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Geldhof, Joris: Liturgical Theology as a Research Program. – Leiden 2020. 128 S. (Brill Research Perspectives, VI), kt. € 70,00 ISBN: 978-90-04-42679-5

Joris Geldhof wants to take us on a walk around the perimeter of liturgical theology and get a sense of its scope and range. He does so out of the conviction that liturgical theology should be considered a full-fledged research program, and that liturgical theologians contribute to theology as a whole when they are called to seriously engage in the study of the meaning of Christian worship. Think of him as making a huge syllabus for a doctoral seminar in liturgical theology, and while we each may have individual preferences favoring certain class days in the semester, we all should be aware of what our colleagues are discussing. This bird's-eye view could only be accomplished by someone who has stayed alert to the whole while engaged in discussions of particulars – someone who sees the genus while discussing the species. This is G.'s knack, and the result is this little volume that will be helpful to researchers and professors who will benefit from the outline, and to graduate students who receive a survey of the landscape they are entering. The latter audience would do well to consider the scholars and books mentioned in the footnotes and annotated bibliography as an exam reading list. I came away with another dozen books to add to my own reading list.

G. centers the book around five questions: (i) What is the place of liturgical theology? (ii) Which past evolutions and current tendencies are there in the field? (iii) Which contents must liturgical theologians focus on? (iv) How liturgical theologians can engage in research? and (v) How can liturgical theology appropriately respond to what happens in Church and society? These questions are supposed to be detected, he says, in the titles he gives to his chapters: "Positions, Developments, Visions, Operations, Challenges." A brief summary is in order.

"Positions" identifies tensions that can be identified as disciplinary, denominational and methodological. The phenomenon of forgetting or neglecting liturgy within theology (what he calls "Liturgievergessenheit" means that liturgical studies in the past has not come very close to theology's classical center, and G. reviews some ways that scholars have attempted to render liturgical theology a place in theology. "Developments" wonders what factors explain the awakened awareness of liturgy's theological meaning and significance. G. answers this not by a historical exercise, but a genealogical one that attends to the Liturgical Movement, and today expands to include biblical, spiritual, ritual, epistemological, anthropological, and systematic accents. "Visions" attempts the difficult task of sketching the contents with which liturgical theology must deal. Here G. comes closest to showing his cards, already revealed in his earlier book on Mystery. Liturgical theology looks for traces of the mysterious reality in God's salvific engagement with people through worship, and doing so could possibly shift the ordering of theological subdisciplines. "Operations" is concerned with how

liturgical theologians can research. An odd question, since they are already doing so, yet it must be asked when the subject being researched is a divine-human interaction. Can one access liturgy? A multiplicity of methods are reviewed (history, phenomenology, music, feasts, buildings, norms and laws). “Challenges” is a short, final chapter that looks upon new horizons identified as three thematic clusters: “faculties” asks an epistemological question, “fluidity” asks an ecclesio-sociological question, and “fragmentation” asks what deep connections still remain after process of disintegration.

G. treats his subjects fairly – I mean now the authors and scholars who are discussed. I can affirm this as one of them, dealt with in the opening chapter. Here “fairly” is meant in its full range of meaning: justly, equitably, clearly, legitimately, and courteously. After explaining the thesis of an outlook, he also treats criticisms that have been made against it. He brings multiple conversation partners to the same page. The creative quality of this book is to make a taxonomy that accounts for different approaches without pitting one against the other. We do get a sense of G.’s own positions by the end of the book, but they do not corrupt his treatment of research areas because the mark of a good scholar is trying to understand what is at stake. For G., what is fundamentally at stake is a conviction that liturgy deserves attention from the academy. “The task of theology, understood as a research program, is precisely to look for the traces of God’s proximity and transformational capacity in the past, present and future of humanity” and “it is my conviction that liturgical theology in particular is most apt for this task” (7).

Throughout his career and throughout this volume G. has had one eye upon the subfields, subdisciplines, and methodologies in liturgical theology, and his other eye trained on a justification for the place liturgical studies should have in the larger field of theology. He offers both eyes to the reader to see with. We are invited to look microcosmically within the field’s struggle with aporias, methodologies, relationships and contents, but at the same time we are invited to look macrocosmically at the theological world that liturgical theology occupies, and to which liturgical theology can contribute. To do the former without the latter might satisfy liturgical hobbyists, but G. believes liturgical theology should make a serious contribution to the theological enterprise. This volume defends liturgical theology as a research program because it tries to make sense of Christian faith practices by its clear and clever focus with respect to its subject matter. So at the end he can lay this challenge before us: “Who knows will liturgical theology soon be able to make a prevailing *Liturgievergessenheit* undone and create ample opportunities for reflection and research beyond many deadlocks in sacramental, ecumenical, systematic, political and practical theologies. I dearly hope so” (115). So do we.

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