

Book Title: Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI
Author: Scott W. Hann
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Reviewer: Paul Irikefe

Scott Hann's *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* sets forth the hermeneutical principles, biblical framework, and doctrinal positions of Pope Benedict XVI. It is a kind of 'explanatory theology' as he calls it, which seeks 'to offer an appreciation of how and why Benedict XVI engages in theology and biblical interpretation' (p.15). As a result, it exhibits in a theological and coherent manner the main outlines of his biblical theology. The book, like his other works such as *Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* or *Reason to Believe: How to Understand, Explain, and Defend the Catholic Faith*, is a classic in apologetics.

The nine chapters of the book elaborate corollaries to this essential concern of Scott Hann. Chapter One: Ignorance of Scripture is Ignorance of Christ – The Theological Project of Joseph Ratzinger, begins from the profound premise that for the Roman Pontiff, how we read and interpret the Bible is decisive for what we believe about Christ, the Church, the sacrament, and the liturgy. This is the unmistakable conclusion when the historical-critical method is examined very closely especially in its espousal of the sole scientific way of reading the sacred Scripture.

Chapter Two: The Critique of Criticism: Beginning the Search for a New Theological Synthesis continues chapter one's discourse by first admitting that for the Roman pontiff, the historical-critical method is an indispensable tool for the task of theology because of the distinctively historical structure of Christian revelation. But the method is gravely limited. It is hampered by its neo-evolutionary assumption that "the more theologically considered and sophisticated a text is, the more recent it is, and the simpler something is, the easier it is to reckon it original" (p.28), by its hermeneutic of suspicion that endeavours to study the biblical texts as a scientist would dissect a lab specimen, and lastly by its rigid and exaggerated separation between faith and reason that began decisively with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Taken together, these limitations mean that the method cannot explain very much as it should because it refuses the entrance of the divine into human history. In a word, it makes it impossible for us to have something for which

we can live and die for.

Chapter Three: The Hermeneutic of Faith – Critical and Historical Foundations for a Biblical Theology, seeks to articulate how the Roman Pontiff's biblical theology provides that missing link. Seen from this standpoint, the project of hermeneutic of faith is to lead men and women to the God who speaks in the Bible. Benedict XVI, as Scott Hann says, does not propose a theological system, let alone a philosophy of interpretation. His hermeneutic of faith employs the critical tools of modern exegetical science along with ancient interpretative methods and perspectives drawn from the church's dogmatic, liturgical and homiletic tradition.

Chapter Four: The Spiritual Science of Theology – Its Mission and Method in the Life of the Church is devoted to Ratzinger's definition and description of the nature of theology. By its very nature theology, he affirms, is an ecclesial science drawn from the Word of God, an extension of the missionary mandate of the church, and therefore cannot be a private affair. In fact, the normative theologians are the authors of Holy Scripture, and all theologians are called to follow their exemplary footsteps in making God the subject of their theology and not just the object.

Chapter Five: Reading God's Testament to Humankind – Biblical Realism, Typology, and the Inner Unity of Revelation, furthers the project by showing how biblical theology is based on the unity of the Old and New testaments, and Christ as the interpretive key of the Scriptures. At the heart of this analysis is the retrieval of the spiritual sense of the scripture discarded and discredited by the historical-critical method.

Chapter Six: The Theology of the Divine Economy – Covenant, Kingdom, and the History of Salvation, carries the project to a new theoretical height. Scott Hann tries to show how for Benedict XVI, the purpose of creation was the covenant, the love story of God and man, that finds its fulfillment in the Church as the new *qahal*. Hence Alfred Loisy was wrong when he said that "Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, what came was the church." (p125). His mistake lies in his failure to see that in the person of Jesus, the kingdom and the Church are one and the same thing.

Chapter Seven: The Embrace of Salvation – Mystagogy and the Transformation of Sacrifice expounds on the nature of the Church as subsisting as liturgy and in the liturgy. The liturgy is said to be the privileged place in which to hear the divine word, which makes present the Lord's saving acts, but also the context that provides the opportunity for Christians to raise their prayer in celebration of God's love. This leads irrevocably to the definition of liturgy as the celebration that brings about an embrace of salvation

between God and man. The summit of liturgy, however, is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross that shattered forever the notion of representational or substitutionary sacrifices. "In the cross," says Scott Hann, interpreting Ratzinger, "divine self-offering is made the pathway and the model for human worship of God." (p. 156).

Chapter Eight: The Cosmic Liturgy: The Eucharistic Kingdom and the World as Temple, exposes the climax of Ratzinger's biblical theology from the treatment of the liturgy of the new covenant that carries two essential typologies. The first is the piercing of the side of Jesus on the Cross as the sign for the Church's birth from the body of Christ, and the second is Christ's body as the new temple. The crucifixion is actually presented in the Scriptures as a cosmic liturgy, an offering of prayer and sacrifice that unites heaven and earth, and we enter into that cosmic liturgy by praying with Christ in the liturgy of the Church. And this is the goal of all New Testament liturgy and of all priestly ministry: to make the world as a whole a temple and a sacrificial offering for God with the overarching aim of bringing about the inclusion of the whole world into the Body of Christ, so that God may be all in all.

Chapter Nine: The Authority of Mystery – The Beauty and Necessity of the Theologian's Task, concludes the preceding chapters with an exhortative tone. The theologian and the exegete must read with passion and with the eye of a scholar, but above all, he must read with humility and love. According to Scott Hann, "Benedict has gone so far as to say that the widespread adoption of *lectio divina* would bring to the Church a new springtime." (p. 191). The above survey of the book makes one point crystal clear: this is arguably one of the most successful attempts to synthesize the thought of an intellectual of the magnitude of Ratzinger in recent times. If the task of theology today is to show the reasonableness of faith, then this is a must read for all Catholics and non-Catholics alike but especially for students and teachers of theology. The book is a personal journey through the broad horizon of Ratzinger's theology and thought.

A COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE 22ND NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY STUDENTS (NACATHS) AT BLESSED IWENE TANSI MAJOR SEMINARY, ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA. FROM 15TH TO 20TH MARCH, 2010.

THEME

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL: A CHALLENGE TO AFRICAN CHURCH.

TOPICS

1. Empowering the Christian faithful through skill acquisition and self reliance schemes
2. The role of the Nigerian Church in Promoting Justice and Equity in the Socio-Economic Order
3. Analysing the Niger Delta Crisis: What Can the Church do?
4. Educating the Christian Faithful on the Right Involvement in Nigerian Politics.

THESE CHAPTERS OF THE ASSOCIATION WERE DULY REPRESENTED

- § Ss. Peter and Paul Major Seminary Bodija, Ibadan
- § St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene
- § St. Augustine Major Seminary, Jos
- § Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu
- § Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri
- § National Missionary of St. Paul Gwagwalada, Abuja
- § Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna
- § Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu
- § Seminary of All Saints, Ekpoma
- § St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi

At the end of our deliberations, we made the following observations and recommendations:

1. The Church should raise her voice against public officials' profile of embezzlement, corruption and bribery that made the rich richer and the poor poorer.
2. Youth empowerment programs that would help them to be gainfully employed should be established, so as to contribute their quota to

- the creation of wealth.
3. The Church should establish structures that would bring about poverty alleviation and empowerment of the people. Examples are: Schools, Industries, Hospitals, etc.
 4. The Church and her leaders should be models to the society and to the people. Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no. 14 says, "Modern men listen more to witnesses than to teachers, and if then they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses". At times, they are often accused of identifying with the rich to the detriment of the poor, whom we should have a preferential option towards. They are found wanting in living out before the world, the demands of the evangelical counsels and that is why they lack the moral authority to confront the situation at hand.
 5. Since the economic order involves both the public and private sectors, the Church, like Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) should train people in thrift society creation and management in order that the poor people can know how to save and manage their capital.
 6. The church cannot delve into political action. It is her primary task to conscientise the Laity whose duty it is to sanitise and transform the socio-political and economic order from within. The people should be encouraged to take active part in the collective decision-making process of the society.
 7. Political formation of the lay faithful would enable the laity to know their rights in politics and as well, respect others. It would make for conscience formation of the lay faithful to engage in politics with the Christian ethics.
 8. The proper catechesis of the lay faithful on the religious impact on politics as intrinsically concomitant with our nature as images of God that would make for deeper religious practice of politics.
 9. The Christian would be enabled to know and practice integrity and values based on right formation of conscience.
 10. There is need to have better church managed-educational institutions which start from the scratch to compliment the church in the formation of her members.
 11. On the presupposition of the knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching, it is the duty of the Church to make such teachings more practical so that the people can put them into practice.
 12. The Church, through her local pastors, must insist on the discipline of the will of the faithful so that they can stand for the truth and not

- be influenced by negative advisers.
13. Family formation goes a long way in modelling the conscience of the individual politician.
 14. The church must be an example to the people by the way she handles the election of her Church members. She must stand for the truth for others to follow.
 15. There is the need for the church hierarchy to critically and carefully understand the crisis so that its prophetic condemnation of the situation of marginalisation will resound with more positive results.
 16. Charity organisations and social welfare structures or institutions should provide relief material to the marginalised poor and oppressed people of the region to the extent that they can handle.
 17. Since crisis is a direct challenge to the church in Nigeria, the spiritual dimension of praying for the betterment of the situation should be guarded with seriousness. Prayer works, and God can touch the hearts of the leaders and militants through prayer.
 18. Sensitisation and awareness campaigns or programs undertaken by the church should be intensified, such as Justice, Development and Peace Commission (J.D.P.C.), and Caritas.
 19. Church leaders should make frantic efforts to sit around dialogue table with the leaders of the nation so that programs already instituted can be implemented. There is need for the church to move from confrontation to dialogue.
 20. In the Niger Delta, the Rehabilitation of the militants should reach the grass root. Church leaders and pastors should begin the integral character formation and value orientation of young children whose hearts are still fragile and not as hardened or tough as their elderly ones in the region so that they begin their lives untainted by the prejudices that becloud militancy.
 21. Blood and martyrdom are potent forces for change. Church leaders should be vanguards of this change by their readiness to lay down their lives for the cause of justice, truth, freedom and right.
 22. The church should draw out a long-term program of action targeted at alleviating and rehabilitating all those affected by crisis in the Niger Delta, and to create the awareness that impatience and quick satisfaction impairs progress.
 23. Grass root rehabilitation of the militants should be entrusted to agents who have deep and practical feelings of the situation in the region, and not to those who have theoretical knowledge only.

24. The church should make efforts to penetrate the political kingdom and encourage lay participation in active political and economic life. Political structures should be re-modelled to accommodate transparent and accountable leaders, not arrogant and corrupt ones.

CONCLUSION

In the eyes of the church, Politics is not dirty, but players can be. The life of a Christian as a citizen is a very much part of his moral life. If he fails in his duties as a citizen, he has failed in his duties as a Christian. Therefore, if he is a good Christian, he must be a good citizen and as such, he must take part in the politics of the state. The church should mobilize the faithful to become more active by creating awareness; education, encouragement as well as making its members register as eligible voters, and join political parties with good manifestos.

Rev. Hilary Etomike
National President

Mr. Benjamin Ojukwu
National Secretary