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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO POSTMODERN THEOLOGY

A profile of Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. ISBN: 0-521-79395-5 (paper).

THE MOST RECENT OFFERING in Cambridge's *Companion to Religion* series, Vanhoozer's *Companion to Postmodern Theology* provides an excellent survey and introduction to those contemporary discussions in theology that often traffic under the banner of "postmodernism." The collection is opened by a judicious introduction by Vanhoozer in which he provides a Lyotardian-inspired "report on knowledge (of God)." The book is then divided into two parts: the first offers introductions to seven key movements in contemporary theology: "Anglo-American" postmodernity (Murphy and Kallenberg), post-liberal theology (Hunsinger), postmetaphysical theology (Carlson), deconstructive theology (Ward), reconstructive (*a.k.a.* process) theology (Griffin), feminist theology (McClintock Fulkerson) and Radical Orthodoxy (Long). The second part then takes up specific loci of Christian theology: Scripture and tradition (Vanhoozer), theological method (Stiver), the Trinity (Cunningham), the God-world relationship (Clayton), the human person (Webster), Christ and salvation (Lowe), ecclesiology (Grenz), and the Holy Spirit and Christian spirituality (Ford). The essays in the second part engage postmodernity in a to-and-fro fashion; as Vanhoozer puts it, "the chapters in Part two display both the *postmodern* condition of theology and the *theological* condition of postmodernity" (22).

The book has three particular strengths I would highlight. First, the team of scholars that Vanhoozer has drawn together are some of the best in the field. And with the exception of Thomas Carlson (chapter 4), the authors in this collection are confessional theologians who have not fallen prey to the enduring Enlightenment notion of secularity (the last modern virtue retained by so-called postmodernism), nor do they consort with the silliness of a diremptive "religion without religion" which has dominated the field of continental philosophy of

religion. Rather than the thin (still modern) messianic without a messiah advocated by Derrida *et. al.*, almost across the board these scholars advocate a postmodern religion *with* religion—a postmodern theology *with* a determinate, historical, resurrected Messiah. And almost all of the chapters seek to show how such confessional thought remains viable in (and perhaps even nourished by) postmodernity.

Second, all the chapters in Part One are masterful, comprehensive introductions to contemporary movements, attentive to both the history and theological content of these diverse movements. One will not find better brief synopses anywhere. I found myself particularly challenged by David Ray Griffin's essay on reconstructive (process) theology. Coming into the collection, I was most suspicious about two of the movements being included under the rubric of "postmodern" theology: process thought and feminist theology. While McClintock Fulkerson's essay on feminist theology largely confirmed that suspicion (there is perhaps nothing more modern than "liberative" theology), Griffin's essay forced me to revise my assumptions. Not only does he marshal amazing historical evidence for the fact that process theology was being described as "post-modern" as early as 1944 (so much for Tom Oden's claim to have basically invented the word!), his emphasis on the "distinctively postmodern notions in Whiteheadian philosophy" (92) convinced me that there could be a non-modernist, non-foundationalist (though still liberal) version of this theological trajectory. (It would be this side of Whitehead that we find Deleuze interested in appropriating.)

Third, unlike so many discussions of "postmodern theology," this is not a work that is fixated on epistemology or nor does it stall at the level of theological methodology. Indeed, it is refreshing to find rigorous engagement with classical theological loci in this context.

I would register only a few reservations about the book:

First, the book is decidedly Protestant (and male) in its makeup. Carlson's chapter on "Postmetaphysical Theology" is largely focused on Jean-Luc Marion, but slanted in this way it misses the deeply Catholic character of Marion's project (which finds its source in Henri de Lubac, von Balthasar, and *la nouvelle théologie*). Catholic philosophers and theologians such as Kevin Hart or Anthony Godzieba would have been better positioned to highlight the Catholic trajectory of postmodern theology (even if neither of them might be comfortable with Marion's role for the bishop!). So also, in the second part on Christian doctrine, a Catholic voice would have expanded the horizons and provided a better representation of postmodern theology.

Second, a couple of the correlations between topic and author were a bit strange, even disappointing. First, as noted above, choosing Carlson to present Marion means that the confessional voice of a Catholic philosopher is mediated to us through someone with a vested interest in downplaying the theological and doctrinal particularities of the Catholic faith. The picture of Marion's work that is played out in the constructive projects of Carlson and Jeff Kosky are a long way from the Eucharistic vision sketched in Marion's *God Without Being*. (This is not to detract one iota from Carlson and Kosky's outstanding work as translators of Marion; the community of scholars of contemporary theology remains in their debt for such labors.)

Third, it seemed curious to me to choose Stanley Grenz, a representative of a low-church Baptist tradition, as the scholar to write the chapter on ecclesiology (Chapter 15). While Grenz's communitarian ecclesiology is welcome, and could be said to be occasioned by his engagement with postmodern thought, it seems to me that his vision of the church remains quite un-sacramental. Indeed, it seems to me that Grenz offers a basically Zwinglian account of the sacraments as "visual sermons" which "recount" God's work (262-263), rather than sites of real presence which *accomplish* God's work. This low ecclesiology, while rightly picking up on a postmodern emphasis on community (over against the modern individual subject), misses a key aspect of postmodernism: the richness of semiotics for thinking about the sacraments (as signs). Here it would have been interesting to hear a voice such as Catherine Pickstock (adding another woman's voice to the chorus) or William Cavanaugh.

These minor criticisms notwithstanding, Vanhoozer's *Companion* deserves a place as a standard textbook in upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate seminars in contemporary theology. Its only peer is Graham Ward's *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (2002), the price of which makes it prohibitive as a text. Vanhoozer's *Companion to Postmodern Theology* could be profitably paired with either Ward's *The Postmodern God* (Blackwell) or Caputo's *The Religious* (Blackwell)—two primary source anthologies in postmodern theology and continental philosophy of religion—to provide students with a helpful, first-hand introduction to contemporary discussions.

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