

That is a strong claim! McCormack promises a second volume, in which he will examine the relationship between Barth and the Reformed tradition on the one hand and modernity on the other—by way of systematic analysis of the doctrines in the 1924/25 lecture courses. Meanwhile, one of his chief concerns is to insist that Barth's later work should not be dismissed (or welcomed!) as 'neo-orthodox'. But the main result of this immensely impressive book, at least for a Catholic reader, is McCormack's insistence that Barth turns out to have been 'from first to last a theologian' and never the 'philosopher turned theologian' that von Balthasar and others in his wake have supposed.

As McCormack notes, von Balthasar recognized that the *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* of 1927, abandoned as a 'false start', was 'completely oriented towards that which was to come'—and by that he meant, not the Anselm book, but the Christologically grounded *Church Dogmatics*, of which of course he had only the first three volumes. Given the absence of the material available now, von Balthasar was not so unperceptive after all. Anyway, if he regarded Barth as a theologian trying to transcend philosophy, he had self-descriptions by Barth to support him. While McCormack's documentation of the genesis of Barth's work is very convincing, he still has to show us what difference it all makes to our reading of Barth. He has surely established that, historically, it was theology, not philosophical epistemology, that triggered off the later work. But what about this distinction between a theologian and a philosopher turned theologian? Why should it be such a good thing to be a theologian *tout court* rather than a philosopher turned theologian? Is it Catholic prejudice to question the distinction? Is von Balthasar a theologian or a philosopher? What about the lengthy philosophical excursions in Barth's theological anthropology? And then—what about other Anglo-American readings of mature Barth, unaffected by Torrance or von Balthasar? In particular, what about Robert W. Jenson's work (never mentioned by McCormack)? In his doctorate thesis, published as *Alpha and Omega* (1963), he argued that Barth inaugurates what he calls 'Christological ontology'—where the historical event of Christ radically transforms the classical metaphysical view of reality. But McCormack's work is a major contribution to Barth studies.

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THE CHURCH IN AFRICA by Adrian Hastings. *The Clarendon Press*, 1995. Pp. xiv +706. £65.00.

Today close to 25 per cent of all the world's practising Christians live in Egypt, Sudan and Africa south of the Sahara; on any given Sunday more people go to worship in Christian churches in Soweto than in London or Paris. This is so but it has not yet impinged effectively on the consciousness of Christians and non-Christians in Europe and North America. Just as the outstanding Jesuit missionary, Alessandro Valignano, believed at the end of the sixteenth century that the real hope of advance was in Asia so as late as the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910, Asia was seen as the area of greatest potential growth

for Christianity. Instead, just as in the early centuries when so much of the heartland of the Church was African, so it is again today. This massive new book by Adrian Hastings lets us see both how and why.

The dates in the title are somewhat misleading. The opening date, 1450, is chosen because that year an important Church Synod at Showa marked a peak in the power and influence of the Christian Ethiopian kingdom. Hastings rightly insists that to understand the position of that church, the earlier history of Christianity coming out of Egypt and reaching south to Nubia and Ethiopia needs to be traced and he does this clearly and sympathetically. The book ends with the 1950s rather than 1950 and needs go no further because the story of the Churches struggling with the problems of post colonial society in Africa, Hastings has already dealt with perceptively in his *A History of African Christianity, 1950–1975*.

In this volume, which is grounded in an astonishing control of a vast literature, Hastings helps us understand the growth of Christianity in Africa in all its forms, Orthodox and Monophysite, Roman Catholic and Protestant, as well as in the myriad varieties of the African Independent Churches.

The volume is divided into three multi-chapter parts, the first entitled 'A Medieval Environment, 1450–1780', the second 'From Anti-Slavery to Total Subjugation' and the third, '1890–1960: the Christianizing of Half a Continent'.

In each of these periods Hastings skilfully tells the various 'stories' in a way that gives due place to the foreign missionaries as well as to the indigenous Christians, clerical and lay, upon whom the ultimate success of Christianity depended. This is not 'mission' history, it is African church history, but the role of the missionary is both described and analysed very even handedly. The emphasis, however, is rightly on the African Christians from the key figures in medieval Ethiopia like the pious and long lived King Dawit to modern prophets like Alice Lenshina. However; neither is this book a 'great man' history for Hastings tries very hard to bring out, as far as the sources allow, the nature and character of popular piety, whether of the courtly Catholicism of the Kongo kingdom of the seventeenth century or of the twentieth century evangelical East African Revival movement.

During the last twenty years there has been a massive growth in the academic study of African Christianity and African traditional religion. Much of this has too often been somewhat ahistorical. This book is a vitally important complement to, as well as an important corrective of this literature. Hastings contributes to this discussion by, at various points, bringing out very perceptively the ways in which African tradition and Christianity mutually reshaped each other, so that in much of Africa today neither can be fully understood without the other. He also deals very effectively with the relationship of Christianity and late European imperialism, showing how varied this was in different places at different periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Unusually in such a massive work of synthesis there are many sharp new insights to challenge, not only the general reader, but also the various specialists through whose academic domain Hastings passes. For

example, he draws our attention to the importance of the African, Gustavus Vasa, to the British anti-slavery movement, whose autobiography in 1791 sold 19,000 copies in Ireland alone, yet who is barely noticed in the literature. Or again he brings out the importance of that brief moment in time, the 70s and 80s of the nineteenth century when Roman Catholic and Protestant missions had penetrated deeply into Africa, way beyond white colonial influences, and, in that period interacted with African society uncomplicated by the massive 'Scramble' that in almost the blinking of an eye, was then to lead to Africa's total subjugation by European power.

It has been usual for most historians and missiologists to deplore the terrible missionary competition that grew up late in the nineteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth. It reveals otherwise good men and women at their worst on too many occasions. Yet again, Hastings brings a refreshing approach to this topic. The missions would never have worked so hard as they did but for fear of people falling into Protestant heresy or Popish idolatry, he insists, but even more important and more seriously, he points out that it gave African people a real choice in many situations. It also gave them references with which to judge the packages they were offered and all this was a check on missionary authoritarianism. "Missionaries had to explain themselves more than otherwise and too great high-handedness might lead to mass desertion to another church".

Adrian Hastings has produced a book of great usefulness and importance, it is therefore to be regretted that it is priced outside the reach of most students in Europe and of almost all the Christians of Africa whose story it tells.

ANDREW C. ROSS

IONA; THE EARLIEST POETRY OF A CELTIC MONASTERY by edited by Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus. *Edinburgh University Press, 1995. 271 pp. £12.95.*

The name 'Iona' in the title of this book could suggest that the island itself is the focal point of the poetry in the volume, or, alternatively, that the poetry has all been composed in that island. The publishers and editors want us to believe that the latter is true, but the editors themselves, in their scholarly discussions of each poem, do not provide conclusive evidence that all eight poems were actually composed in Iona. They may have been, but final proof eludes us, and indeed there is evidence to the contrary in certain cases. Two of the poems may have been composed in Rum, while most of the others would fit a location anywhere within the *paruchia* of Columba. The common thread of the volume is not Iona but Columba, the famous saint who established his monastery in Iona around 563 A.D. One cannot help feeling that the growing importance of Iona, which came to fame on the basis of the saint's former presence, is now tending to eclipse the saint himself. The island of the title is not the *terruia* of Adomnán, but a much less concrete *locus cordis*, a unifying concept rather than a precise geographical location. It is, however, fair to say that the poems do have 'a firm connection with Iona', as the editors claim in

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