

Frederiek Depoortere. *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard and Slavoj Žižek*. London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008 (160 pp.) [978-0-567-03331-4]

Frederiek Depoortere is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Faculty of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. He is also a member of the research group 'Theology in a Postmodern Context'. To this effect most of his published work has been concerned with either evaluating and/or theologically engaging with the thought of post-modern figures such as Alain Badiou, René Girard, Merold Westphal, Slavoj Žižek, and Richard Kearney. He is quickly establishing himself as a thinker who can quite suitably situate himself amongst the currents of both continental philosophy and theology.

In this book Depoortere tasks himself with aggregating into three succinct chapters the role Christianity plays throughout the works of the Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek. There are two concerns that Depoortere uses to structure his discussion of these philosophers: 1) a concern for the relation made by the authors between transcendence and the incarnation of Jesus as Christ, and 2) the way in which Christianity is unique.

The book itself is broken up into five chapters; an introduction, one for each author respectively and then a final conclusion. His introduction provides an overview of what he intends to cover in his analysis, and why he is undertaking the task. The next three chapters are structured similarly; each opens with a brief biographical account of the authors and the works they have completed. This is followed by an analysis of the themes of their works that specifically engage with Christianity vis-à-vis the two concerns outlined above. The chapters end with an evaluation and critique made by Depoortere. The biographical accounts as well as the language used in these chapters make the book accessible to a wide range of readers – from students to scholars.

The book's evaluation begins with Gianni Vattimo who interprets the history of metaphysics and Christianity as a process of becoming non-violent – or weakening – through kenosis; the beginning of which is heralded by the ending of transcendence in the incarnation of Jesus. Transcendence, which also includes metaphysics, is disavowed in Vattimo as a way of thinking that perpetuates violence. Vattimo takes the Jesus' command to love as a formal command akin to Kant's categorical imperative and puts it to use as a process under which violence is diminished. Springing

from this Vattimo then suggests that Christianity has little unique to it except as a tradition that locates its roots in the incarnation of Jesus. God may be encountered in other religions and Vattimo inevitably argues for a move away from religious institutes – viewed by Vattimo as sources of violence – and towards the secularization of culture founded on love. Thus, there is very little, if nothing at all, unique to Christianity, and transcendence finds its demise through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In the next chapter Depoortere moves to survey René Girard. The pervasiveness of Girard's thought is clearly brought to the fore as he is clearly shown to not only think creatively, but to also navigate his thought and its significance across the three fields of the social and natural sciences, and philosophy. Girard develops a theory of culture based on the principles of imitation, memetics, and the scapegoat mechanism. The principles of which account for the evolution, interaction, and, perhaps more importantly for Girard, a theory of violence inherent of culture – a result of the three principles above. It is from this position that Girard interprets the bible and establishes the uniqueness of Christianity in the incarnation of Jesus. The life and death of whom exhibits a negation to the violence inherent of culture.

Transcendence in Girard is not abolished as it is in Vattimo. Rather, it undergoes transformation according to the life of Jesus. Love becomes the new form of transcendence and views the incarnation as the revealing of a God who stands against violence, not just in culture but also in the way philosophy and theology postulate the metaphysics of transcendence. Thus, the incarnation becomes the meeting point in the thought of Girard that brings together a new transcendence founded in love as well as prescribing the uniqueness of Christianity as a religion that stands in negation to the violence of culture generated through imitation, memetics, and scapegoating.

The final philosopher is Slavoj Žižek; a Slovenian philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst. Christianity in the thought of Žižek is inextricably bound up with these elements of his thought as he subjects the incarnation of Christ to Hegelianism, whereby the transcendence of God ends in the revealing of Christ in the incarnation, who then removes himself as mediator by birthing again as the Holy Spirit. In effect, this means there is no Trinity but only the Spirit. The necessity of Christianity and its uniqueness, for Žižek, are both grounded in its ability to satisfy the concerns of his

use of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Žižek, whilst using Hegel and Lacan also draws primarily from the ideals of German Idealism and political theory as this is how Christianity is seen to fit in Žižek's thought. This also account for why there is only the Spirit. Transcendence also comes to an end in Žižek, and the uniqueness of Christianity is its ability to satisfy the psychoanalytic requirements of his spin on the thought of Jacques Lacan. The last chapter is the conclusion, and acts as a summary of all three authors.

Depoortere highlights the connections and influences made between the three philosophers. Girard is clearly made to be the key influence in all three. In regards to the two questions Depoortere is asking at the beginning of this work he answers by ultimately pointing towards Girard as the most promising route. Firstly, because unlike Vattimo and Žižek, didn't seek to entirely eradicate transcendence and provided necessary space for faith. And secondly, his work is congruent with recent developments in science. In other related, and more general, critiques of these authors Depoortere points out the charge of supercessionism present in the works. The way religious pluralism surfaces in the authors is also evaluated due to its position as an important agenda in theology at present.

This book does not necessarily offer anything new. There is no new argument being made by bringing these authors together, but rather, this is a clear, accessible aggregation of the role Christianity plays in the thought of three prominent philosophers. Its readability subsists in its easy to follow structure and jargon free language. Thus, it might be said the value comes through for those unfamiliar with these works, or interested in how Christianity is being used in academia. Those already familiar with these three authors might not find it as valuable.

Jimmy Harvey