed theology of creation, and Schillebeeckx’s mature comprehension of God in relation to human beings and the rest of creation.

All that said, the final two chapters of this book provide an excellent introduction to Schillebeeckx’s Christological project. They are meticulously referenced with a vast array of Schillebeeckx’s writings in his own native language. This book succeeds in showing how able Schillebeeckx was in recognizing divine grace in his worlds—ecclesial and otherwise.

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