

Book Reviews

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Volume 11: Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work 1931–1932*, trans. Anne Schmidt-Lange, Isabel Best, Nicholas Humphrey and Marion Pauck; ed. Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Brocker and Michael B. Lukens, Augsburg Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2012; 624 pp.: 978080069838, £40.99 (hbk)

This volume in the now nearly completed series of the Bonhoeffer Works English translations covers the period between Bonhoeffer's return to Germany from his studies in the USA in June 1931 to October 1932: a mere sixteen months but still requiring some six hundred pages to do justice to the extent and intensity of his activities. During this time he had his first personal encounter with Karl Barth; began his ecumenical activity in the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship Through the Churches; became an adjunct lecturer in Berlin University (his teaching load would make many academics shudder); served as assistant pastor in north Berlin; conducted a confirmation class of unruly boys in a poor working-class district; ran a youth centre; and (not very successfully) was chaplain to the Technical University – all the time living a life rich in relationships with family and friends.

This well illustrates what he musically described years later in prison as the 'polyphony' of life. But for Bonhoeffer himself the score was moving on: from brilliant doctoral student to junior lecturer trying to establish himself; from ordinand to pastor; from observer of the ecumenical scene to active participant. For Germany too it was a time of significant, but fateful, change as the Weimar Republic staggered towards its end. Bonhoeffer, who through academic concentration had hitherto eschewed much political interest, was now confronted by the fearful rise in unemployment and social distress, and the newly virulent nationalism. These pages show how, more clearly than most, he realized the true danger of the direction in which the national tide was running and perceived only too well – almost to the point of despair – the vulnerability of the Church which was as much a part of the German problem as any cure.

As with the other biographical volumes, the material is grouped threefold into correspondence, lectures (or reports) and sermons. Much is new in English. The lectures (some reconstructed from students' notes), as well as developing his own theology of the Church, show how this young, assured (sometimes arrogant)

Barthian engaged with the grand tradition of liberal theology, including a fascinating survey of the nineteenth-century background and with some ironic asides: ‘Troeltsch did not have to preach; what would a history-of-religions sermon have to look like, as a message?’ (p. 209). His addresses from the ecumenical podium call for courageous self-understanding and concrete actions by the churches and ecumenical bodies, which still await adequate responses today. But a special new gem is the lecture on ‘The Right to Self-Assertion’, addressing the ominous contemporary popularizing of the ‘will to power’ and just as pertinent for our contemporary debates about freedom and identity. The sermons, characteristically, are rigorously biblical and contextual, while the letters are often poignantly revealing of an inner life of faith wrestling with fears for the future.

As elsewhere in the series the translation is excellent, and the editorial apparatus from both German- and English-speaking editors helpful and illuminating. In all, another essential contribution to Bonhoeffer studies.

Keith Clements

Portishead

Stephen Bullivant, ***The Salvation of Atheists and Catholic Dogmatic Theology***, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012; 224 pp.: 9780199652563, £65.00 (hbk)

In Catholic circles, concern for the salvation of atheists, that is, a person who is without belief in God/s, has traditionally lagged somewhat behind concern for those who ascribe to a belief, albeit in a different God/s. Yet, as Bullivant contends, atheism may well be the most serious matter of our time. His book is certainly the most serious study-length consideration of the problem from the perspective of dogmatic theology and goes a long way in offering a response to the central question: do atheists get to heaven?

In the initial chapters Bullivant provides historical/critical excursions on the development of the doctrine of salvation and the renewed understandings of atheism within the Church. Particular attention is given to the optimism of Vatican II on the matter, and the work of Karl Rahner.

Rahner’s ‘anonymous Christian’ might intuitively offer a means to negotiate the salvation of atheists, yet, as Bullivant argues, Rahner is merely one of many modern catholic theologians who, despite their individual differences, resolved the question of non-believers’ salvation by positing an implicit, anonymous or unconscious faith in the non-believer. The problem arises because any such appeal remains uncertain, on the one hand, or, on the other, in stretching the analogy to atheism, fails to acknowledge the complexity of non-belief.

The later chapters offer a constructive response to the problem. Much of the argument centres on a tension within *Lumen Gentium* 16 (LG) which maintains that those without faith and ignorant of God through no fault of their own *can* attain salvation, while LG 14 announces that nobody can be saved without faith, baptism