

Book Reviews/Recensions/Buchbesprechungen

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The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith **Avery Dulles, S. J.**

Oxford: OUP, 1994, pp. xii + 299, £27.50

RÉSUMÉ

Le discours religieux contemporain, en particulier lorsqu'il s'adresse au grand public, semble se concentrer sur la notion de foi. L'expression 'ma foi' est peut-être un code pour éviter toute référence à l'objet de la foi; ou peut-être s'agit-il de la disposition humaine à croire (quoi qu'on puisse entendre par là); ou peut-être encore est-ce un système de croyance. C'est cette ambiguïté qui a poussé Avery Dulles à entreprendre cette étude systématique et pénétrante. Son ouvrage pose la question: Qu'est-ce que la foi dans un contexte chrétien?

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das religiöse Gespräch auf populärer Ebene, vor allem im Bereich der Öffentlichkeit, scheint sich zur Zeit vor allem um das Konzept des Glaubens zu drehen. Ist der Begriff 'mein Glaube' ein Schlüssel, den Rückgriff auf das Objekt des Glaubens zu vermeiden, meint er die menschliche Disposition zu glauben (was immer das sein mag), oder zielt er auf ein Glaubenssystem? Genau diese Mehrdeutigkeit verhilft Avery Dulles zum Ausgangspunkt seiner umfassenden und eindringlichen systematischen Untersuchung. Was, so fragt dieses Buch, ist 'Glaube' im christlichen Kontext?

Religious discourse at the popular level, especially when heard in the public domain, seems these days to be focused substantially around the notion of 'faith'. 'What does your faith mean to you in this situation?' asks the presenter of a Sunday evening prime-time 'religious' broadcasting slot. 'I think my faith really helps me in my job', replies a breezy interviewee, 'I don't think I could manage without it.' Perhaps 'my faith' in this context is in reality merely a code designed to avoid the speaker having to introduce any straightforward reference to the actual object of faith (God, Jesus or whoever) in public. One suspects that it is ordinarily so. But there are

other possibilities. Maybe it is in fact the human *disposition* of faith (whatever that might be) which is being referred to; or perhaps it is some belief system (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Marxism etc.) from within which the world is being viewed and interpreted. Talk about faith, left unqualified, is notoriously ambiguous and imprecise.

It is this ambiguity, taken together with the centrality of 'faith' as a category in Christian life, practice and theology, which provides Avery Dulles with the rationale for this comprehensive and insightful systematic study. What, his book asks, is 'faith' in the Christian context? What has Christian theology over the centuries had to say about faith, and what role does faith itself play in the Christian life, and in the doing of Christian theology? His study thus falls naturally into two parts: a historical overview of the Christian tradition from the Bible to contemporary developments, and a systematic synthesis, drawing insights from the tradition, and offering some new insights on topics such as faith and reason, faith and doubt, faith as a developing form of life, faith and salvation, and so on.

The discussion in the systematic part of the book seems to engage with a broad ecumenical agenda, but many Protestant readers will perhaps still find some of the key players appealed to relatively unfamiliar. Thus, for example, while Gordon Clark and Carl Henry both find mention in a discussion of the 'Propositional Model' of faith, a discussion of the grounding and credibility of faith focuses on Newman and Rousselot, rather than, say, Pannenberg, Althaus and Barth. This, of course, adds to, rather than detracts from, the overall interest and usefulness of the book for a non-Catholic reader.

The ambiguity of the language of faith, far from being resolved, is acknowledged and underscored in the book as indicative of the multi-faceted nature of that to which the word refers. Thus 'It seems safe to hold . . . that there is a single, complex reality having different aspects, and that this global phenomenon, as well as certain of its elements, may properly be called faith.' (181) No doubt there is some truth in this assertion, and some of the different uses of the word in the Christian context are simply focusing on different bits of a common reality. But I for one found myself

still asking at the end of the discussion whether the sort of overall synthesis attempted here was not too ambitious, and whether at best we were not talking (sometimes at least) about family resemblances between what remain nonetheless different realities. If this is the case then the categorical substitutability of any one for another cannot simply be presupposed. Thus, for example, questions about which of them apply and which (arguably) do not in a statement such as 'Faith is essential to salvation' (270) may be asked and must be answered. Of the various 'models' offered for consideration in Chapter 8, while it may well be the case that more than one might legitimately be appealed to or tolerated in relation to this question, some, it would seem, do not really belong there, and we should not be afraid to say so.

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Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology

C. Marsh

Oxford: OUP, 1994, 185 pp., £22.50, H/B,
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RÉSUMÉ

Dans le flot ininterrompu d'ouvrages sur Bonhoeffer, celui-ci a des chances d'exercer le plus d'influence dans le milieu théologique. Il explore le fondement souterrain, souvent négligé, de la pensée philosophique de Bonhoeffer, qui a joué un rôle primordial dans son orientation. L'exposé de sa pensée philosophique est profond et techniquement réussi. Dans une première partie, l'auteur présente l'arrière-plan de Bonhoeffer, non seulement dans la théologie dialectique, mais aussi avec plus de recul dans la tradition théologique allemande. La seconde partie explore les relations de Bonhoeffer avec Barth, Tillich, Hegel et Heidegger. Une troisième partie, assez brève, noue la gerbe, en un excellent résumé du cheminement philosophique et théologique de Bonhoeffer.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Von den weiterhin in großer Menge produzierten Büchern zu Bonhoeffer wird dieses Buch wohl eines der einflussreichsten sein, zumindest im Bereich der akademischen Theologie. Es untersucht die vernachlässigte

unterschwellige philosophische Gedankenwelt Bonhoeffers, d.h. die Einflüsse, die ihn am stärksten geprägt haben. Das Werk stellt eine profunde und beweiskräftige Behandlung seiner philosophischen Theologie dar. Im ersten Teil behandelt der Autor Bonhoeffers Hintergrund, nicht nur im Kontext der dialektischen Theologie, sondern im Gesamtzusammenhang der deutschen Tradition. Der zweite Teil untersucht zudem seine Beziehung zu Barth, Tillich, Hegel und Heidegger. Ein abschließender, kurzer Teil vereint die verschiedenen Fäden zu einer ausgezeichneten Zusammenfassung von Bonhoeffers theologisch-philosophischer Pilgerfahrt.

Of the continuing flow of books on Bonhoeffer this book is likely to be one of the most influential in academic theology. It explores the neglected subterranean world of Bonhoeffer's philosophical thought where the most fundamental influences upon him are to be found. Whereas most recent works have mainly picked away at the popular and applied Bonhoeffer, this book is a profound, technically skilled and sustained treatment of Bonhoeffer's philosophical theology. The text uses some relatively rare technical words when it does not need to but this is excusable when the underlying labours are so highly competent.

The book falls into three major parts: I *The Context of Reformation*, II *Life Together* and III *The Self for Others*. In the first part the author tackles the background to Bonhoeffer not only in dialectical theology but also much further back in the German tradition. On the question of Bonhoeffer's relation to Barth, the former's thought emerges as 'a continuous wandering along the various paths of the secondary objectivity of relation, attentive with an intensity not found in Barth to the inner rhythms of worldliness', but without jettisoning Barth's attention to the aseity of God. This and later chapters provide a rare illumination on Bonhoeffer's often alleged role as the theologian of 'secular' Christianity. The second part of the book explores further Bonhoeffer's relationship to Barth, especially on philosophy and revelation. It then proceeds to achieve a similar goal with Tillich. Analyses of Hegel and Heidegger follow, and all the time Bonhoeffer's stature as an interpreter of this tradition grows. A brief final part brings the threads together and points the way towards an appreciation of Bonhoeffer's theology.

Along the way the discussion focuses on such matters as Bonhoeffer's ability to 'Chris-