

Scripture and the tradition. But that is a strength, not just a weakness of the work. Pentecostal theology is alive and well and with scholarship such as this, one can be sure that Pentecostal theology has much yet to offer the wider church in many areas, not just in pneumatology. This is an important contribution to contemporary theology and I can think of no better start than this to the McMaster Theological Studies Series.

Myk Habets

Francesca Aran Murphy. *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (356 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-921928-5]

This work is a challenging critique of narrative theologies, including the works of George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, and Herbert McCabe. Murphy argues that the use of the concept of story or narrative in theology is circular and self-referential, and that the widespread notion that the role of the theologian is to 'tell God's story' has not helped theology to advance the reality of its doctrine. As the subtitle indicates – God is not a story. If God is a story, argues Murphy, then he is an idea, a character, and thus utterly dispensable. She believes that God is not a story, he is a reality. Murphy contends that the scriptural revelation on which Christian theology depends is not a story or a plot but a dramatic encounter between mysterious, free, and unpredictable persons. She offers her own alternative approach, making use of cinema and film theory, and engaging in particular in a dialogue with the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to highlight the weakness of narrative theologies and the superiority of a Christian form of realism.

Murphy (Reader in Systematic Theology, University of Aberdeen) specialises in the relation of aesthetics and the arts to theology. She uses drama, film and literature in her undergraduate teaching on philosophy of religion and contemporary theology and this explains the appeal of film over narrative in this work. Her academic writing has centred on theological aesthetics, especially von Balthasar and Etienne Gilson. Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy which examines the idea and function of beauty. Unfortunately, this

work is not aesthetically pleasing! It is not easy to read, nor is it easy to comprehend what it is Murphy is arguing. This is not a model of aesthetic theology.

One of the major weaknesses of this work is the complicated set of terminology Murphy invents and the ambiguous way she uses it. For example we read about 'Story Barthians' (Hans Frei), 'Grammatical Thomists' (George Lindbeck), 'Story Thomists' (Robert Jenson), 'Cinematic Modalists' (Jenson again), 'postliberals,' 'narrative theologians,' 'foundationalist fideists,' and a host of other such titles. And yet, these terms are not clearly defined, and there seems to be considerable overlap in her application of these titles to certain opponents such as Robert Jenson (who may qualify as all of these!).

My own sense is that Murphy is right in her major contention – that certain forms of narrative theology suffer from speaking of God as an idea rather than relating to him as a personal being. I also sense that her critique of so-called 'Story Barthianism' and 'Grammatical Thomism' is correct and that a form of biblical realism is the antidote. However, the argument was obfuscated by jargon to such an extent that it was lost from sight. This is a shame as a critique along the lines argued here is required, but this work has not yet filled the gap.

Myk Habets

J. Todd Billings. *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (vii + 218 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-921187-6]

Exponents of Radical Orthodoxy argue that genuine human participation with God in salvation involves a reciprocal relationship in which a gift of grace is both received as a gift but also returned to God through human action. It is returned, as it were, with value added. In justifying such a theology of Gift these writers have taken on Protestant theology at major points in order to overturn long-held views of salvation. In particular the theology of John Calvin has come in for special scrutiny. Exponents of Radical Orthodoxy contend that Calvin establishes such a radical disparity between God and humanity that humanity merely remains passive throughout the process of