

Balázs M. Mezei, *Radical Revelation: A Philosophical Approach*, London and Oxford, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017, xxvi + 384pp.

Following the book *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz*,¹ Balázs M. Mezei—Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Phenomenology and Philosophical Theology at Pázmány Péter Catholic University Budapest, Hungary—in this latest volume explores revelation as an all-pervasive phenomenon and a key to a theistic (and essentially Trinitarian) understanding of reality. The author characterises his innovative approach as “nonstandard radical philosophical theology.” It is nonstandard inasmuch as it treats traditionally theological themes from a fundamentally philosophical perspective, and so it is neither theological nor philosophical in the conventional sense: the theological dimension consists in the consideration of a central theological fact (revelation), while the philosophical dimension is realised as the consideration of this fact from the perspective of its natural and cognitive conditions. It is “radical” because it investigates the roots, the original and comprehensive fact of revelation.

Philosophy and theology are viewed here as mutually enriching parallel discourses with common features and a common subject matter: the revelation of God as Trinity. As Mezei argues, what such nonstandard philosophy may offer to theological discourse is the rethinking of the latter’s axiomatic presuppositions in a spirit of open questioning and in an all-encompassing way. To do this, one needs to look for a complex account which transcends the continental–analytical divide in philosophy and integrates insights and methods from both traditions into a new comprehensive approach where cultural history and the arts have an equal role to

¹ Balázs M. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz* (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

play as free human products and interpreters of divine revelation. In this vein, Mezei's encyclopaedic treatment addresses the issue of revelation from all the possible angles.

Chapter One situates the project both within the philosophical tradition and with regard to theology and traces the semantics, the historical and cognitive origins and development of the notion of revelation with special attention to its fact character and sources. It also proposes a novel ontological argument for the fact of revelation in the context of "weak conditionalism" where the existence of the notion of revelation as revelation entails the existence of the reality captured in it.

Chapter Two gives a panoramic and historical survey and a critical evaluation of existing types, forms and models of revelation through the analyses of Gerardus van der Leeuw's, Friedrich Heiler's, and René Latourelle's classifications of the forms and Avery Dulles's models of revelation. The underlying central questions of the chapter concern the relationship between forms of revelation and revelation itself on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the relationship between the various forms themselves. Mezei integrates elements from former models into an open, dynamic and concentric structure and reveals the essential correlation of fact and cognition overlooked by earlier one-factor models.

In the third chapter, the author investigates the notion of self-revelation (its linguistic and historical background and manifold meaning) and outlines key elements of his own overarching, complex and unified model which hinges on the distinction between direct and indirect self-revelation: self-revelation revealing itself as revelation and as revelatory of a subject, a self. All this leads to questions of selfhood, personhood, and freedom and the idea of kenotic radical personhood both with regard to human persons and God. Mezei's model of self-revelation is kenotic self-donation expressed as radical (constituting the core of) personhood. For him, the dynamism of self-revelation equally characterises intra-Trinitarian life and economic action, resulting in the challenging claim that God is the unity of selfhood (the divine nature) freely and wholly expressed in three persons.

The fourth chapter develops a further model: radical revelation, which concerns the special mode, the unique revelational quality of self-revelation in absolute freedom and self-negating love and in the dynamism of at once revealing and hiding what is being revealed. Eight gestures (free disclosures of divine Trinitarian personhood) are discerned in the gospels, all of which inspiringly illustrate the reality of radical revelation and show its all-pervasive character: birth, growth, entry, healing, radiance, transfiguration, kenosis, and overcoming.

Chapter Five revolves around problems of what Mezei terms “apocalyptic personhood” as the eschatological fulfilment of radical personhood and the tensile unity of kenotic passion and ultimate glory. The biblical themes of the kingdom of God, the Son of Man, resurrection, Pentecost, conversion, stoning, and their artistic portrayals are shown to highlight the integration of suffering and glorification.

The sixth, in many ways central, chapter develops an “apocalyptic phenomenology” which regards openness as a fundamental “rich” fact, one that is more original than the notion of being. As Mezei convincingly argues, what is ontological, epistemological, or anthropological already presupposes an *ur-fact* of opening. The rich and insightful phenomenological analyses of this chapter demonstrate the relationship between openness, freedom, newness, personhood, and their essentially threefold Trinitarian structures. The author’s novel principle of “*refusivum sui*” as an explanation for the possibility of evil in a good creation (an intricate balance of self-withdrawal and compensation/reparation) is also thought-provoking. Finally, examples taken from philosophy, literature, and music (Augustine, Pascal, Goethe’s Faust, Lévinas, Liszt, Beethoven, Wagner) illustrate exemplifications of apocalyptic personhood and its constant presence in European culture.

The last chapter considers the catholicity of revelation in terms of its dynamic and open structure and in relation to the traditional triad of faith, hope and love. Beyond a wealth of illuminating detail, Mezei’s comprehensive work aspires to establish a new discipline coined “apocalypitics” (in contradistinction to

metaphysics): the study of things belonging to disclosure. The overall framework and methodology are laid down here for further investigation.

The book is an inspiring read for a theologian, who discovers in Mezei's nonstandard philosophical account a curious and challenging "other" to traditional Trinitarian theology, which, however, takes visible inspiration from Hans Urs von Balthasar's and Karl Rahner's projects. The ideas of intra-Trinitarian kenotic revelation, the two-way relation between *ad intra* and *ad extra* revelations, the connection between divine and human personhood, the divine unity of nature understood as self-revealed in three personal forms will certainly provoke fruitful debate in the future and help theology creatively re-articulate—what Mezei terms—its unquestioned axiomatic formulations.

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