

Scott Hahn, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace* (New York: Doubleday, 2006)

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Scott Hahn's book *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace* is easy to read. Hahn carefully describes the Opus Dei institution within the Roman Catholic Church. In recent days, it has drawn attention with the advent of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* which featured Opus Dei as a key player in conspiracies and cover ups. Hahn's work then helps give an insider's picture of Opus Dei. His purpose is to present 'Opus Dei's biblical theology and biblical spirituality' (5)

Two audiences seem foremost in mind. Firstly, Hahn writes for Catholics describing the practices and theology driving Opus Dei. Secondly, the book anticipates protestant readers. Hahn often contrasts his experiences in Opus Dei in light of his previous Calvinism.

Opus Dei is a recognised institution within the Catholic Church. It is unique in that, as a "personal prelature" it is an institution "made up of both priests and lay people." (44) It seeks to bring Catholic theology and experience into the realities of everyday life. As an evangelical, I found some aspects of its theology of particular interest. Opus Dei has an interest in the Bible and is part of what attracted Hahn in his exodus from Calvinism. The divisions between priests and laity are in some measure broken down. The founder, Josemaría Escrivá, urged Christians to have a "truly priestly soul and fully lay mentality." (7) Yet despite these things, Catholic tradition still constrains the Bible's voice and the exclusivity of the priesthood still remains. There is no real movement away from Catholic doctrines. While some sections of the book demonstrate some biblical understandings, it is ultimately conditioned by the Roman Church's teachings.

In explaining Opus Dei, Scott Hahn seems to ignore the issues raised by *The Da Vinci Code*, for example, the use of the Cilice belt and the practice of mortification of the flesh. Other documentaries and books have pointed to the use of these practices. How are these biblically justified? What role do they have?

The most disturbing part of this book is its misrepresentation of Calvinism. Hahn seems to angle for protestant interest. He recites his own conversion and how Opus Dei "held all that I loved about the Reformation tradition too: a deep devotion to Jesus, a spontaneous life of prayer, a zeal to transform the culture, and, of course, a burning love for Scripture." (3-5) But, when referring to Calvinist doctrines, there are misleading distortions.

Hahn states that Calvin conceived of "covenant" as a "contract" so that he and his predecessors only saw Christianity in legal terms, not viewing covenant as a family bond such as in marriage and adoption. The doctrine of adoption may have been "lost amid all the post-Reformation debate" (22) within the Catholic church but within Reformed

Christianity this has been held with great importance, so that Christians “enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God” (Westminster Confession of Faith).

In presenting the “Protestant work ethic,” Hahn perceives it as derived from election and “that earthly success could be a providential sign of God’s favor, of election, of a heavenly destiny.” (33) In reality, for Calvinists, it is a recognition of God’s sovereignty and so rather seeks to honour and glorify Him in every area of life. It establishes Christ’s lordship within their occupations, not personal election.

At one point, Hahn carelessly introduces “total depravity.” He gives no definition of the doctrine but instead fallaciously utilises it to show how Calvinists denigrate the secular world of vocation and public interest. How far it is from a Reformed commitment to live out their faith in all areas of life!

Such distortions are then employed to elevate Catholic thought against Hahn’s poorly presented Calvinism. This can have two damaging effects. Firstly, it can entrench Catholics in false convictions about how their own religion compares against Calvinism. Secondly, it wrongly undermines the faith of Protestants who are yet thinking out their faith. Hahn’s Calvinism prior to his conversion appears ill-defined. This results in his own erroneous portrayal of it.

So who should read this book? *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace* is useful for understanding some of the philosophy of Opus Dei, and should be read for little more than that. Catholics who read this should distrust his comments on Calvinism. Evangelicals would be better edified by other literature that explains how to live for Christ in all of life.

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