

At one level the tome is broader in scope than you might expect from companion to political theology: it does not confine itself to liberation, feminist, black or third world theologies. Indeed, it places them in special pigeon-holes as though they are rather marginal, and as though marginality were not the normal place from which to start any theology. Rather, it shows that main-stream Christian theology is inherently political, and for this reason I think it's a pity there was not some kind of discussion of the differences between Rahner and von Balthasar, which have huge political as well as ecclesiological implications.

We could all make our particular criticisms of what was put in and what left out. As a not very technologically competent being I was nonetheless surprised that there was not more reference to the reality of information and other technologies which have so massively changed our political and economic life, sometimes in a very violent direction, but also in the way we understand our world. Neither nuclear weapons nor the world wide web receive a mention. I wonder too whether a 21<sup>st</sup>-century bibliography can really confine itself to books, even if in the process of change it needs to change its name. Others might have other particular gripes.

But I would like rather to question the whole perspective of an undoubtedly expert piece of work. While I was reading this volume, I also read Anne Primavesi's *Gaia's Gift*, which continues her work in *Sacred Gaia* of questioning the homocentric presupposition of our philosophy, our politics and our theology. Reviewers of *Sacred Gaia* were often dismissive of a work which simply did not fit into their paradigms, but the whole point is that the paradigms by which we construct our world view are questionable in the extreme, and proving to be hugely destructive of our world. A politics and a theology which simply ask how human beings should see their relationship to each other, and not to the earth and its atmosphere, are increasingly irrelevant. Unless we take seriously our covenant with the earth and its atmosphere (prescinding for the moment from questions of the wider cosmos), and learn from it a new hermeneutic, a humbler theology, and a wiser politics, then the titanic efforts of the editors and contributors in this meaty tome might seem like a last rearrangement of the epistemological deck-chairs before we all drown.

COLIN CARR OP

**HOLY SCRIPTURE. A DOGMATIC SKETCH** by John Webster, [Current Issues in Theology], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, Pp. viii + 144, £35.00 hbk.

This book admirably meets the requirements of the series in which it appears, which aims to offer focused studies for upper-undergraduates

and postgraduates penned by authors who question existing paradigms. In this case John Webster questions understanding Scripture as an instance of a general category of texts understood in terms of a generalised theory of textuality and reading, where Scripture's meaning is constituted by the human community that authorises those texts. This Webster does from a Barthian perspective, drawing on Calvin and classical Protestant divinity, as well as Bonhoeffer and Barth himself. He aims to sketch out a truly dogmatic account of what Holy Scripture is that can fulfil a modest function ancillary to the real business of exegesis, rooting this account in the free self-presentation of the Triune God rather than any general hermeneutical theory.

From a concept of revelation drawn out of the doctrine of God, Webster moves to attempt to explain what makes Scripture *holy*. This is God's sanctification of the creaturely processes of writing in the service of revelation. Webster refuses to bifurcate the transcendent God and creaturely texts so as to lead to a false dualism of a supernaturalism removed from historical contingency versus a naturalistic criticism that fails to understand the purpose of Scripture and instead attempts to reconstruct the matrices from which it emerged. Rather there is no competition between the transcendent and historical, but God annexes creaturely realities so that they serve his purposes precisely *as* creatures. 'Inspiration' is sanctification applied to the specific work of the Spirit with regard to texts, and Webster expounds inspiration in such a way that God's activity is neither objectified into a worldly entity nor spiritualised into the experiences of authors and readers. Inspiration is primarily a being moved by God to write, where the Spirit's moving is directly and not inversely proportional to human authorship.

Webster thus moves not from Church to Scripture, but from Revelation to Scripture to Church, the latter being formed not by religious common interest but as a creature of the Word, a hearing Church destabilised as well as made cohesive by the otherness of Scripture. The Church does not confer authority on Scripture, and canonisation is an extension of Christ's communicative presence through the Spirit such that the Church 'approves' Scripture in the sense of receiving and acknowledging rather than authorising. The human acts of canonisation refer back beyond themselves to divine revelation and sanctification. Though he is drawing largely on Calvin, Webster's thesis put me in mind of Vatican I's teaching that the Scriptures are to be held canonical not because they have been approved by the Church's authority, but because they are authored by God and have been handed down to the Church.

Unfortunately, Webster betrays no sense of Tradition as destabilising and as holy, a work of the Spirit who sanctifies creaturely participation in the transmission of the Word. How those Webster

opposes treat Scripture seems to be how he himself treats Tradition, and one fears that, in bifurcating the divine and the human in regard to Tradition, Webster will espouse the human side of a false dualism. There is no rooting of Tradition in the doctrines of God and his self-revelation and in pneumatology. At best 'tradition' could be conceived as a passive hearing of the Word on the part of the Church, and Webster is concerned, among other things, not to reduce Holy Scripture to a human tradition.

All this may have something to do with the fact that Webster chooses to focus more on the reading of Scripture than on proclamation, on the passive reception of its teachings rather than on their active transmission. There is a fine chapter on reading, which stresses attentiveness to the Word and the mortification as well as vivification of the reader, clarity being not a quality of the text before use but a result of the Spirit's sanctifying of the reader, but there is no chapter on preaching. The chapter on theology's service of the Word, which functions as an example of attentive reading expressed in modest rhetoric, places theology firmly in the Church, more nearly allied to catechesis (and proclamation) than to secular disciplines. Theology is starkly left at odds with the contemporary university, its methods, genres, and subdivisions. Webster does not attempt a full explanation of how such a biblical-ecclesial theology should attempt its work in the academy in relation to other disciplines, as he likewise attempts no full explanation of how Scripture is related to Tradition and preaching, but it is part of the strength of what he does treat that it leaves one with questions and eager to search for answers.

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**LA PIRA TRA STORIA E PROFEZIA: CON TOMMASO MAESTRO**  
by Vittorio Possenti, *Marietti*, Genova-Milano, 2004, Pp.182,  
€15.00 pbk.

**GIORGIO LA PIRA: BEATISSIMO PADRE, LETTERE A PIO XII**  
edited by Andrea Riccardi and Isabella Piersanti, *Mondadori*,  
Milano, 2004, Pp. 347, €18.00 hbk.

The centenary of the birth of Giorgio La Pira (1904–1977) has seen an impressive set of commemorative events including the issue of an Italian postage stamp. Who was he? University law professor, a founding father of the Italian Republic, internationally renowned and long-serving mayor of Florence, politician, writer, someone capable of prophetic and daring actions and thoughts, and possibly a saint (his cause of canonisation opened in 1986). The two books under