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Book Review: Mary Healy and Robin Parry (eds), *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings of the Knowledge of God*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2007

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The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings of the Knowledge of God. Edited by Mary Healy and Robin Parry. Pp. xvii, 198, Paternoster, 2007.

One of the major tasks of theology is to find a rational way to speak about the mystery of God. This can be a challenging task, especially as many chasms exist between academic theology and other disciplines like psychiatry or other areas like the local parish. Yet, to admit the possibility of a ‘catastrophic chasm’ between theology and biblical studies implies a grave division at the heart of Christian reflection. The aim of book is to try to fill this tragic lacuna by way of sounding out the Bible’s epistemology. The concern is to show that the Bible is instrumental for developing Christian approaches of knowledge. An epistemological exploration of the bible is, so to speak, to find a horizon where the complexities between knowing God and biblical praxis can begin to unfold.

Bringing together catholic, protestant and evangelical scholars into conversation, Part I of the book takes the reader on a journey to listen to the ‘soundings’ of epistemological studies in Deuteronomy, the Prophetic Literature, the Psalms, Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Luke-Acts, and the Johannine and Pauline corpus. In Part II, two concluding chapters provide reflections on Part I’s attempt to draw out the nature and character of philosophical and theological knowing in the Bible.

Breaking the silence between philosophy, theology and biblical studies, the book succeeds to make the bible more accessible for theologians with a philosophical background. On the other

hand, whether or not biblical scholars would find helpful such biblical soundings is less conspicuous. For example, biblical scholars could be wary of an epistemological study emphasising certain ideas like reality, existence, presence and human condition over the biblical narrative itself. In effect, the danger here could be to contaminate the biblical text with soundings otherwise than the intention of the text. In other words, biblical scholars could fear the biblical narrative mutating into epistemological-existential discussions of being, experience and presence rather than faith, hope and love.

None the less, the book is a beginning to find some way between the perilous chasm between theology and biblical studies. And it is important that scholars attempt to do this despite the likely danger of falling into misrepresentation, that is to say, epistemological (and onto-theological) thematisations which betray the biblical narrative and proclamation of faith.

Notwithstanding these concerns and caveats, the book produces some excellent scholarship worthy to be utilised by lecturers and ministers alike. Particularly, the strength of an epistemological outlook is to provide greater clarity and unity of meaning to the biblical texts, and further to draw out an ethical, prayerful response. When doing this in the context of theology, a theo-logic comes into play to rationally testify to the logic of faith and grace in our secular world today. Throughout the chapters, there are many examples of a theo-logic aiming to resonate through the Scriptures. For example, in Ryan O'Dowd's chapter, 'A Chord of Three Strands: Epistemology in Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,' there is a resounding emphasis on the search for wisdom and knowledge and of Qohelet's personal experience of such a search.

O'Dowd leads the reader to discover that the Hebrew *hebel* (Eccl 1:2), usually translated as 'vanity,' is increasingly recognised as "obscure". The theo-logic here is to emphasise the confusion of discerning between the good and the obscure (coming out of nothing (cf. Gen 1:1)). Inverting the Genesis story of creation coming out of nothing, there is the teaching for all generations that disorder or meaninglessness comes also out of order/Creation. Qohelet's text becomes closer perhaps to one's ordinary life when his outward realisation that 'All is obscure' (Eccl 1:2) is a product of his own experience with others. The effect of O'Dowd's theological and epistemological reflection is to invite the reader into a more prayerful and ethical search for the wisdom of God at the service of God. Consequently, the aim of the book is to develop a sense that knowledge of God implies developing a personal relation with God through faith, discipleship, hospitality, worship and fidelity. Throughout the book, there are many other and varied examples of searching for a rational way to speak of God's word in the Bible. I recommend this book especially as an introduction to the language of epistemology and how it can begin to be transposed towards the horizon of biblical truth.