

sociological or historical determination of the manifold life of poverty, which remains lost in translation. N. does not attend to the narrative of a single poor person, nor to particular contexts or passages in Latin American history. The sociological dimension of poverty goes entirely ignored in favor of an exaggerated focus on economics. Critical axes of gender oppression, racial discrimination, and sexuality get short shrift. N. says nothing about feminist theology's articulation of the impoverishment(s) of women beyond mention that it would not be a topic for his book. He entirely omits questions of the many cultural, legal, and religious exclusions imposed against nonheteronormative sexualities and identities.

While N.'s introduction mentions experiences he had in Brazil with Christian base communities, those experiences do not surface elsewhere in the book. Even though he is presently on a university faculty in Prague, the matter of poverty and liberation in Eastern Europe or the Czech Republic do not arise. Indeed, the question of the contexts of poverty vanishes from the scene. This is strange in a text that deftly summarizes debates in Latin America around the option for the poor, yet misses the spirit of a committed, contextual theology that seeks to overcome the massive experience of poverty. In following N.'s interrogation of whether portrayals of "the poor" offered a "pathway to God" or an "ideological construct," I had the feeling that the category of "the poor" was indeed being reified and nullified.

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JOSEPH RATZINGER: EIN BRILLANTER DENKER? KRITISCHE FRAGEN AN DEN PAPST UND SEINE PROTESTANTISCHEN KONKURRENTEN. By Thomas Rießinger. Münster: LIT, 2013. Pp. ii + 217. €29.90.

Rießinger, retired professor of mathematics and information technology at Fachhochschule Frankfurt am Main (1992–2010), examines Pope Benedict XVI's theology. Under the heading "Papal Purification" (3–33) R. treats *Deus caritas est*, followed by "Papal Hope" analyzing *Spe salvi* (35–82). "Papal Economics" (83–140) reflects on *Caritas in veritate*. He rounds off his treatment of Ratzinger's theology with a section titled "Papal Hermeneutics" (141–71) on *Jesus of Nazareth*, volume 2. In a final chapter he critiques the central positions of Protestant thinkers Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfgang Huber, and Margot Käßmann.

The various chapters of the book had previously been published as articles in the journal *Aufklärung und Kritik*, issued by the *Gesellschaft für kritische Philosophie*. R.'s background and the venue of the original articles help explain both his style and line of argumentation. His language is nontechnical and his worldview is decidedly Deistic. He approaches theological texts not only as a layman, but more importantly as a non-Christian,

subcutaneously probing everywhere for convincing responses to the late 18th-century theodicy question. One finds comparatively few footnotes and a very selective bibliography, listing almost no theological texts pertinent to his object's writings, and no index.

Not accepting such basic Christian tenets as God being good, triune, and effecting atonement, he finds no justification for Ratzinger's claim that God loves the world he had created (11). Regarding the Eucharist, he rejects wanting to be party to the self-sacrificing act of Jesus, for it is cruel and inhumane (14). In fact he even goes so far as to say that Ratzinger himself wants no rational discussion of issues that are central to Christianity, but wants to "immunize" people against any objections or accusations that "reasonable people" might have (33).

Assuming an unbridgeable Kantian bifurcation between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, and echoing Richard Dawkins, R. asks how Paul and Ratzinger know the nature of hope (36). He critiques Ratzinger for assuming that God's death should be necessary to overcome human transgressions, and speculates on why God should not simply have forgiven humankind (46, 61). When *Spe salvi* mentions that Augustine found strength for his life in the incarnation, R. observes that this requires ignoring the cruelty of God's plans to save humanity by "his son's murder"—"an altogether not encouraging source for strength" (63). The greatness of the divine *kenosis* remains hidden to R. (150). He asks why the OT God did not do away with suffering (70). He denies suffering's salvific dimension, countenancing neither the tragic content of human existence nor the drama of freedom and sin. A Christian God claiming "he who believes in me . . . shall never die" (Jn 11:25–26, quoted in Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* 83) (156) must be "schizophrenic" (157). In not accepting Jesus Christ's two natures, R. sees God as responsible for suffering (159). In fact, on the cross "Jesus recognized God had forsaken him" (165). R. assumes that, according to Catholic faith, only Christians can be saved (80).

R. notices that Ratzinger "arbitrarily" redefines eternity as timeless in order to avoid the "problem of God's eternal boredom" (47). Little does R. know of Augustine's discovering that divine eternity is beyond temporality (*Confessions*). Lacking familiarity with the encyclical *Fides et ratio* and Ratzinger's Bayeux talk in 2004 on the pathologies to which both faith and reason may fall victim if they are not constantly related to each other, R. charges that faith promotes obscurantism (50–57). R. ignores the fact that the Christian identification of Christ with the *Logos* is something pre-Christian philosophers had sought (87). Therefore he is incapable of countenancing Jesus as *the* template for genuine humanity (*Gaudium et spes* 22).

Seeing Jesus not as a descendent of David, R. rejects Ratzinger's calling Jesus "heir of David" in *Spe salvi* 50 (81). Here again, unfamiliarity with

Christian theology is obvious. This leads R. to see in Catholic social teaching only “a tool to evangelize,” but not to improve material well-being (95). He does not appreciate that the Catholic understanding of the human person is essential for defending union rights and a social free market system. Benedict’s thoughts on human life as gift remain beyond comprehension, as R. does not see the ramifications of human beings created in the image and likeness of God and therefore called to worship him (111–17). Yet for R., only if God is tripersonal is man a person (see 127), are the concepts of “subsidiarity and solidarity” viable (129), and are Catholic positions on social ethics and morality comprehensible. To R. the transcendentals—truth, goodness, and beauty—are “meaningless and hollow words,” incapable of contributing to the solution of the world’s problems (125).

Since R. is not acquainted with theological or metaphysical terms, it is understandable that he accuses Ratzinger of circular arguments: only a hermeneutics of faith can access faith (143). He bases his sweeping conclusions on just four texts of Ratzinger’s oeuvre of over 1600 titles. Using Ratzinger as his preferred opponent, R. settles the score with Christianity in general.

The book highlights an important development since 1989: as ideologies have lost their fascination, Deism becomes *en vogue* in postmodernity. The question then is, What is the common basis for dialogue between Christianity and deistic Enlightenment?

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BIBLE, GENDER, SEXUALITY: REFRAMING THE CHURCH’S DEBATE ON SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS. By James V. Brownson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. Pp. xi + 300. \$29.

Contributing in two fundamental ways, Brownson invites us to “reinvigorate the imagination of the Church” in the ongoing debate within many Christian traditions on same-sex relationships (15). First, he attempts to offer a comprehensive and transcultural biblical vision for Christian sexuality. Second, he searches for a moral vision that the Bible commends regarding gender and sexuality, especially in the case of committed and loving same-sex relationships today.

B. begins by pointing out that interpretation of biblical texts is not simply understanding what the texts say, but finding out *why* the texts say what they do. Thus, he first uncovers what he calls the “moral logic” behind the texts. B. recalls the dichotomous moral arguments presented by traditionalists and revisionists, and concludes that neither position is adequate.

The rest of the book is divided into two rather equal parts in which B. introduces several forms of moral logic that shape the Bible’s treatment of