

BOOK REVIEW

The Missionary of Knowledge: Hastings Rashdall's Life and Thoughts, Christopher Cunliffe. Sacristy Press, Durham, 2024. pp. 135. ISBN 9781789593341. £16.99 pbk
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Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924) was an Anglican priest, historian, philosopher and theologian. He was a prolific writer. His major works include *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (1895), *Doctrine and Development: University Sermons* (1898), *The Theory of Good and Evil* (1907) and *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (1919). On the surface, Rashdall seems like an old-fashioned theologian: idealistic, romantic, sometimes prickly and often passionate. However, Christopher Cunliffe's account of Rashdall's life and work helps us see that there is something about this somewhat unfashionable theologian we need to rediscover.

In terms of an overall view of Cunliffe's book, his chapter headings are informative:

1. Rashdall's life and character
2. Dean of Carlisle
3. Rashdall the historian
4. Rashdall the philosopher
5. Rashdall the theologian
6. Pursuing good and resisting evil: Rashdall's theology in practice
7. Rashdall's legacy

Subsequently, I am concentrating on three concepts that emerge from Cunliffe's work, which exemplify his analysis, inviting further exploration in the future. The concepts are knowledge, Christology and metaphysics.

Knowledge

The importance of knowledge is a pervasive theme in Cunliffe's book. In broad terms, knowledge has to do with the impact of modernity and the place of reason. In fact, reason is the key to understanding the liberal theological tradition. Ironically, the term *liberal* is often dismissed today, in certain quarters, as being *loose with the facts*. In Rashdall, reason entails a commitment to critical thinking, the analysis of evidence and the importance of philosophical support. There is nothing loose about

this. For Rashdall, these are essential elements for the identity, vocation and practice of clergy. The concept of knowledge is complex. Broadly, there is an everyday use of knowledge and a technical use. With the first, knowledge encompasses everything from information to daily wisdom. With the second, this is linked in the West with the Enlightenment and the emergence of critical thinking. That is, we can adopt an objective standpoint from which to observe, test and reflect. It is a process of abstraction and testing, evidence based engaging expert testimony. This capacity for discerning knowledge is relevant today, encompassing everything from fake news to the rise of religious fundamentalism and its epistemological absolutes. Moreover, the rise of fundamentalism is problematic in the Anglican Communion. So, it would have been fitting for Cunliffe to have drawn attention to the relation between fundamentalism and epistemology (at least as a footnote).

Christology

Cunliffe's examination of Rashdall's Christology is perceptive and timely. After all, what does it mean to be Christian in the 21st century? It has to do with Christology and the identity of Christ. Rashdall's Christology, however, was criticised at the time for making Christ too accessible, diminishing the Church's claims to Christ's divinity and/or uniqueness. The strength of Cunliffe's approach is that, on the one hand, he presents Rashdall's arguments in a clear and detailed manner. On the other, Cunliffe also presents the objections and arguments of detractors in a clear and detailed manner. For example, Cunliffe's inclusion of Gustav Aulén's scathing critique of Rashdall's Christological approach (p. 80). This method brings the issue to the fore. The onus is on the reader to wrestle with the issue. In this vein, Cunliffe's analysis of the 1921 Girton Conference is insightful (pp. 94–103). At the conference, Rashdall read a paper entitled 'Christ as Logos and Son of God' (p. 100). At that time, the status of the 39 articles was in dispute. Addressing this issue, however, depends on the method of interpretation, its premises and the meaning of revelation. As these are current issues, it would have been interesting to know what Cunliffe meant exactly by revelation.

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is a contested term. In a simple way, it is about *joining the dots* (as *evidence* can only take us so far). Typically, metaphysics is a form of abstraction that attempts to understand and describe the meaning of universals. It is inherently speculative, although speculation can be thoroughgoing as well as dubious. In theology, then, metaphysics plays a role in working out the identity, and hence, universal significance of Christ. Specifically, metaphysical explanations have been utilized to address Christological conundrums (e.g., human and divine). Thanks to Cunliffe, Rashdall's metaphysical claims and Christological questions are worth revisiting; especially as there are now new post-metaphysical trajectories. So, it would have been helpful to know something about Cunliffe's view of metaphysics. Nevertheless, while Cunliffe was focused on Rashdall's era, he has also signalled implicitly several important contemporary issues. In conclusion, Cunliffe presents a

comprehensive account of Rashdall. According to Cunliffe, Rashdall was committed to critical thinking, which he saw as indispensable to the Church and its clergy. This is because critical thinking enables us to discern something of the truth for our own time. Moreover, Cunliffe is forthright about Rashdall's shortcomings and challenges (p. 60 Rashdall's racism). It is a balanced account. Accordingly, the book would be beneficial for laity and clergy, as well as historians, theologians and philosophers. In addition, a comparison between Rashdall's day and ours would also interest philosophers of religion. Through Rashdall, Cunliffe has shown us the persistence of major theological and philosophical issues.

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