

HORIZONS

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Author's Response: **Tomáš Halík**

Plus Reviews of 37 Books

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLLEGE THEOLOGY SOCIETY

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The College Theology Society is a professional organization of college and university professors of religion in the United States and Canada.

The purpose of the College Theology Society is to improve the quality of the teaching of religion: by stimulating and sharing scholarly research; by developing programs of theology and religious studies which meet student needs and interests; and by exploring, evaluating, and encouraging effective ways of teaching which are interdisciplinary and ecumenical.

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From the Editor

It was a tough Lent 2011 for Catholics, wasn't it? Along with the continuing fallout from the February 2011 Philadelphia Grand Jury Report that, among other things, excoriated the Philadelphia Archdiocese for keeping in ministry a number of "priests accused of molesting minors" (http://www.phila.gov/districtattorney/grandJury_clergyAbuse2.html), there was also the unexpected critique of Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine.

On reading the Committee's statement, three random questions came to mind. The first was whether Walter Kasper's brilliant work *The God of Jesus Christ* (written while Kasper was still a professor of theology at Tübingen) might also fail to meet the Committee's criteria. Kasper is deeply concerned with the very problem Johnson also takes up. He argues for a theology of the Trinity—what he calls a "theological theology"—as the antidote to atheism and to "the abstract theism of a unipersonal God who stands over against man as the perfect Thou or over man as imperial ruler and judge. In the final analysis, this conception is the popular form of a Christianity half under the influence of the Enlightenment, or else the religious remnant of Christianity in a secularized society." He doesn't hesitate to label this conception "the heresy of theism" (294–95).

The second random question was "What would Jacques Derrida do?" How would that arch-deconstructionist have poked and worried the text of the Committee's statement in his typical close reading? What seams and contradictions would he have found in a discourse that both represents what the Committee *means* (*vouloir dire*) but also what it didn't mean (reading *vouloir dire* literally—as Derrida insists—as "want to say," "imposing one's will to speak directly," which glosses over the fact that the will of the "one" speaking is already constituted by a discourse permeated by otherness, differences, and absences)? Would this particular sentence, for example, have caught his probing eye? "Sr. Johnson . . . begins with a critique of the Church's faith, or, rather of what she terms 'traditional theology' or 'classical Christian theology'" ("Statement on *Quest for the Living God*. . . , " 2). While the Catholic tradition recognizes that "faith" and "theology" obviously overlap, is faith, an already contextualized first-order experience, being conflated here with theology, a second-order reflection?

Lastly, does the Committee's statement imply that, in contemporary Catholic theology, only one method is becoming acceptable for carrying out the theological task of "faith seeking understanding"? The epistemological and metaphysical grid through which Johnson's argument and her appeals to Scripture are analyzed recalls the deductive certainties of Neo-Scholastic fundamental theology which (as Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Franz-Josef Niemann, and Peter Eicher have shown) contained a hidden contradiction: it used modern rationalist presuppositions of certainty in its attempts to defeat modernity.

For the Fall 2011 issue of *Horizons* we have planned a more detailed study of the Committee on Doctrine's statement from the point of view of fundamental theology—not in order to answer these random questions, of course, but to examine more closely the issues that the statement raises and their implications for the practice of Catholic theology in the contemporary context.

The articles of this current issue deal with a number of important yet problematic "intersections": church and secular politics (Paul Lakeland, critiquing the tendency to "integrism"); critical theory and religion (Erin Brigham, comparing the thought of Habermas and Ratzinger); consumerism and liturgy (Timothy Brunk); academic freedom and the role of the theologian (Kenneth Garcia); and justice and interreligious dialogue (Paul Knitter). The focus of our book review symposium is Tomáš Halík's *Patience with God*, which was enthusiastically mentioned in our previous editorial. Our usual cornucopia of book reviews, well worth your perusal, brings this issue to a close.