

seek to open new doors to a new theology, a new church up ahead and a new social imaginary of God.

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*Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization.* By Robert Barron. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. Pp. xv + 250. \$24.99.

Robert Barron, newly appointed auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, is probably best known for his acclaimed series of DVDs, *Catholicism*, with its accompanying book. The series has been successfully used in RCIA programs, in parish continuing-education programs, and in undergraduate classes devoted to Catholic theology. I, along with many others, can attest both to the aesthetic attractiveness of the series and its pedagogical effectiveness.

It soon becomes apparent that the accessibility of B.'s work does not come at the expense of theological substance. A coherent and compelling theological and philosophical vision animates the *Catholicism* series, as well as his other multi-media offerings. B. is not only a first-rate evangelist and communicator, he is a most impressive systematic theologian.

That comprehensive vision has been articulated in such fine works as *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation* (1998), *The Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path* (2002), and most fully in *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (2007). Each of these displays B.'s ability to join seamlessly theology and spirituality, the intellectual and affective, as he draws richly from the classics of Christianity's theological, literary, and artistic traditions. These qualities are abundantly present in this new collection: *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*.

The range and depth of B.'s theological ancestry, revealed in these essays, is noteworthy. Irenaeus and Augustine, Aquinas and Newman, Balthasar and Ratzinger, Lonergan and Dulles do not receive only passing mention. They are vital conversation partners from whom B. continues to learn and whom he cogently incorporates into his own theological synthesis. For him, as for them, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* are inseparable and perennial dimensions of the theological task at the service of the Church's liturgy and life.

The present essays develop a number of the key insights and sensibilities that structure B.'s previous writings. The book's four sections display his primary concerns and commitments: the Doctrine of God, Theology and Philosophy, Liturgy and Eucharist, A New Evangelization.

B. draws upon Thomas Aquinas in his insistence that *Deus non est in genere*: God is not a member of a class, albeit the highest. God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, the personal power that brings into existence and undergirds all finite reality. In addressing the "New Atheists," B. assumes a mystagogical stance, seeking to lead beyond a

truncated concept of God, toward the mystery in whom creation lives and moves and has its being.

But the uniqueness and originality of the Christian revelation is that this God of infinite mystery interacts intimately and personally with our human world. In Jesus Christ God has drawn near and assumed our human nature, not to overwhelm, much less annihilate, but to consecrate and transform.

B., however, goes beyond merely affirming that the Incarnation is the distinctive “Idea” (in Newman’s sense) of Christianity. He probes that claim to maintain “the epistemic primacy” of Jesus. Such an affirmation bears both methodological and missionary implications. Jesus is not the supreme instance of a generic type: one of a class of savior figures. The salvation he brings in his person is not constricted, but catholic.

B. contends that the liberal tradition in theology, beginning in 19th-century Protestantism and embraced by many Catholic theologians in the aftermath of Vatican II, promotes a reductive understanding of the Christian tradition. Revelation tends to be absorbed by human experience, Christology by anthropology, the mystical by the moral. Thus B. advocates a “postliberal” or “postcritical” approach to the craft of theology, one in which Jesus Christ is the measure and not that which is to be measured. For this reason B. is wary of appeals to a “method of correlation” in pursuing the theological task. He recommends, instead, what he calls (following Newman) a “method of assimilation,” wherein the Catholic theologian appropriates “whatever is true, honorable, just, pure” (Phil 4:8) in a given culture. But such critical discernment always transpires in the light of the gospel and is normed by Jesus Christ who alone is *lumen gentium*.

Moreover, without a firm sense of the absolute *novum* of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the surpassing joy of his gospel, missionary activity becomes anemic. As Pope Francis insisted, in the very first homily after his election as Bishop of Rome, “without Christ and his cross at the center, the Church becomes only a charitable NGO!” B. concurs completely. Only the conviction that Christ is, in truth, *lumen gentium* can spur and sustain a mission *ad gentes*.

Tutored by Aquinas, Newman, and Lonergan (as well as by Robert Sokolowski to whom the book is dedicated), B. opts for both theology and philosophy, both the biblical narrative and speculative metaphysics. In this regard I would single out his essay, “The Metaphysics of Coinherence: A Meditation on the Essence of the Christian Message.” In typical fashion, B. introduces his subject by evoking a work of art: here the intertwined and interconnected patterns of the Book of Kells. The “coinherence,” the multi-faceted unity and participatory sensitivity so graphically displayed in the manuscript, finds its ultimate ground in the union of God and man in the Incarnation and the extension of that saving communion to all creation through the Eucharist.

The essays in this collection were composed prior to the appearance of Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato si’*. Yet reading the two works concurrently reveals a striking complementarity. A key theme of the encyclical, of course, is that “everything is interconnected,” “interrelated” (138); that there is an urgent need for “a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (240); and that “the Eucharist embraces and penetrates all creation” (236). At the same time the Pope

realizes that these insights require fuller theoretical grounding. Hence his repeated call for “a new synthesis” (112 and 121).

I suggest that B.’s work offers rich resources for such a synthesis.

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*Diasporic Feminist Theology: Asia and Theopolitical Imagination.* By Namssoon Kang. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. Pp. xiv + 378. \$39.

The author offers a diasporic feminist theology, which includes a discourse of identity politics that negates Western-centered, patriarchal, and domineering discourses. In this superb example of scholarship and poignant critique of feminism, Kang explores the third space where fluid identities and diverse discourses encounter each other and result in creating an alterity.

As a Korean feminist who resides in the United States, K. examines how dislocation and relocation affect doing theology in the context of trans-nationality and trans-ethnicities. In her geopolitical imagination, she revisits and rearticulates Asian feminist theology—including the use of myth and folktale, as well as Asian cultural values, as represented by Confucian thought.

In response to her fundamental theological question, Who is Asian?, K. frames a diasporic feminist theology that resonates with her current location, and with her multiple sociopolitical locations within the global context. She argues that very often the Asian woman’s identity, or that of any non-Westerner for that matter, is essentialized and fixed. For example, as a Korean woman scholar, her identity is prescribed as “the Han ridden” one, who undergoes a variety of suffering and poverty. Western scholarship expects, and thereby limits, the discourse of Asian women within victimization.

This discourse is not new. Kwok Pui Lan, in her seminal work, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (2005), articulated the identity construction of Asian women in the postcolonial context. Wai Ching Angela Wong, in *The Poor Woman: A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women* (2002), also dealt with the Asian woman’s image of being poor. Here, Kang extends these discourses to diasporic and global discourses. Her research thus helps readers map postcolonial and postmodern discourses in the context of diasporic theopolitics.

Given that this book is a collection of the essays of this author, who writes from various contexts and times, it is not fair to expect systematic arguments or a progression of argument. Rather, it is perhaps best to read each chapter independently. K.’s scope and interests vary, so that she covers a gamut of discourses from postmodernism, Asian feminism, and postcolonialism, to those of transnational feminism, borderlands, and diasporic feminist theology.

The author does not seem to explicitly address explicitly the task of creating an innovative approach to diasporic feminist theology. For example, she articulates the