

Wahlberg, Mats. *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014. x + 246 pp. \$20 (paper).

This fine book, a model of clarity and argumentative vigor, has two central purposes. The first is to elucidate and defend the view that God possibly offers us testimony by speaking to us. Wahlberg's claim here is not that God has spoken to us (though he clearly thinks so), but that it is neither incoherent nor irrational to think so. The second is to elucidate and defend the view that we can be doxastically responsible in treating what God says in Christian Scripture as God's speech to us, and, concomitantly, ourselves as coming to have knowledge about God and God's purposes by receiving this testimony as God's speech.

Informing and underlying this concern with divine testimony and its responsible reception is a more fundamental claim. It is that God's existence, together with its principal entailments, can be justifiably assented to if and only if one or both of the following conditions is met. First, that there is a more or less potent natural theology, by means of which a rational knower might come responsibly to assent to the claim *God exists* without dependence upon revelation; and second, that there is propositional revelation, by means of which God speaks to us about Godself. If both of these are rejected, as, arguably, many theologians and some philosophers do (Barthian despisers of natural theology; Rahnerian condemners of revelation-as-information; and others), then, Wahlberg thinks, God's existence can neither be responsibly assented to nor known. If either of them is affirmed, then responsible assent is possible. Wahlberg leaves the natural-theology question aside for the purposes of this book (he's written another on that topic: *Reshaping Natural Theology: Seeing Nature as Creation* [2012]). Here he treats the revelational question only.

Most of *Revelation as Testimony's* first half is devoted to analysis and critique of nonpropositional understandings of revelation. Wahlberg calls these manifestational. According to such understandings of revelation, he argues, God reveals Godself (and whatever else God might want to reveal) not by telling us anything, but by showing us things – Godself, say; or some intervention in the world; or the like. Manifestational understandings of revelation, although varied as to particulars, share, in Wahlberg's view, the view that "the means of revelation is a natural sign of the actuality revealed" (p. 87) – as, for example, the sun standing still upon Gibeon. These understandings of revelation he argues, convincingly, either fail to establish what they need to, or assume and imply some telling, some broadly propositional revelation, by which Wahlberg means any testimonial witness to us that deploys something other than natural signs of what it's about. The paradigmatic (though not the only) instance of such testimony is the kind that uses words, and it's this that interests him.

The book's second half begins with an account of what it means to say that God speaks, drawing heavily on Nicholas Wolterstorff's analysis of this matter in *Divine Discourse* (1996). It follows this with a depiction of what's involved in coming to have knowledge by way of testimony, drawing heavily in this case on John McDowell's essay, "Knowledge by Hearsay" (1998). This in turn leads to an extended defense of the

view that it is doxastically responsible to take (for example) the New Testament as testimony (among other things), and thereby to come to have testimonial knowledge about God. Wahlberg offers here an especially good description and critique of the bad reasons for which a large majority of scholars of Scripture restrict their studies of the text to those made possible by a forensic historicism, and thus prescind from treating it as possibly testimonial. He also provides the best anglophone analysis known to me of the concept of miracle and its epistemic significance.

The book succeeds admirably, given its assumptions, in demonstrating its positions. Reliance upon testimony is indeed a sui generis means of arriving at knowledge; Scripture may indeed be coherently regarded as God's speech to us, and thus as an instance of testimony; and those who so understand it can indeed so regard it without doxastic offence, and thus come to know all sorts of things about God. The book is a first-rate instance of anglophone-scholastic philosophical theology.

But there is a tension that runs through it, at least at the rhetorical level, and perhaps also at the conceptual one. On the one hand, Wahlberg often writes as if he's an epistemological internalist, which is to say someone who thinks that in order to be doxastically responsible one must know, and even be able to say, what it is to be thus responsible in particular cases. This sort of talk comes to the fore when Wahlberg engages and expounds McDowell, who likes, following Wilfrid Sellars, to speak of knowing testimonially as occurring within the space of reasons. Inhabitants of that space, it can easily be thought, should be able to specify what the relevant reasons are – in this case, what makes them doxastically responsible in accepting this, whatever it is, as testimony. Maybe entering the space of reasons involves knowing that you have and being able to say what the relevant reasons are. That's a characteristic internalist claim. Wahlberg often sounds like this. But, on the other hand, he also mutes and qualifies this internalism sometimes, especially in the final chapter, where he properly emphasizes that meeting doxastic responsibilities can be a function of communities, and that individuals may be able to meet theirs by belonging to the right community and thus don't need to know or be able to say that or how they've met their doxastic responsibilities. But still, Wahlberg doesn't pay enough attention to the possibilities of an externalist epistemology, in which what counts for justification isn't the reasons you have, and much less those you can give, but, rather, the reasons there are. Much, but not all, of his defense of testimonial knowledge could survive a shift in this direction; making it would have smoothed out some unnecessary difficulties, especially those that make doxastic responsibility seem possible only for ideally rational knowers.

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