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Book Review: Tracey Rowland, Catholic Theology (UK: T and T Clark International, 2017), pp 256, Paperback AUD \$37.00.

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Book Review

Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (UK: T and T Clark International, 2017), pp 256, Paperback AUD \$37.00.

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Tracey Rowland, an Australian theologian, is a current member of the International Theological Commission (ITC). Her latest book aims to a) outline the basic principles in any approach to Catholic theology (Ch. 1) and b) explain four dominant approaches (or 'schools') in 'doing' Catholic theology today and their respective historical backgrounds (Chapters 2-5). Her goal is to offer guideposts for seminarians (and the interested reader) to make sense of theological developments since Vatican 2. She hopes her 'broad-brush exposition' will suffice for the student or reader to fill in 'details or nuances' (2).

The author begins with a summary of the 'perennially' important issues in Fundamental Theology as outlined in ITC documents: Christ and Trinity; Nature and Grace; Faith and Reason; Scripture and Tradition; Faith and Culture; Truth (meaning) and Praxis (*Logos/Ethos*) etc. Different understandings of these 'binaries' underpin the varied theological projects explored in remaining chapters.

Ch. 2 deals with Thomism and its many 'appropriations' and 'varieties' throughout history. 'Shorthand' descriptions capture the trajectory from Thomas Aquinas (13th century) to the present day: Thomism as 'classical', baroque (17th and 18th century), Leonine and neo-Thomism (post Leo XIII to early 1960s), Transcendental and Existential Thomism engaging the modern subject and personal consciousness; local expressions of Thomism (e.g., in Toulouse, Fribourg, United States).

Ch. 3 examines the more synthetic and Patristics- grounded approach of the founders of the journal *Communio* (Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac SJ and Joseph Ratzinger). They searched for a more existential and personalist approach to theology. Rowland uses 'Communio' as an umbrella term for those associated with the 'hermeneutic of reform' in interpreting the documents of Vatican 2.

Conversely, Karl Rahner SJ and Edward Schillebeeckx OP initiated the journal *Concilium*, discussed in Ch 4. It was a forum for those with a different interpretation from the *Communio* 'group not only of Vatican 2 but, as Rowland suggests, from magisterial teaching of Popes Paul 6, John Paul 2 and Benedict XVI. The *Concilium* stream highlighted the relationship between faith and history, between continuity and change in the light of faith's deepening understanding of the gift of revelation embodied in Jesus Christ. *Concilium*, Rowland observes, was shorthand for the 'spirit of the Council' – a general openness to new ideas of every kind – and for what Ratzinger was to label a 'hermeneutic of rupture' (93).

With the papacy of Francis 1, Rowland suggests there is a greater focus on Latin American issues and a renewed interest in Liberation Theology. This underpins the final chapter which offers an overview of the theological methodology of this movement's thinkers. The chapter also situates Pope Francis, first, in relation to the school of Liberation Theology and, second, to other approaches already discussed by the author. This is a valuable chapter in itself but also as a means of bringing together the various threads of the book. Towards the end, the author deals with debates over *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) and, specifically, its 'contentious' chapter 8. Ironically, this chapter of AL, rather than an expression of Liberation Theology, presents as a blend of Ignatian discernment and Thomas Aquinas's moral theology. We have come full circle.

The book has a helpful index of topics and names plus four appendices: lists of all Doctors of the Church, of all encyclicals since the 19th century, of the documents of Vatican 2, and of definitions of the various Christological heresies within debate of the early Church Councils.

Some observations to 'fill in details or nuances.' First, Rowland's discussion of Thomism and social ethics (in relation to Liberal social and economic theory and Maritain's 'huge' contribution, particularly, on human rights, 80) could be complemented by noting specific Dominican (and other) contributions to social ethics in the twentieth century. Prior to the first World War, the Dominican Master-General, Andreas Frürwirth, openly supported social justice initiatives and scholarship in the Order. From the nineteen thirties, Dominicans taught Church social doctrine at Universities of Louvain, Lille and Fribourg. In 1941, inspired by Louis Joseph Lebret OP, the research centre on social and economic issues and its journal, *Économie et Humanisme*, commenced in France. Finally, the Faculty of Social Sciences was established at the Angelicum University in Rome in 1952. Second, scholarship from the southern hemisphere is relevant here, such as that of Marist author John Thornhill (the first Australian on the International Theological Commission). In 1967 he published a study of society and community from an Aristotelian/Thomistic perspective, namely, *The Person and the Group*.

Second, while Rowland rightly notes the limits of Lonergan's method in relation to the distinctiveness of Christian faith and the unique role of Jesus Christ (and the Church). Studies by Lonergan scholars in the intervening thirty years since his death (1984) have gone some distance in addressing these issues. Robert Doran and Neil Ormerod (both mentioned by Rowland), in their efforts to develop a Trinitarian theology of mission to ground Christology and Ecclesiology, are representative of advances amongst theologians of the Lonergan 'school'.

Third, the renewed interest in Liberation theology occasioned by the pontificate of Francis 1 is one aspect of a shift in the centre of gravity in the theological world in relation to the continental European context of the *Communio/Concilium* pairing that guides Rowland's

investigation. Theology in the Latin (and North) American context is accompanied by theological ‘traditions’ emerging in the ‘south’ – Africa, Asia and Oceania, including significant contributions from Australian scholars (including Rowland).

In conclusion, this book is a testimony to the author’s range and depth of scholarship. Her control of a vast amount of material is, overall, sure-footed and even-handed, particularly in the extensive treatment of Thomism. While the book is not primarily a forum to expound her own theological position, its presence is inevitable and consistent with her previous publications. Her clarity of thought combined with her lucid and engaging style go a long way to making this rich and exacting text accessible to the theological ‘beginner’.

We are indebted to Tracey Rowland for this significant theological achievement and valuable teaching resource.

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