

KEVIN HART
The University of Notre Dame

ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND OTHER THINGS: SOME RECENT THEOLOGY

THE TIME HAS LONG SINCE PASSED when students in a seminary or a university studied “theological encyclopedia.” And nowadays it would be very difficult to find a candidate suitable to hold a Chair in the subject. People who can add their area of specialization to a general competence in all the main branches of theology — Scripture and Systematics, Ethics and Liturgy, Pastoral Theology and Church History — are few and very far between. Even if such a person were identified — N. T. Wright, for example — the chances are that he or she would not be especially honored by the invitation. The very title recalls the age of German Idealism. Well over a century ago Philip Schaff retired from the Chair of Theological Encyclopedia and Christian Symbolism at Union Theological Seminary to take a Chair in Hebrew at the same institution (to be followed by Chairs in Sacred Literature and Church History), perhaps feeling that his first appointment was tied too strictly to routine pedagogy. Today the advertisement of such a Chair by the American Academy of Religion would invite snide remarks about “overreaching” and “amateurism”: theology has increasingly become an academic profession, looking to secular norms that both chasten and distract it. Karl Rahner famously styled himself an “amateur theologian,” and certainly he comprehended the whole of theology in the studies gathered in his *Theological Investigations*. Primarily an essayist, Rahner for the most part left any systematic consideration of theology to his teaching, principally his *Grundkurs*, misleadingly translated as *Foundations of Christian Faith*. His modesty is appealing, all the more so when recalled while standing before the six volumes of his *Sacramentum Mundi* or even his *Theological Dictionary*. They are monuments of a time when the greatest theologians of the day knew the whole field in the yard and the mile, if not always in the quarter inch.

Those were the days before the world got fat with information — or, rather, with publications. Now no one could reasonably be expected to be an authority on both St Augustine and Origen, let alone Systematics and New Testament. The

modern academy encourages its scholars to regard knowing all the publications in the field, even those not worth reading, as part of expertise, and only the strongest scholars refuse to have their authority figured in such wasteful terms. But the eruption of information is not the only factor to be considered in the shift in theological consciousness. As recently as the late nineteenth century there was still a broad, largely unspoken agreement that theology was a vast unity, either underwritten by the eschatological unity of the Church or subsisting along idealist lines. Even when there was less faith in unity, as when the gulf started to widen between biblical studies and the more speculative areas of theology, the discipline could still be figured as a massive network of ideas, philology and textual practices. Theology as a whole was systematic in principle if not always in fact, and one sign of the shift to our current state was the recasting of “dogmatics” as “systematic theology.”

In the old world, especially the Protestant part of it, a young theologian could imagine years of hard work being brought to a satisfying conclusion in the writing of a three-volume systematic theology in early old age, a work that ventured into ethics, church history and pastoral theology, and that was earthed in the Bible. Unless their general editor exercises very firm intellectual control on the entries, modern encyclopedias are seldom systematic, yet some systems veer towards being encyclopedic. The old three-volume systematic theology might not be a theological encyclopedia in the nineteenth-century sense, but at a pinch it could serve as one. If dictionaries can be regarded as truncated encyclopedias, systematic theologies of the old school are often like squashed encyclopedias: Christology has been stretched here, Trinity has been collapsed there, yet Liturgy seems to be in pretty good shape. For some time now, certainly in the wake of the “philosophical theology” that started in the 1960s, many theologians have been doing systematics piecemeal so that “systematic” has almost come to mean “analytic,” though not in all the senses it has acquired in the expression “analytic philosophy.” The high level of clarity and rigor demanded by Anglo-American philosophy is still often a long way from what one finds in the work of even the best systematicians. Nonetheless things have changed: fewer theologians desire the satisfying click that comes at the moment a system closes upon itself, and more of them listen for the snap that concludes a well-conducted argument. For younger theologians, writing a three-volume systematic theology is about as attractive as composing a three-volume Victorian novel. I hear Miss Prism telling Cecily, “Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel,” but I hear no one, and certainly no publisher, saying the same of the three-volume *Systematic Theology*.

Colin Gunton was one of the last theologians to entertain writing a quasi-encyclopedic systematic theology, and his early death prevented him from

fulfilling his plan. Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* will not be the final instance of the genre — Franz Jozef van Beeck's *God Encountered* is still in progress, for example — but reading Pannenberg already makes one recall Wallace Stevens's melancholy line about "a great shadow's last embellishment." The great theological works of the last century that were written with encyclopedic reach — Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and Hans Urs von Balthasar's trilogy — exceed what the word "system" usually designates. Given Barth's dialectical approach, his *Realdialektik*, it is one thing to know his final position on a given topic — predestination, say — and quite another to be able to say what his view is at a particular moment in the discussion of the topic. To re-describe theology according to the third transcendental and then according to drama, as von Balthasar does, is not to settle on positions that can be locked into a system. There is a sense in which his system, if there is one, can be found only in the *Theo-logic*, which is the least satisfying part of his trilogy. Besides, Barth and von Balthasar's major works are too brilliant, too imaginative, and too singular, to be examples of anything.

In a different style, Pannenberg's contemporary Jürgen Moltmann has already conceded that the Church does not need yet another system by regarding his final series as "systematic contributions to theology." "Systems save some readers (and their admirers most of all) from thinking critically for themselves and from arriving at independent and responsible decision," he says in the Preface to *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. His first works, *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*, sought to find points of entry into theology that would allow him to say everything from one well-chosen perspective. Paschal Trinitarians have sought to do the same, and the approach has become more widely adopted. In *Symbol and Sacrament* Louis-Marie Chauvet maintains that sacramentality runs through all theology. If you pull just one single thread, you will see the whole fabric respond. Yet as the universes of information and concern expand and theology tries to keep up by means of the formula "theology of *x*," it becomes harder and harder to know even the edges of the fabric.

What is to be done? Many professors act as though there is a clear decision to be made. To judge by their actions, you can withdraw into one's nook of the profession — NAPS or SOTS, say — and enjoy its many pleasures, or you can enter a bewildering range of conversations in the hope of gaining a vantage point that will reveal where you are in world and time. You do not have to leave a moderately large Theology Department to engage in cross-disciplinary conversations. Often enough, you simply have to talk to the person in the next office. Theology is no longer a discipline; in practice, it is a convention of disciplines, which is one reason why many departments of Theology have refigured themselves as departments of Religious Studies. Only in confessional

schools, and only in those with a will to treat the entire curriculum theologically, is it otherwise. Theological encyclopedia vaguely subsists in those curricula that insist that students take essential courses — Christology and Trinity, for instance — and round these out with excursions into “Tradition” and optional courses of special interest (“Theology of Play,” “Theology and Literature”). But it subsists only in a ghostly manner, without conviction that there is a principle or a method to which all can and should subscribe.

Yet, while we mostly teach something more like “theological smorgasbord” than “theological encyclopedia,” the world grows heavy with encyclopedias. It was only ten years ago that the vast *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (1932-95) was completed; it is now on CD-ROM but has yet to be translated into English, as has the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (1930-50), the many volumes of which almost make Jean-Yves Lacoste’s *Dictionnaire* look portable. Neither of the older French encyclopedias is likely to find a home in English in the near future. Yet enormous tasks of translation do occur. Think of Geoffrey W. Bromily’s translation of *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* as *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (2003). And even within the one language there are huge labors that are undertaken in the name of “religion” or “knowledge” or both. Think of Lindsay Jones’s expanded new edition of Mircea Eliade’s *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005) or even of works of more restricted scope such as Allan Fitzgerald’s *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (1999). No longer able to be grasped by an individual, not even one with titanic energy, theological knowledge has become a collective enterprise, international in scope. Our relation to this knowledge has changed: we consult rather than read, we search rather than recall. No longer determined by a conceptual order, knowledge is offered to us in alphabetical order, and then, thanks to search engines and electronic searching of texts, in no order whatsoever.

While waiting for the new set of encyclopedias to reach your library, you can always use Google as an *ad hoc* encyclopedia of Borgesian dimensions, with all the misinformation that he lushly imagined in “The Library of Babel.” And when the encyclopedia does come, it will be consulted on the shelves only until it becomes available on the Internet, along with the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, *Talmudic Encyclopedia*, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), the second edition of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2003), and the emerging *Societas Christiana Encyclopedia*. In his essay “The Time of Encyclopedias” (1957) Maurice Blanchot consigned the encyclopedia to the past, noting that we are challenged by “a different speech and another vision,” that of the fragmentary. A half century later, the encyclopedia has been almost effortlessly folded into that vision. Former attempts at unifying knowledge now take a modest place in the mobile and plural way of being that Blanchot

anticipated. Postmodernity's motto is *tout dire*, and if it cannot be achieved by extreme compression (as in Paul Celan) then it will be done by extreme capaciousness (as with the Web).

The value of encyclopedias has not been diminished; how we use them has changed. A part of that altered use turns on how we let them represent past knowledge: no longer is it a monument set up in a hushed public space (the Library); it is an endless flat plain that can be entered from any computer — at your desk, in a coffee shop, or in bed. For the brief period before it goes on the Internet, Lacoste's *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* is a monument. It can be admired for its wise choices, its balances, and its careful inter-relations, and read not only for its major articles but also for the many pleasures that chancing on an entry can give. (Someone interested in eco-theology will turn to Animals, yet, if he or she lingers, might find out something about Anhypostasy by reading the preceding article. And *vice versa*. The old and the new are treated with equal seriousness.) Scholars have been consulting the original *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* since the first edition appeared in 1998, so much so that some of us feel more comfortable with it than its English double. That said, all Anglophone professors should be directing their students to the new, expanded English edition in the Library. It is more sharply focused on theology than the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*; its articles are informative yet never overwhelming, in a critical relation with the past though never testy about anything. It is rare thing for a first-class mind to consent to become a harmless drudge for a period, and all students and professors of theology owe a debt of gratitude to Lacoste for his generous act of kenosis. Who knows what original theological work we have been denied because of the years he devoted to this project.

Lacoste's choice of contributors is impressive. Brian Daley on Apocatastasis; Louis-Marie Chauvet on Sacrament; Alain de Libera on Scholasticism; Andrew Louth on Prayer; Oliver O'Donovan on Liberty; Martin Marty on Fundamentalism; Constant Mews on Peter Abelard; Jean Porter on the Virtues; John Webster on Conscience: no one could ask for better people, although at times I find myself wishing that more words could have been assigned to a topic. Of course, everyone dreams of an encyclopedia with all one's favorite authors writing on their favorite themes. Alas, there is no John Meier on the Historical Jesus (though Daniel Marguerat writes well on the topic), no Peter Brown or James J. O'Donnell on St Augustine (said with no disrespect intended towards Marie-Anne Vannier), no Bernard McGinn on Mysticism (or any mystic), no Pierre Hadot on Marius Victorinus, no David Burrell on Analogy, and no David Tracy on Correlation; while Henri Crouzel writes on Modalism and Subordinationism, leaving Éric Junod to inform us about Origen. But doubtless Lacoste had his dreams as well, along with a thick file of declined invitations to

contribute to his project.

Some of the finest entries are by Lacoste himself: Being, Martin Heidegger, and Hermeneutics, among others. Inevitably, there is a French complexion to the whole, in the selection of contributors (Jean-Pierre Torrell on St Thomas Aquinas and François Marty on Kant, for example), in their range of reference, and sometimes, in key entries, in their theological orientation. It is unlikely that Lévinas would crop up several times in a comparable work edited by an English scholar. There is no question of parochialism, though; in fact, when weighing the alternatives for choice of general editor of such a work, that danger would prowl closer to the house of an American or British scholar. It is appropriate that Lévinas come up several times — more often than his name appears in the index, as it happens — in a work of this bulk and at this time. In terms of institutions, nationalities and religious affiliations, the attentive reader will find good pieces that come from Britain and Germany, Italy, the United States and Australia, Tübingen and Rome, Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism, the Church and the University, the Inevitable (Gregorian University, the Pontifical Biblical Institute) and the Unexpected (Emory Law School). Unfortunately, the attentive reader will also find more than a fair sprinkling of typographical errors; the slips over proper names — K. Pickstock (935) rather than C. Pickstock and Marc C. Taylor rather than Mark C. Taylor (1261), for example — will irritate those who wish to seek out books by those cited. More worrying are some peculiar translations, and not only from the French. In the article on Apocatastasis the title of Rufinus's *De adulteratione librorum Origenis* is rendered *On the Adoration of the Books of Origen*. We are not told who translated the encyclopedia.

I have seen people race through an encyclopedia measuring the entries on competing figures to determine how fair it is. The method is flawed: there is not always a positive correlation between complexity and influence; besides, not all contributors follow word limits, and not all editors have the time or the temperament to enforce them. To save people some trouble, however, they can be assured that St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas each receives five pages, and each is supplemented by reflections on the "ism" he has generated. Origen receives four pages, a half page more than St Maximus the Confessor, while St Gregory Palamas is allocated only two and a bit pages. Luther comes in at seven pages and with his own "ism" to boot. That's twice as much as is given to Calvin (who also comes with an "ism.") Barthians will rejoice that their man has four pages in comparison with the two and a half pages devoted to Bultmann, though some will mutter that there is no entry on Barthianism. Still, they will experience some *Schadenfreude* in the fact that Brunner has no entry of his own. "Look on my works ye mighty and despair," as Ozymandias had inscribed on the base of his statue, according to Shelley. Rahner has six pages, beating von Balthasar by

rather more than a flared nostril (five and a half pages), surpassing de Lubac (nearly three pages), and leaving Lonergan in the distance with a mere one and a half pages.

There are at least two species of limit that impinge on the reader of an encyclopedia: those of choice and emphasis, and that of detail. Take the mystics as one way of probing the former. Carmelites can rejoice that St John of the Cross has an entry to himself but not so St Teresa of Ávila; votaries of Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and many others, must remain silent. It is regrettable that Meister Eckhart is treated only in the piece on Rhineland-Flemish Mysticism and not assigned his place in the sun. Another way of evaluating the rightness of choice and emphasis would be to identify unexpected yet welcome entries such as those on Character, Chinese rites, the Infinite, Protocatholicism, and Theological Notes. (I should add the category of unexpected and unwelcome entries; it has just one item: Zoroaster.) And, for sounding the level of detail, take early Christological heresies as an example. You will find useful pieces on Adoptionism, Apollinarianism and Arianism, on Docetism, on Monophysitism and Nestorianism, and of course on Nicea I and Chalcedon. If you wish to find out about Monarchianism, you are referred to the article on Modalism, which seems about right. This is, after all, not an encyclopedia of patristics. For detail on late antiquity we have the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (1992), the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (1997) and the *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* (1989-).

With over 250 contributors, representing fifteen nationalities and about 100 institutions, Lacoste's *Encyclopedia* can hardly be imagined to present a single, consistent theological position on the Christian faith. This is important since the encyclopedia seeks not simply to transmit information but to weigh it before recycling it. (The adjectival tang of *critique* in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* has been lost in the English title.) Its criticisms do not all come from the one quarter. By and large, though, liberals will be more content more often than their conservative neighbors. Center and right of center Catholics will be uneasy when reading the entry on Mary to learn that, on the basis of biblical criticism, the virginal conception of Jesus is most likely no more than a theologoumenon, a theological opinion, ventured by Matthew and Luke. When reading the entry on Church, the same group will of course be pleased to hear that the truth assigned to the Church "is in itself inviolate and thus cannot depend on democratic decision," but might be dismayed to learn that there is a call, presumably one supported by the author, "for democratic procedures and structures" in the choosing of bishops, as well as in the Church's general comportment to the world (309). Similarly, the entry on the Pope will annoy centrists and conservatives when it concludes, "the ministry of Peter will convince the other Churches only to the extent that they will see it as serving the legitimate plurality

of Churches expressing itself in a vigorous synodotal and conciliar fashion" (1258). The notion of a legitimate plurality is a curious one in this context. To which law can one appeal to justify the proliferation of churches? *Lumen Gentium* might contain one, but not according to recent Vatican interpretations of the dogmatic constitution.

If conservatives will disagree with some articles, liberals will be displeased to find John Milbank of all people writing the entry on Liberation Theology. He observes there that liberation theology "often still lacks a conception of religious and Christian acts which fully integrates their social meanings" (914). They might wish that Gustavo Gutiérrez had written the entry. If offended liberals turn to the article on Political Theology they will find no comfort. Once again Milbank is there to needle them: "In short, the systematic refusal of a political theology that fuses theocracy with positivism has criticized the former more than the latter aspect, and thereby minimized the possibility of a theological interpretation of the social and political as such" (1253). And, if that were not enough, Milbank does not conclude without saying, "there is no purely political sphere over against the church" and that "20th-century political theology has not grasped that ecclesiology, if it is not to be lost in abstraction, must take the whole of society into account" (1253). Here is one contributor whose writing reminds us that this is a *critical* encyclopedia of theology.

No single program can be found when you read Lacoste's *Encyclopedia* close up. Step away a few paces, though, and one almost comes into focus if you squint a little. After sustained use over the period of months, the *Encyclopedia* encourages you to think that there could be a principle and method to theology, certainly not one adopted by everyone who contributed to it or promoted in a single key article, but one that is informally commended all the same. It is not hermeneutics so much as phenomenology, understood very broadly. "Perhaps the most fruitful results can be obtained from this method," says Jörg Splett in his entry "Religion, Philosophy of," and I do not doubt that Lacoste would agree with him. Phenomenology would not lend itself to a systematic theology in the old sense but is quite capable of fashioning a new, enlivened philosophical theology. Analytic philosophical theology tends to overlook the historical nature of much theology, Burrell reminds us in *Faith and Freedom*, yet phenomenology need not succumb to that danger. It is, after all, the seeing of what manifests itself. To allow "phenomena" full range, and not to impose philosophical restrictions on "revelation," would be to understand the strange, familiar logic of Christianity. Michel Henry offers us one vantage point in *Paroles du Christ* (2002), with his insistence that the Gospel is itself a radical phenomenology, while Jean-Luc Marion offers us another in his explorations of saturated phenomena. Lacoste himself provides a third.

* * *

Leonhard Hell tells us in a brief entry on Postmodernism in Lacoste's *Encyclopedia* that Chrétien, Henry, Marion and Ricœur accept Heidegger's "end of metaphysics" while subjecting the German thinker, and sometimes Derrida as well, to a theological critique. In the end the Frenchmen refuse "the nihilism of difference by appealing to a phenomenological analysis of experience," a gesture that appears "foundationalist and therefore 'modern' to British or American readers." This is all rather breathtaking, and being born in Britain yet living in America I don't like being told what I think, especially when I do not think it. To begin with, Ricœur's position is mistaken by Hell. Sure enough, his attempt to save reflective philosophy from becoming idealism by leaguering it with hermeneutics is broadly indebted to Heidegger's reflections on the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics. Yet in *La métaphore vive* (1975) he roundly rejects Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics. "It seems to me time to deny oneself the convenience, which has become a laziness in thinking, of lumping the whole of Western thought together under a single word, metaphysics" (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 311). And nowhere does Ricœur subject either Heidegger or Derrida to a "theological critique."

Several other worries about the entry should be listed. To begin with, Henry, the most maverick of French phenomenologists, accepts very little of Heidegger (while also making major adjustments to Husserl), and the idea of a theological critique is alien to him. What he proposes, as early as *L'Essence de la manifestation* (1963), is a notion of revelation that does not derive from outside life, which is considered as pure immanence. Staying within the same broad stream of French phenomenology, I pass to Marion. Rather than appealing to a "phenomenological analysis of experience," Marion explicitly seeks to uncover something quite different from experience, namely counter-experience. The notion is elaborated in the first edition of *Étant donné* (1997), although this perhaps comes too late for Hell to consider for the original French edition of the *Dictionnaire*. As for foundationalism, you have only to take stock of Marion's adoption of Ricœur's infinite hermeneutics to realize that the charge is misplaced. But perhaps this was not clear to his readers when Hell submitted his entry. Second, is it true that Chrétien, interesting philosopher that he is, is really a phenomenologist? There is little reason to say so over and above his inclusion in Jean-François Courtine's *Phénoménologie et théologie* (1992). It makes more sense to think of him as a philosopher with a gift for description and lyrical insight, a writer who takes pains to let the history of philosophy and theology speak to us in and through him. Third, there is no sense of the word "nihilism" that can square with deconstruction that does not also include a good deal else

(empiricism and pragmatism, for example) and, on realizing that, you see that the word will not help us to understand Derrida's writings.

So beware the encyclopedia entry on a contemporary movement: chances are that more light will come after the deadline or that axes will be ground before the deadline. It is a pity that Hell's entry was not revised from 1998; at the least he could have adjusted the picture of Marion. Whether the past seven years have been fat or thin for theology is a matter of dispute. Yet more than enough has happened under the loose rubric of postmodernism, especially by philosophers, both by way of promoting ideas and by way of recoil. In *God in France*, Peter Jonkers and Ruud Welten supply us with a guide to some of the former. Anyone who teaches contemporary philosophical theology in the European style will want to refer students to this collection. There are essays, all more or less introductory, on Ricœur, Girard, Lévinas, Henry, Derrida, Lyotard, Marion and Lacoste. The selection is a little puzzling: Stanislaw Breton and Chrétien would have made better topics for reflection than Lyotard, yet it is pleasing to find essays on Lacoste and Henry. There is a fair amount of Henry's writing available in English, even if the quality of the translations is mixed. Several of the volumes, including *The Essence of Manifestation*, are so expensive, though, that they might as well not be in print. What is needed is a translation of his crucial methodological essays ("Phénoménologie non intentionnelle: une tâche de la phénoménologie à venir," for example), along with his final writings on Christianity. Peter Jonkers opens the collection with a historical survey entitled, appropriately enough, "God in France. Heidegger's Legacy." All the philosophers discussed in the collection have been marked in one way or another by Heidegger's diagnosis of metaphysics as onto-theo-logy, he argues, and some have been touched by his contention that Christendom has reinterpreted Christianity as a world view.

Jonkers worries that the contemporary philosophical "turn to religion," as Hent de Vries calls it, is a largely empty phrase. De Vries in *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (1999) "explicitly detaches the concept of religion from any personal engagement in a religious conviction, and reduces religious traditions to a semantic and symbolic archive, which can be, to a great extent, formalized and transposed into concepts and philosophemes" (11). This is a fair summation. In their fuzzy summaries and lack of close attention to either textual detail or conceptual flourish, De Vries's books show postmodern theology at its most exhausted. St Bonaventure argued, in his *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, that all disputes in the arts lead back to a ground in theology. For De Vries, though, religion leads back to cultural studies: if you squeeze Adorno, Derrida or Lévinas hard enough you might just get a drop or two of thin theology. Time would better be spent in re-reading St Bonaventure or reading Adorno, Derrida and

Lévinas in other ways. Things are different with Chrétien, Lacoste and Marion, partly because they have a far richer engagement with the tradition and partly because they have stakes in it. Whether the new phenomenology continues “postmodernism,” if that word is of any use these days, or whether it looks back to Husserl and Heidegger in order to go in a fresh direction, is not yet evident.

In general, much of contemporary French philosophical interest in God can be summarized in Derrida’s words as “religion without religion,” but the expression yokes together quite different positions. On the one hand, there is a Kantian tradition strenuously recast by Lévinas and Derrida: here ethics, understood as hyper-obligation to the singular other person, becomes the core of religion and protects us from fanaticism and superstition. There is always an uncertainty when reading Kant as to what direction his philosophy of religion is heading. Does he seek to secure the center of Christianity as a faith? Or does he quietly translate Christianity into philosophy and then philosophy into ethics? If Derrida tends to accent the latter aspect, not all of his followers in “religion without religion” are quite so sure. On the other hand, there is a Husserlian tradition rethought by Marion: here Revelation is taken as non-sensible intuitions and considered as an eidetic possibility. There is none of the iconoclasm drawn from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. On the contrary, this phenomenology is oriented to anti-iconoclasm, as a reading of *The Crossing of the Visible* will quickly show. It is worth observing that Derrida inherits the theological model of “religion” from the Enlightenment, a model in which the positive religions are held to derive or imply an ahistorical or natural religion from which the positive religions have fallen. If you take that model seriously, the natural or ideal religion to which you aspire will inevitably be “religion without religion.” Derrida may reset religion “at the limits of reason alone” but his account of it remains part of an Enlightenment vision. Things are otherwise with Marion. He stays on the older ground of Revelation. To develop the faith as an eidetic possibility is not an Enlightenment gesture; rather, it is a new way of developing the *preambula fidei*.

A persistent worry about the “theological turn” in phenomenology is that there is no religion, at least not in the Judeo-Christian world, without transcendence; yet, as Husserl says in *Ideas III*, all transcendence falls before the phenomenological reduction. Critics of the “theological turn,” beginning with Dominique Janicaud, think that the transcendent is illicitly brought into phenomenology. Henry can excuse himself, since he conceives Christianity in terms of immanence and puts aside the reduction. Marion defends himself by pointing out that he is not doing theology, only phenomenology: he is talking of Revelation as a possibility, not as an historical actuality, and Husserl did not have warrant for excluding non-sensible intuitions from the principle of

principles in *Ideas I*. Lacoste, who is close to Marion at some points, is an intriguing figure in this conversation. A Catholic theologian, he is also a scrupulous phenomenologist and is notable for keeping the two together yet distinct. *Experience and the Absolute* develops a phenomenology of liturgy by way of examining its two vanishing points, the human (by way of existence, experience and place) and the divine (by way of its self-disclosure). An inevitable comparison, especially for an American reader, is Robert Sokolowski's *Eucharistic Presence* (1994). While Sokolowski seeks to show how the meanings of the Eucharist can be discerned by seeing it concretely placed in our intentional horizons, Lacoste is concerned to examine liturgy, taken far more broadly than the Mass, in terms of our being in the world. Sokolowski looks primarily to Husserl, Lacoste to Heidegger. Taken together, and with sidelong glances at people on the fringes of phenomenology such as Chauvet and Chrétien, the two studies would form the basis of a highly instructive seminar on the phenomenology of Christian living.

To say that Lacoste bends his mind to the state of being *coram deo* is true but insufficient. He is not proposing a theology of the subject, as we find in Rahner. His analysis is based firmly on Dasein, which, as he says, is not a subject but "is nothing but doors and windows" (11). And he chooses the word "liturgy" as a way of naming our comportment when before God, in order to evade the debilitating distinctions between "interior" and "exterior," "soul" and "body" that cling to all theologies of the subject. Stepping back a few paces, we can see that Lacoste has learned from the Eberhard Jüngel of *God as the Mystery of the World*. There Jüngel proposed a shift in our thinking of God by proposing the question "Where?" rather than "Who?" or "What?" Lacoste invites us to rethink the humanity of the human with the same change of question. To re-conceive our being before God requires us to refigure place, and in particular how our comportment as liturgical beings makes us exceed our being in the world.

One of Lacoste's touchstones is the Hölderlin of "On Religion" (1797), who was also important to Heidegger in his elucidations of the poet. Hölderlin talks, with characteristic abstraction and compression, of the "infinite relation [*unendlichere Zusammenhang*]" that opens up when speaking of a divinity. For Heidegger, this was a hint in how to formulate the *Geviert* or fourfold of mortals and divinities, earth and sky. And for the Blanchot of *L'entretien infini* (1969) it was a way of naming the human relation that is established in (and always interrupted by) the neutral. Hölderlin says that all religion is poetic in essence, to which Heidegger adds that dwelling poetically is to know the unknown God. In his turn, Lacoste wishes to explore dwelling liturgically, which for him is dwelling in an infinite relation, being *coram deo*. This infinite relation is what Blanchot, Lévinas and Derrida call the "relation without relation;" its main trait is that the

transcendence of the other preempts any and all unity, let alone fusion, in community. Lévinas will speak of the asymmetry of the other person; Blanchot of the double dissymmetry of self and other; and Derrida will favor one vocabulary and then the other. Now the relation without relation was postulated long ago by St Augustine in his *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* where God is praised as "Measure without measure. . . Number without number. . . Weight without weight." Lacoste recovers St Augustine's sense of our infinite relation with God by way of Hölderlin, and in effect refuses the Kantian inspired recoding of a relation with God as a relation with another human being. In Lacoste's terms, to dwell liturgically is to transgress our being-in-the-world, to live before the distinction between earth and world impinges, and *to be towards* God.

The same point can be made with reference to St Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa theologiae*, St Thomas argues that God's relation to creatures is *relatio rationis tantum* while our relation to God is *relatio realis*. Being related to God is a reality for us but God's being related to creatures is not a reality for Him. Thus Burrell, pondering the category of relation, argues that "the *esse* of creatures is an *esse-ad-creatorem*," which he glosses so that it almost sounds as though it was written by Heidegger: "their to-be is to-be-towards-the-creator" (pp. xx-xxi). As he makes clear, this relation with God, in which our center is outside ourselves, sets St Thomas apart from Aristotle who insists that the defining characteristic of substance is to exist in itself. It is Sokolowski, an essential reference for Burrell, who makes this teaching of St Thomas phenomenologically explicit in what he calls the "Christian distinction." The distinction runs between the world and God and is a simple one. God was not bound to create any world, including this one, and had there been no creation there would have been no diminution of God. He would still have enjoyed all perfections without limitation. By the same token, the creation of this world does not mark an increase in God's perfections: the mercy of creation is not anything added to God's being. It follows then that when we talk of God as "other," He is other in a far more radical way than anything within the world is other than anything else. The one distinction gives us the doctrine of free creation and the justification for apophatic as well as cataphatic theology. It also invites us to recognize that our relation to God breaks with what Aristotle tells us of relation in the *Categories*. Our relation to God is infinite, without relation, and must be to the precise extent that we do not engage in idolatry.

If we figure ourselves as liturgical beings, we will not be looking back to the theology of experience to clarify our acts and our desires. Such is Lacoste's contention. Whether with Schleiermacher we approach experience by way of feeling or with Rahner we posit a supernatural existential we end up at the same terminus. "Dasein exists in the world without God," Lacoste rightly says, and

then draws out a consequence that many Heideggerians do not draw or do not wish to draw: “this does not presume the nonexistence of God but teaches only that the world, as world, draws a veil between Dasein and God” (41). The infinite relation we have with God does not disclose itself in terms of experience but of non-experience. What of the mystics? Surely they had experience of God, people will object. Not all of them, it will be replied, or if they did they did not value it or wish to talk of it. Origen, Meister Eckhart and St John of the Cross— three figures usually called “mystics” though often for different reasons — are one in their distaste for the category. In his *The Darkness of God* (1995), Denys Turner goes so far as to say that if mysticism is “the cultivation of certain kinds of experience — of ‘inwardness,’ ‘ascent’ and ‘union’ — then the medieval ‘mystic’ offers an *anti-mysticism*” (4). He goes on to urge that “mystical experience” is a confusion of first-order experience and second-order critique of experience. “I have argued,” he says, that “apophatic ‘unknowing’ [is not] to be described as the *experience of negativity*. . . rather it is to be understood as the *negativity of experience*” (264). It is doubtful that mystical experience can be explained away quite so quickly and in such neat terms. Turner strongly implies that God does not reveal Himself in the realm of experience. Can we be so sure? Lacoste is on firm ground to deny that living *coram deo* is to be understood in terms of *Erlebnis*, and he is right also not to foreclose the issue. No Chair of Theology, whether in Encyclopedia or not, gives one the right to tell God what He can and cannot do. It is a hard lesson for some theologians to learn.

There is no experience without a relation of self and other (even the self as other), yet if God is radically other than the world we seem to have four options that serve as starting points for what would need to become very subtle discussions. We can say that God does not offer Himself to experience in any way, and follow the venerable path indicated by *finitum non capax infiniti*, or, with post-liberals, look to tradition and theological grammar rather than to expression as the surer theological path. Or we can say that the encounter with God, sheer otherness with respect to this and every other possible world, is the hallmark of experience as such. It leaves us elated, shattered, calm, certainly unable to say anything prosaic about it: yet it was an *experience*, if anything was, an exposure to the peril of being in the hands of the living God. Or we can say that we experience God by a feeling of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher) or in a vague and unthematic way in our ordinary human experiences (Rahner). Yet again we can say that the encounter with God yields what Marion calls counter-experience, a rebuke to any attempt to render the divine as a phenomenon.

Lacoste is rightly skeptical of “religious experience,” especially in the sense of *Erlebnis*, and consequently declines to take the path that Schleiermacher trod. Yet, since he is occupied with liturgical being, he does not take the second-order

concerns of post-liberals like George Lindbeck as his starting point either. Our encounter with God, he says, “gives itself to be thought. . . as nonexperience and nonevent” (55). Our relation with God is without relation in the sense that it is not determined by consciousness but is prompted by the assurance that God is there. So Lacoste distinguishes “human consciousness” and “presence of God”; indeed, the liturgical being stands in the presence of God without turning that presence into experiences, let alone feelings. The divine presence is given in our acts of kenosis, which we perform because we have knowledge — *connaissance* — of God and know what we must do. We must live in patience for the eschatological morning “when the experiential will confirm the conceptual contents of knowledge [*connaissance*]” (91).

It follows that our infinite relation with God is essentially Christological in character: not only in “the dark night of the soul” but also in each and every prayer. We are with God when we are imitating Christ, when we turn to begin anew, with nothing of our own to help us. In words taken, a little roughly, from Stevens’s great poem for George Santayana, prayer is “poverty’s speech”: the stammering words that come to us in the recognition that we have no words of our own with which to pray, in the experience that prayer is the releasing of even the words we are given into an absolute silence that does not cleanse them for our use so much as probe their insides, break them, dissolve them, call into question any attempt to figure our relation with God as anything other than infinite, without relation, and thereby to loosen the strings that tie us to the world. That slackening of attachment does not set us against the world or allow us to become indifferent to suffering but makes us see the world and suffering more clearly, enables us to pray with conviction for the Kingdom that will transform the world and, when prayer is done, to work for the justice that is the coming of the Kingdom.

* * *

Vocal prayer is “wounded speech” Chrétien tells us. When we pray we overhear ourselves speaking to God and are lacerated by what we hear: “the gap introduced by the addressee has broken the closed circle of speech, opened within it a fault that alters its nature. Another has silently introduced himself into my dialogue with myself, and has radically transformed and broken it” (21). One might well wonder about non-vocal prayer, as promoted by Evagrius and many others. Is there no wound here? If so, how does prayer occur? Bypassing these questions, Chrétien returns to his theme:

How is the speech of prayer wounded by its addressee? The person praying

addresses his speech to the divine capacity to listen. Unlike the capacity to listen of any particular human being, this listening is already vigilant, it does not need any call to attention in order to be aroused. The wavering speech of our voice echoes in, and in accordance with, a silent listening that has always preceded it and been expecting it. Being thus expected makes this speech unexpected to itself. To have God listening to you is an ordeal, a testing of speech incomparable with any other, for our speech is incomparably stripped bare by it, in all it seeks to hide, to excuse, to justify, to obtain in real terms. Speech appears in the attentive light of silence, the voice is really naked. (27)

All Chrétien's writings, in verse and prose, turn either closely or distantly around the figure of the wound. As he says in "Retrospection," the final piece in *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For* (2002), "It is the very event of a wound by which our existence is altered and opened, and becomes itself the site of the manifestation of what it responds to" (122). Our response is always belated with respect to a call, whether it comes from God or Beauty, and yet this need not be figured as a deficit. On the contrary, our finitude and our weakness are to be thought affirmatively, as the place where (and the means by which) we can offer testimony to the infinite.

This generous estimation of the finite is everywhere in evidence in Chrétien's writings. An unfriendly reader might complain that many of his essays seem to be composed with encyclopedias of philosophy and theology open before him, and that he does not argue a case or analyze texts so much as saturate the reader with knowledge of past masters. I open a page of *The Ark of Speech* entirely at random and find on p. 103 quotations or allusions to Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen, Kierkegaard and Dürer. It is hardly atypical. A more charitable reader, though, would follow Chrétien in his desire to see a response to the call as polyphonic, even choric. His essays are not only about hospitality; they are themselves hospitable to a great many voices from the past and the present: Church Fathers, mystics, philosophers and theologians from all eras, and poets.

Speech is the ark that carries what is, Chrétien tells us. And in saying that he sets himself against Hegel and, in particular, against Kojève's Hegel and those he influenced. (Nothing is said about Hyppolite's Hegel, or later versions such as the Hegel of Claude Bruaire or Pierre-Jean Labarrière.) The young Hegel tells us in his first attempt at a philosophy of Spirit that when Adam named the animals he annihilated them as beings on their own account. His reasoning is clear: as soon as Adam looked at a dog and said "Dog" (or whatever), he destroyed the particularity of the creature he was looking at and generated a category of canines. Kojève made rather a lot of this, telling us that comprehension is equivalent to murder, and Blanchot took up the thought in essays that entranced

a generation and beyond, assuring us that to say “This woman” is tantamount to a “deferred assassination.” Not without reason Chrétien notes that here Blanchot quietly passes from naming to saying, an illegitimate move that makes coming into being coincide with disappearance. And yet is not Blanchot the thinker *par excellence* of conversation, the one who teaches us about the human relation, and who admonishes us that if we do not speak we are likely to kill? There are times, many of them, when one wishes that Chrétien would pause to entertain objections that run against the current of his ideas. If anything, a little counterpoint would make his discourse more genuinely polyphonic, perhaps even more choric. A phenomenologist engages in what Husserl calls “imaginative variation” which includes the entertaining of counter-examples. Chrétien, however, is more drawn to encyclopedias than to phenomenology, and while there can be counter-encyclopedias there can never be an encyclopedia of counter-examples.

A contrary spirit runs through David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite*. Like John Milbank, he dislikes those postmodern thinkers who “can conceive of ontic difference only under the form of an ontological tautology, which reduces difference to mere differentiation (the indifferent distribution of singularities) and which suppresses the only real difference (the analogical) whose affirmation can liberate thought from ‘totality’” (8). Quite so, although the two uses of “only” are rather heavy handed: important discriminations are needed when treating Deleuze and Derrida, for example, for Derrida looks neither to Scotus nor to Spinoza, each of whom is significant for Deleuze. In general, the negative aspect of D. B. Hart’s case is weakened by the sharpish tone in which it is conducted. More often than I would like, he argues by adjective rather than demonstration. Jünger is dismissed because of the “dark, late romantic coloratura of his unwholesome theological *Liebestod*” (373), not because of any flaw identified in his assumptions or his reasoning. Unfortunately, D. B. Hart also succumbs to the temptation to snipe from footnotes: Lévinas’s essay “Reality and its Shadow” is called “silly” on p. 80 n. 80; Caputo’s *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* is dressed down as “poor” and “sanctimonious” with arguments that exhibit “weaknesses” and “recklessness” (89 n. 95); Heidegger’s reading of *actus* is convicted of “stunning vulgarity” (219 n. 84); while Marion’s *Étant donné* is judged as “brilliant but flawed” (261 n. 119). A little evidence would be a nice touch, and in any case a good editor would have pointed out the dangers of emotive judgments.

More compelling is D. B. Hart’s positive argument, which he calls a *dogmatica minora*, and which is made with a refreshing return to patristic sources. We will get a fuller, richer understanding of the infinite — that is, we will grasp that it is beautiful — if we read St Gregory of Nyssa than if we restrict ourselves to the

merely formal account given of it by Descartes and adopted uncritically by Lévinas. To read the Fathers, especially the Cappodocians, with care is to recover “a single discourse of boundless difference, one music infinitely expressed in the trinitarian *perichoresis* and unfolded in creation, and in which the creature takes part not through dialectical negation but through an endless and joyous *epektasis*” (317). Gregory uses *epektasis* and its forms quite frequently, usually with a glance back to Phil. 3: 13. In his rhetoric, at least, D. B. Hart seems most influenced by Gregory’s use of the word in his commentary on the Canticle, in which the soul strains towards God, and perhaps less drawn to the infinite extension of thought in all directions that is imagined in *Against Eunomius*. His home ground is theological anthropology rather than theological speculation. He follows Gregory’s eschatology (though not his commitment to the final restoration) in order to redeem from Derrida the idea of an endless deferral of full presence. As Gregory says in his commentary on Psalm 6, the one who always stretches ahead [*epekteinomenos*] will always ascend in a quest for transcendent reality that never ends. The beatific vision has nothing in common with the chilly self-identity that is sometimes imagined as “full presence.” I remember putting this position to Derrida some years ago, objecting that his account of God was itself rigidly metaphysical and had little in common with what the Church Fathers tell us of the Trinitarian God. He was unfamiliar with the material I was citing, he said, but — while making it clear that it was not a path he could explore himself — he saw no reason to object to the language of *perichoresis* and *epektasis*.

At that time Derrida had already passed from an interest in apophysis to reworking Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* for the present age. Ethics, not doctrine of God, was his concern; and rather than negotiate the difference between *Offenbarkeit* and *Offenbarung*, revealability and revelation, he dogmatically affirmed the primacy of *Offenbarkeit*. One consequence of this move, for the theology that is indebted to his late work on religion, is an ethics that tries to bear the whole weight of theology. This cannot be done, not even if we bracket the phenomenality of revelation and examine our relation with God only in terms of phenomenological concreteness. The other person is relatively singular, not absolutely singular, and any blurring of the distinction in ethics generates a discourse that is at best counter-intuitive (the other person becomes wholly other) and at worst idolatrous. D. B. Hart is surely on the right path when he reminds us that, for Gregory, “moral and mystical knowledge differ not in kind but only in intensity” (197). What is needed is not “religion without religion” but a Christianity that acknowledges and explores its ground and abyss in revelation without thereby denying the role of nature.

D. B. Hart’s interest in the Fathers is intense rather than broad. He draws mostly

from St Gregory of Nyssa and, being close to John Milbank, brings St Augustine into the conversation. The same is true of his use of contemporary figures. There is a generous comment on von Balthasar's theological aesthetics ("it would be quite appropriate were this essay read as a kind of extended *marginalium* on some page of Balthasar's work" [29]) but you will find no sustained engagement with *The Glory of the Lord*. Von Balthasar stands "at the end of modernity," according to one school of interpretation, and any attempt to establish the aesthetics of Christian truth must engage with him in a more detailed manner than is done here. Similarly, no mention is made of Chrétien's *L'effoi de beau* (1987), even though D. B. Hart might be sympathetic to that book as well as to an essay such as "Does Beauty Say Adieu?"

Nonetheless D. B. Hart is in conversation with a strong philosophical current of the age. His *credo* is announced in a rather unwieldy sentence:

I believe that what, in part, I mean to advocate is simply a phenomenology liberated from transcendental stricture: beginning from the phenomenological presuppositions that being is what shows itself, and that the event of the phenomenon and the event of perception are inseparable, I wish nonetheless to say that only a transcendental prejudice would dictate in advance that one may not see (or indeed does not see) in the event of manifestation and in the simultaneity of phenomenon and perception a light that exceeds them as an ever more eminent phenomenality: not only the hidden faces of a given object, or the lovely dynamism of visible and invisible in presentation, but the descending incandescence and clarity of the infinite coincidence of all that grants world and knower one to the other. (pp. 145-46)

This is close what Marion argues in *Being Given*, the book that D. B. Hart maintains is "brilliant but flawed." Doubtless the "flaw" would be the recovery of revelation as possibility, not actuality, and the reluctance to develop an ethics as part of the phenomenology of givenness. Is ethics for Marion something to be adapted from Lévinas (while talking into account the criticism of his account of the other person in *Prolegomena to Charity*)? Or is it to be construed, as with Barth, as commandment? To the extent that Marion attends to the possible rather than the actual, with phenomenology rather than theology, it will be the former.

D. B. Hart would have a liberated phenomenology — a "phénoménologie éclatée," perhaps — allow us to *see* a light that exceeds all phenomena. The Marion of *Le Visible et le révélé*, mindful of a critic such as Jocelyn Benoist, would insist that one should not pass quickly from the saturation of phenomena to talk of the divine. At the same time, he would underline that to argue on the basis of not seeing something ("You see a divine light, I don't") is to admit defeat as a phenomenologist. Blindness is no authority; it is a spur to see better than you do now. One might argue that

spiritual insight is impossible in phenomenology, since faith is suspended in the *epoché*. No one can fully suspend Grace, however; it comes before it is accepted. When St Augustine recognized that external items were created, he did so from within a state of Grace. “I said to all these things in my external environment: ‘Tell me of my God who you are not, tell me something about him.’ And with a great voice they cried out: ‘He made us’ (Ps. 99:3)” (*Confessions* 10. 9, trans. Henry Chadwick). A theology of perception must be a part of a wider theology of Grace. If a phenomenology of perception does not let one see “a light that exceeds” it is not necessarily because of a “transcendental prejudice” but because Grace, which finds its way into even the most rigorous *epoché*, has been declined by the perceiver.

Which brings us to the topic of images. In his entry “Images” in Lacoste’s *Encyclopedia*, François Bœspflug provides a concise overview of the disputes between the iconoclasts and iconodules that took place between Nicea I (325) and Nicea II (787), and then considers the theme of “images of God” in the middle ages and beyond. Only when considering Orthodoxy does he venture in the later times in the theology of images. Thereafter, the questions are centered on ecumenism and on the fading of interest in what was once a matter of securing orthodoxy. Catholic theologians, we are told, “are largely uninterested” in the use of images in proclaiming the gospel. “If need be they will apply themselves to thinking about the cinema, television, advertising images, or even virtual images and multimedia — in short, those forms of the image that have the most obvious relation to power” (755). No mention is made of Marion’s *La Croisée du visible* (1996), or indeed of his treatment of idols and icons in his first major publications. Bœspflug lists Hans Belting’s *Bild und Kult*, now translated as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (1994). Yet several recent publications testify to a revival of interest in icons: Moshe Barasch’s *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (1992), Alain Besançon’s *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (French, 1994; 2000), and Marie-José Mondzain’s *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (French, 1996; 2005). Both Marion and Mondzain are interested in our postmodern world of images, and both are absorbed by its origins in the theological wars of Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries. Only Marion, however, has a definite theological stake in the subject.

Marion tells us that “the question of painting” is a wide one that “concerns visibility itself, and thus pertains to everything — to sensation in general” (ix). Accordingly, the philosopher should busy himself or herself with this question. Philosophy itself has changed, having become “essentially, phenomenology,” he says, while phenomenology in turn has re-focused its energies on “the task of seeing what gives itself” (ix). I appreciate the chutzpah, though most

philosophers in the United States, Britain and Australia are unlikely to do so, and when they are further told that theology has become “an indisputable authority [*instance*] concerning any theory of painting” (ix), they are even more likely to be puzzled. The theory of painting, for Marion, is a space determined by idol and icon, and so immediately a horizon appears, one that contains St John of Damascus, St Nikephoros and St Theodore the Studite. The final essay in Marion’s fascinating collection, “The Prototype and the Image,” addresses the contemporary relevance of Nicea II, the council that affirmed the orthodoxy of icons. We have only to look around us to see that postmodernity enforces a stultifying culture of the image. Marion, however, looks behind this situation. From Plato until today, he maintains, metaphysics has been iconoclastic with respect to the image. For Plato — in the *Phaedrus*, though not of course in the *Timaeus* — the image is secondary and dangerous. In Nietzsche’s reversal of Platonism the image is detached from its original, and reality becomes a “world of images.” Now, in a reality in which there is no prototype there can be no image, either — “with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world,” Nietzsche declared in *The Twilight of the Idols* — and so the figure of man as spectator of images assumes importance, and idolatry emerges with fresh vigor, this time as the self-idolatry of the human. Thus understood, the will to power becomes a virulent form of iconoclasm; and, thus diagnosed, Marion says, our sorry postmodern situation can be cured, as Nicea II insisted, only by the icon of Christ.

Mondzain’s guiding thread is the word “economy,” which, as is shown, is variously rendered as “incarnation, plan, design, administration, providence, responsibility, duties, compromise, lie, or guile” (13). And so we grasp, more surely than before, the tight weave of Byzantine politics and theology (in the western sense of the word), the fine line between iconic space and territorial rule, the delicate accommodation of revealed truth to life, and the responsibility of the believer to enlarge the Kingdom by telling or withholding the truth as seems fit at any given time. In Orthodoxy there is a strict distinction between economy and theology: “The difference between theology and economy is the difference between believing without seeing and believing while seeing” (24). From which Mondzain derives a theorem: “The essence of the image is not visibility; it is its economy, and that alone, that is visible in its iconicity” (82). Incarnation is central to this theorem, needless to say, since the Byzantine iconodules defended reverence for icons and orthodoxy with respect to the incarnation. God the Father cannot be circumscribed, but Jesus the Son of God can; and since Jesus is fully human and fully divine, it is right and proper that there be icons of the Savior. Now, though, we live in a world of simulation that subtly orients us to discarnation. That Christianity makes the most of this new world — think of John-Paul II’s skillful use of the media — is an economy, to be sure, though one that might not

always be able to be reset in a proper relation with theology. For theology pivots on believing without seeing, while our postmodern economy turns on believing everything, even the TV news and Pop Ups on the Web, while being less and less able to detach ourselves from screens. In a world of simulacra we need to recommit ourselves to incarnation, not least of all as a critique of our culture.

* * *

Laurence Hemming and Denys Turner both urge us to have faith in reason. For Turner, this involves looking back at Vatican I and offering a defense of the idea that the existence of God is rationally demonstrable. Hemming's faith in reason is evident in his practicing a philosophical theology that is deeply informed by phenomenology, especially Heidegger.

"A term is predicated analogically of creatures and of God when we know from creatures that it must be true of God too, but also know that *how* it is true of God must be beyond our comprehension" (211). Such is Turner's argument, and its best moments are compelling and occasionally brilliant. Whether Turner is correct to find justification for his case in Vatican I is another matter. The Dogmatic Constitution of the Faith, which Turner quotes right at the start, tells us that "God. . . can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason" and declares anathema anyone who denies that God "cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason" (pp. 3-4). This means, of course, that Karl Barth is anathema, something that Paul VI probably did not point out when the great Reformed theologian visited him; and it also means that rather a lot of Catholic theologians are anathema, especially those influenced by "la nouvelle théologie." For de Lubac and his followers, there never has been any pure nature that is untouched by Grace, and so there never has been any "natural light of human reason." It is merely an abstraction. But does the Dogmatic Constitution bind all Catholics to believe that "known with certainty" means, as Turner would have it mean, "that the existence of God can be formally and validly proved by rational argument" (5)? Had the Bishops such a precise idea in mind doubtless they would have specified it. That they did not specify it allows the possibility of other sorts of "certainty" than those given to us by formal proofs. To be sure, when my nine-year old daughter tells me that she is *certain* that God exists because the universe must have been brought into being, or because there is such beauty and intelligence displayed in its workings, she cannot back up her claim with a clever argument. Nor do I think that our local Bishop, if he meets her, will require an act of faith on her part that someone at some time in the future could or will come up with a proof that will establish

beyond all doubt that God exists.

The idea of a formal and valid proof of God's existence, given outside all faith, is a legitimate topic in the philosophy of religion, even in philosophical theology, but is not something required by the *magisterium cathedræ pastoralis*. Once that is understood, it is possible to read Turner's book with the care that it deserves. *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* is a prolegomenon to a study that Turner seems to have no intention of writing. He tells us that "nowhere in this essay do I offer any argument intended as proof of the existence of God, nor do I examine from the standpoint of validity any of the arguments which historically have been offered as proofs" (ix). Readers who are disappointed by this news might think the author "pedantic" (ix), Turner confesses, although other words come more readily to mind. The Bishops of Vatican I would have had St Thomas's five ways in mind as one path to "certainty," and it seems disingenuous to rule out any discussion of them right at the start. Similarly, to take no account whatsoever of recent work on arguments for the existence of God — Graham Oppy's, for instance — makes Turner seem fearful of what he might find.

That said, Turner's book has large rewards for the patient reader. His account of the shape of reason and its proto-sacramental character is genuinely illuminating. "In Thomas, rational demonstration of the existence of God is reason stretched to the end of its tether; and though reason reaches the end of its tether by its own means of discursive inference and argument, what it reaches there, where its tether ends, is the territory of 'intellect', a territory altogether beyond reason's scope — which is another way of stating the paradox, oft-repeated in this essay, that what the 'proofs' prove is at one and the same time the existence of God and that, as said of God, we have finally lost our hold on the meaning of 'exists'" (87). Lit from one angle, this means that a rational proof for the existence of God would be an interlacing of the cataphatic and the apophatic. And lit from another angle it means that a proof for the existence of God would be proto-sacramental, having the shape of Christ to the extent that it would be kenotic. Reason, Turner finely argues, is rooted "in our animality" and it opens up "into the mystery which lies unutterably beyond it, for it can, out of fidelity to its own native impulse, ask the question which it knows it could not answer, the asking being within its powers, the answering being in principle beyond them" (261).

Turner is at his best when working on the ground supplied by earlier generations of analytic philosophers. When dealing with contemporaries, he addresses local English theologians, not philosophers; and in some ways his dealings with Oliver Davies, Colin Gunton, John Milbank, and others, obscure and needlessly lengthen the case that he develops. He is least convincing when responding to

European philosophers in the phenomenological tradition. Much of the book turns on claims made about onto-theology, but when the notion comes up he looks to Philip Blond and Laurence Hemming (whom he misnames Lawrence Hemming) for answers. It would have been better to go directly to Heidegger, not only to the comments appended in 1949 to his 1929 lecture "What is Metaphysics?" but also to the 1957 essay "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics" which makes it evident that onto-theology is a flexible structure of thought, one that organizes a good deal of western philosophy but that does not capture everyone's ideas about God. Had Turner read Heidegger he might have learned that onto-theology is not, as he has it, a "theological error" but that it arises in philosophy. Heidegger is less than clear, it must be said, for he writes "onto-theo-logy" when he should write "onto-theio-logy." Onto-theology becomes a theological problem only when *theos* is identified with *theion*, an issue that preoccupies Hemming throughout *Postmodernity's Transcending* and that he treats with originality and subtlety.

Anyone who reads the two books within the one span of time will see clearly that Hemming is the more exacting scholar and certainly the better writer of prose. It is useful to have colleagues read your manuscripts, but Turner relies too heavily on his students who are thanked endlessly for saving him from making mistakes he should have avoided in the first place by knowing his field as well as he ought. This is part of a general sense that *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* is a rushed job. It reads as though it were written hastily, not only in its lack of detailed reference to the full range of St Thomas's writings but also in its style. Many sentences are tangled, scare quotes are overused, Aristotle's *eadem est scientia oppositorum* is quoted to excess (and always in Latin even when taken from the *Organon*), and sentence structures are wooden and wearily repetitive. The elegant and crystalline prose of *Postmodernity's Transcending* comes as a very welcome relief.

What could be meant by "postmodernity's transcending"? At first you think of Jean Wahl's distinction in *Existence humaine et transcendance* (1944) between "transascendance" and "transdescendance." He conceives various hierarchies of transcendence, including one that goes downwards, as it were. In his mind this transdescendance is associated with D. H. Lawrence's unknown God in *Kangaroo* (1923), but matters would be clearer if we refrained from identifications such as this one, since the unknown God is traditionally associated with an ascent through the cloud of unknowing. Suffice it to say that much of the thought that journalists, inside and outside the academy, call "postmodern" has wished to recode what has theologians have regarded as transascendance as transdescendance. Thus Derrida is able to offer an unlimited scope to interpretation of texts not on the basis of a doctrine of plenary inspiration or even

Romantic genius but because these texts answer *as texts* to the quasi-transcendental play of *la différence*. Similarly, in his disturbing essay "Reality and its Shadow," Lévinas argues that art does not disengage itself from reality by going beyond the world, in the direction of the heavens, but rather compels us to speak "of a disengagement *beneath*" (*Unforeseen History*, p. 78). In art we have "an essential doubling of reality by its image, an ambiguity 'beneath' it" (83). Lévinas finds this insight in Blanchot's criticism, which he regards with tonic satisfaction because it points us away from the approach followed by Heidegger in his writings on poetry. Even in his fiction Blanchot affirms the path going down rather than the one that rises upwards, choosing the figure of Eurydice rather than Beatrice. In *Aminadab* (1942) a young man tells Thomas who has been ascending the floors of a strange boarding house that he should have gone downwards right at the beginning. "Down there," he says, "hardly have you descended into those long tunnels that pass through hundreds of feet of earth, when you feel as if you have woken up" (187).

Rather than focus on transdescendance, though, Hemming looks to transascendance, specifically to the sublime. He patiently questions Longinus and Kant, as one might expect, although some of the most arresting pages turn on how the sublime is read back into Aristotle. Throughout, his guiding question is "What theology is implied by talk of the sublime?" With Longinus the truth is what we reach out for, past the given limit. But with Descartes things change: the truth is already given because it is already in God. To use a word that Hemming does not, theology drops *epektasis* for talk of the highest value and thereby turns God into an idol. If *epektasis* is revived, I would say that it is only in Rahner's "transcendental experience" that draws us ever onward into the Mystery, and which is perhaps a theological negotiation with transdescendance. Rahner's transcendental experience seeks fulfillment in God, it goes without saying, which distinguishes it from the transcendence in question in Nietzsche and beyond. There we find transcendence without an end.

"Transcending is at the same time consumed by the image," Hemming notes, and adds that this "is nothing other than pure seeing, visualizing" (210). I wonder if "image" and "pure" can ever rightly be put together in this way, especially after what Lévinas and Blanchot have taught us about the kingdom of the image. But my worry hardly diminishes the impact of Hemming's case. A postmodern installation like Sam Taylor-Wood's *Brontosaurus*, which forms a touchstone for the entire book, "figures someone who refuses to look at us, who deprives us of the end, the aim and *telos* of our gaze, it represents us representing, and as representing, it represents us representing nothing — the figure is the quintessential image (*Inbegriff!*) of our own onlooking" (pp. 210-11). Such is "postmodernity's transcending": not a nihilistic debauch but an *ek-stasis* in search

of a transcendence it will never find and consequently must posit differently. In a peculiar way, postmodernity prepares the ground for recovering the God who exists *a se* by separating the divine from each and every value. Many postmodern thinkers might not think they are aiding the faith, but theology has its own cunning, it would seem, and, if Hemming is right, far more so than is possessed by most contemporary theologians.

Books Discussed

- David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2004.
- Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*. Trans. Andrew Brown. London: Routledge, 2004.
- David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003.
- Laurence Paul Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*. London: SCM Press; Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 2005.
- Peter Jonkers and Rudd Welton, ed., *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God*. Leuven: Peeters, 2005.
- Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed., *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 3 vols. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- , *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*. Trans. Mark Raferty-Skeban. New York: Fordham UP, 2004.
- Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*. Trans. James K. A. Smith. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004.
- , *Le Visible et le révélé* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005).
- Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*. Trans. Rico Franses. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.
- Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

KEVIN HART holds the Notre Dame Chair at the University of Notre Dame where he teaches philosophical theology and serves on the editorial board of *Religion and Literature*. His recent publications include *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago UP), *Postmodernism* (Oneworld), *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, co-edited with Yvonne Sherwood (Routledge), *The Power of Contestation: Perspectives on Maurice Blanchot* with Geoffrey Hartman (Johns Hopkins UP). His most recent collection of poems is *Flame Tree: Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe). Forthcoming are two edited collections: *The Experience of God*, co-edited with Barbara Wall (Fordham UP) and *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame UP).

©2005 Kevin Hart. All rights reserved.

Hart, Kevin. "Encyclopedias and Other Things." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 6 no. 3 (Fall 2005): 43-69. PURL: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/06.3/hart.pdf>