

Rowland, Tracey. *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*. Oxford University Press, 2008. \$24.95 hardcover.

Although in her acknowledgements Tracey Rowland identifies Aidan Nichols' 2005 work, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, as the "gold standard" for studies of Josef Ratzinger's theological thought, I would argue that in the sophistication and nuance with which it charts the genealogy of his intellectual perspective, the detail and rigor with which it situates this perspective within the dizzyingly complex post-conciliar currents of theology, and in the breadth and depth of its treatment of the Pope's theological vision as a whole, *Rowland's Faith* is, at least, the new gold standard for any study of the theology of Pope Benedict XVI.

In contrast to Nichols' more thematic treatment, Rowland follows the Pope's own mode of theological analysis: doctrinal and dogmatic, yet always historically and culturally sensitive and situated. Thus, she presents the thought of the Holy Father in both its "tradition-dependent and tradition-constituted" genealogy (to use the terms of Alasdair MacIntyre) and in its "tradition-transcendent" vision and scope. Thus while she carefully negotiates the Augustinian, Bonaventurian, Guardinian, von Balthasarian, de Lubacian, and *Ressourcement/Communio* influences on the Pope's theological development, she also manages to capture its profound originality and wisdom, its unique synthesis of Thomism and Augustinianism, incorporating not only the essential perennial truths developed through the abstract, syllogistic, propositional, and dogmatic methodology of the neo-scholastics, but also the historical, cultural, linguistic, and personal aspects and implications of these truths rendered conscious to the Church through the distinctly Augustinian, "theo-dramatical" epistemology and hermeneutic developed in the post-conciliar period.

While the Pope's mission is, as Joseph Komonchak says, to "present the Christian vision in its synthetic totality as a comprehensive structure of meaning," (29) such a presentation is always historically limited and culturally particularized in virtue of what the Pope calls the "mediation of history in the realm of ontology" (151). Thus, while agreeing with Romano Guardini that "what can convince modern people is not an historical or a psychological or a continually ever modernizing Christianity but only the restricted and uninterrupted message of Revelation," (146) he insists that "revelation is not a collection of statements—Revelation is Christ himself" (49). Since the reality of a living person, as distinct from a mere dogma, is intrinsically dramatic—and this "Balthasarian" truth, as Rowland argues throughout the book, is what the neo and Baroque-Thomists (from Suarez to Garrigou-

LaGrange) missed—any presentation of the supernatural drama of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of the God-man in abstraction from the dramatic particularities of culture and history renders that presentation—even if theologically accurate—ineffective, and ultimately, false. This is the central thematic thread of Rowland’s study, and her analysis of Benedict’s thought is cast precisely in this historical *cum* ontological *cum* theological mode.

Rowland breaks down Benedict’s vision into several key chapter themes, such as the relationship of revelation, scripture, and tradition; ecclesiology; modernity and modern politics; and liturgy. What ties her presentation together is its “reference to the problems within the tradition of the Catholic Church and the cultures of modernity and post-modernity he is trying to resolve,” problems the root causes of which both Rowland and the Pope essentially agree upon. For, Rowland is not a neutral observer of the Pope’s thought; she is a self-identified “Augustinian-Thomist,” a member of the editorial board of *Communio* (a journal that Ratzinger helped found in 1972), as well as an outspoken critic of what she calls “Baroque scholasticism,” the pre-conciliar, manual scholasticism of the discarded preparatory schemas of Vatican II, and “whig Thomism,” the attempted synthesis of Enlightenment liberalism and traditional Thomism. These are schools and positions with which the Pope, as Rowland shows very clearly, has great intellectual sympathy.

So, Rowland is certainly “biased,” but, in my opinion, it is quite helpful, indeed, essential; for it allows her to grasp and present Benedict’s vision from the inside, as it were. What causes this book to be the new gold standard is, I think, its treatment of the problems of modernity in relation to both Church and culture. As a member of the radical orthodoxy theological movement, and as a student of the philosophical thought of Alasdair MacIntyre, both providing the most sophisticated and profound treatments of modernity to date, Rowland’s understanding of the genesis, character, and dangers of modernity is incomparable. Therefore, particularly in the chapters “Modernity and the Politics of the West” and “Beyond Moralism,” but scattered throughout the entire work, we reap the analytical fruit of one of the greatest theological minds today working with an even greater one; Rowland’s otherwise unsurpassed theological analysis of modern culture is fecundated by Pope Benedict’s in the very process of penetrating and presenting it.

As in her magnificent first book, Rowland takes us to the very root of the problems in contemporary culture. The root cause of the crisis of western culture is, of course, its absence of God, but for the Pope, this

absence stems from a philosophical *aporia*: “its inability to answer the question: Is God merely a projection of man or is it God who makes it possible for man to be human?” As Rowland suggests throughout both books, the pathologies of modern culture are only the metastasization of problems in the Church deriving from her own philosophical and theological *aporias*, as Rowland summarizes here: “One might therefore conclude that what happened to the Catholic Church in the twentieth century is that it was forced to confront the question of the relationship between history and dogma” (148). This relationship cannot be confronted in isolation from the relationship of nature and grace, faith and reason, philosophy and theology, tradition and knowledge, truth, goodness and beauty, love and truth; indeed, for both Rowland and the Holy Father, the isolation of these questions, relationships, and problems from one another is the heart of the problem in both the contemporary Church and western culture.

Both culture and Church must be informed and judged with reference to the revelation of God, not the will of man, and for this to occur, the Church in her members, both lay and clerical, must learn again what she, in her mystical mind, already knows. Benedict XVI is our primary earthly teacher, the spokesman for the ultimate teacher, Christ, whose primary school is the tradition, whose source and summit is the liturgy. As Benedict XVI, the Church’s liturgist *par excellence*, has taught us, it is in the drama of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass where we experience “the Christian vision in its synthetic totality as a comprehensive structure of meaning.” Rowland concludes the book with a chapter on the Church’s liturgy. Perhaps it is the recent *motu proprio* placing the ancient Mass back in the heart of the Church that, more than anything else, defines Benedict XVI’s theological vision and reveals his heart. For, it is only in the Liturgy that, for us, truth, goodness, beauty, history and dogma, faith and reason, and truth and love truly meet and are as one.

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