

BOOK REVIEWS

General

Scripture in the Church. The Synod on the Word of God.

James Chukwuma Okoye, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011. Pp. 200. Pbk.

Fr James Chukwuma Okoye is well qualified to speak about the Synod on the Word of God. He was a *peritus* at the 1994 Synod for Africa, and he is Professor of Old Testament at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.

Synods of Bishops were the fruit of the Second Vatican Council. The question of how to involve the bishops of the world in the leadership of the universal church was addressed by Pope Paul VI before the end of the Council by instituting Synods. Okoye lists the twelve ordinary general synods which have taken place since the first was held in 1967. In addition there have been two extraordinary synods and special assemblies for different regions of the church, such as the Synod for Africa which Okoye attended in 1994.

Okoye examines in detail the preparatory documents of the Synod, known as the *Lineamenta* (or guidelines) and the *Instrumentum Laboris* (or plan of work). He thus traces how different themes, which were present in the Council document *Dei Verbum*, occur again in these preparatory texts. For a start, then, Okoye provides a useful review of *Dei Verbum* fifty years after the Council.

Okoye also gives some idea of the interventions of the two hundred and fifty bishops who attended the Synod in October 2008. This he does by reporting on major speeches given by prelates from the five continents. *Dei Verbum* has certainly achieved much in the effort to found the life and mission of the church more and more on the word of God. At the same time there is everywhere the danger of a fundamentalist approach to the Bible. Okoye comments further: ‘Despite advances since Vatican II, a spirituality fully rooted in the word of God still needs to emerge among Catholics’ (p. 37).

Major topics appear in the interventions at the Synod, and Okoye selects five issues which he examines in five subsequent chapters: the inspiration and truth of Scripture, interpreting the word of God, recent Catholic

exegesis, *lectio divina*, and the ‘dark sayings’ of Scripture and fundamentalism. Each of these chapters is an in-depth examination of the topic, which is followed by questions for discussion. There are references to the Council document, to the preparatory documents of the Synod and to *Verbum Domini* itself. Okoye thus presents something like a textbook on various hermeneutical issues. Attacks on modern exegetical method from within the Church are fully reported.

In chapters 10-12 Okoye examines *Verbum Domini* itself. The presentation of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation contains frequent reference back to what was said earlier in the book. Okoye's methodology has traced the journey of different ideas at various stages of the Synod process, but his method may well disappoint those looking for a straightforward critique of *Verbum Domini*.

Rather curiously, in his concluding chapter, Okoye produces two charts spanning several pages. In the final six pages he usefully presents the ‘propositions’, the fifty-five proposals which the Synod Fathers made, and shows where these proposals appear in the Synod document. In an earlier five page chart Okoye offers what he calls ‘the determinations’, his own selection of points taken from the document through which ‘His Holiness has seen fit to promote an ever greater love of the word of God’ (p. 167). Okoye, who describes the tone of the apostolic exhortation as ‘very collegial’ (p. 128), is nevertheless quite keen to differentiate what Pope Benedict proposes from what the Synod Bishops proposed.

Adrian Graffy

Diocese of Brentwood

Angels and Demons: A Christian Primer of the Spiritual World.

Michael Patella, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 186. Pbk.

Exploiting the title of Dan Brown’s sensationalist novel, Michael Patella’s book offers a wide-ranging consideration of the spiritual world, exploring the scripture roots of the Christian, especially Catholic, teaching about the angelic and demonic, and the developing tradition which has grown from those roots. The immediate catalyst for writing was the wide range of queries from his students about the spiritual realm, especially angels, Satan and the occult. Thus this is not straightforwardly a scriptural study, but falls within the genre of ‘primer’.

The book falls into three parts. The first offers a broad exegetical study of relevant biblical texts from both Testaments (subdivided into the Pentateuch and Historical Books, the Wisdom literature, Isaiah, and the New Testament). In this section, Patella explores the seedbed provided within Scripture for Christian teaching about angels and demons, but reveals its limited character. The raw scriptural materials needed a long period of development, shaped not least by non-canonical traditions, in order to result in a coherent Judaeo-Christian vision. Thus there is a salutary warning against too readily locating the devil/Satan in Genesis 3, and a convincing appeal is made to those biblical traditions criticizing the worship of false gods as the appropriate context for understanding later teaching about the demonic. The late and deuterocanonical Tobit (c 200 BC) is singled out as an important development for naming both the archangel Raphael and the demon Asmodeus. Similarly, the Wisdom of Solomon is important for introducing the motif of the last judgement. Surprisingly given the subject matter of Patella's book, the discussion of the figure of the Satan in the book of Job is very brief.

One of Patella's important insights is that the angelic is much more prominent in the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch and Historical Books, than the demonic. The latter are much more evident in the New Testament, where a crucial dimension of Jesus' proclamation of God's Kingdom is the overcoming of evil spirits. But the New Testament evidence is set within the wider teaching about Christ's definitive victory over sin and evil, which further underscores the Judaeo-Christian rejection of a cosmic dualism which made some inroads into the biblical tradition via Zoroastrianism. This is reflected in Paul's teaching about the powers, and Revelation's compelling vision of the victorious Lamb.

Of his wide-ranging discussion of the New Testament evidence, a couple of elements are especially noteworthy. First, Patella offers a first-rate critique of the concept of 'the rapture', particularly pervasive in an American Christian context. He should that this is a misguided interpretation of 1 Thess. 4, and contrary to faith in its extreme individualism and eschewing of Christian suffering. Second, he attempts a categorization of the Apocalypse's teaching about angels. Given that the angelic are especially to the fore in the Apocalypse, his discussion is particularly appropriate. Arguably, however, his categorization of courtly, revelatory, guardian and military is too rigid, not allowing for specific angels (including the seven 'angels of the Presence') performing more than one role.

A more detailed discussion of angels is offered in Part 2. Here Patella acknowledges the extent to which Jewish and Christian angelology is dependent upon extra-canonical writings. He singles out Pseudo-Dionysius' influential *Celestial Hierarchy* for the standard division into three angelic tiers, each containing three orders. It is the lowest tier (principalities, archangels and angels) which is most frequently appealed to in Christian discourse. Patella plausibly links this to Christianity's incarnational and sacramental character. These lower orders of angels manifest in a particular way God's love for and engagement with the terrestrial world. Further chapters in this part of the book explore the liturgical role of the angels, and eschatological themes including the resurrection of the body and *theosis*, the Last Judgement, and the doctrine of Purgatory.

The final part considers the diabolical world. It highlights the paucity of Old Testament evidence for Satan, the Devil, and Lucifer, and the strong influence of pseudepigraphical writings in forming the Christian imagination. For the tradition of the fall of the angels, loosely related to Gen. 6:1-5, Patella points to the important influence of the Hexamera, particularly mediated to the English-speaking world through Milton's *Paradise Lost*. A surprising omission in his discussion of this topic is 1 Enoch's *Book of the Watchers*. Where he succeeds in his avoidance of sensationalism, and his theologically mature concern for what the sources of evil are *not*. Similarly, he provides a nuanced treatment of the struggle with demons by the desert fathers and mothers which focuses on 'the demon within', whilst a wider exploration of demonic possession recognizes such as a rare diagnosis when alternative medical, psychological, and parapsychological explanations have been ruled out.

The questions of Patella's students seem particularly in evidence in the last few chapters, which deal with topics as wide-ranging as exorcisms, Neo-paganism, Wicca and the celebration of Halloween. His concern to address such questions means that some sections are more loosely connected to the overall theme. Nonetheless, this is a very useful contribution, nuanced, critically aware and theologically perceptive: in short, much more satisfying than the sensationalist alternatives of the Dan Brown variety.

Ian Boxall

St Stephen's House, University of Oxford

New Testament

The Christ Journey.

Wendy Beckett and Greg Tricker, London: St Pauls Publishing, 2011. Pp. 143. Hbk.

In this beautifully illustrated book, Sr Wendy Beckett offers an engaging commentary on the work of contemporary British artist Greg Tricker. The vast majority of the art discussed in this book relates to New Testament narratives and characters. Yet despite the title, Tricker's pictures are not restricted to the Gospels, but to the ongoing life of Jesus in his first disciples (Paul, John of Patmos, Mary Magdalen and Joseph of Arimathea), and in his saints of more recent centuries (Francis, Clare and Bernadette, as well as Anne Frank 'who did not know the name of Christ but who followed His journey by virtue of her own courage and purity', p. 134). In her commentary, Wendy Beckett identifies this as a consequence of Tricker's 'profound conviction that the Christ Journey is for each of us, our own journey.'

The journey begins with the child Jesus, standing in Joseph's carpenter's shop, preparing to release three doves. In the background, a boat waits on a calm sea as if ready to set sail. It is the appropriate place to begin the journey, although the reader is immediately taken back to an earlier event, as the second image depicts the flight into Egypt. The turbulent painting style of this picture, in sharp contrast to the first, reflects the turbulence in the lives of Mary and Joseph, while the divine child can only be detected by the golden light surrounding him. A mystical interpretation of the inner meaning of the Nativity is followed by the return from Egypt, where the child is now centre stage, journeying into a future which will be dominated by the shadow of the cross.

For the remainder of the story Tricker is necessarily selective. He has a particular preference for Johannine encounters such as the Samaritan woman, the healing at the Pool of Bethesda, and the Washing of the Feet, and for the Johannine 'I am' sayings. Given that these sayings of Jesus are normally commented on verbally, it is both striking and illuminating to encounter visual interpretations. For Sr Wendy, the most important subject of 'I am the Good Shepherd' is not the youthful figure in the image, but rather the viewer who gazes at the eternal shepherd as one of the lost sheep. Taking us beyond the New Testament, the coherence of the ongoing journey of Christ is evoked by the recurring motif of the dove which first appeared in Tricker's image of the Holy Child.

The variety of styles and range of media in Tricker's work is immense, enabling him to evoke different moods and elicit different responses. Sr Wendy's text is the perfect complement to the images, teasing out possibilities which others might easily have missed. This is an accessible book aimed at a wider readership which could usefully be recommended as a resource for meditation, even for a visual form of *Lectio Divina*.

Ian Boxall

St Stephen's House, University of Oxford