

into two phases, namely, a rapid rapprochement in discovering common ground, followed by the asking of what are the fundamental differences that still divide the Christian confessions, he suggests in Part I that some of the remaining obstacles to unity which we need to identify may be in themselves philosophical.

Morerod holds that practitioners of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue have employed, whether consciously or not, principles of dialogue which are rooted in the scientific culture that is dominant in our time. He makes his own examination of how philosophers, principally Popper, Kuhn and Feyerabend, have approached the understanding of the relationship between scientific systems. What he discovers is an incommensurability among scientific theories based on the limitation of human understanding, and thus a difficulty in choosing between systems, since each system addresses its own favoured questions which are not easily transferred to another. A crucial point, for Morerod, is that theological questions in demand of ecumenical dialogue differ from scientific ones on account of the fact of revelation by a God whose knowledge is unlimited. Thus Morerod scorns a merely pluralistic yet amiable future for the partners of ecumenical dialogue. However, despite the fact that the key difference here is made by revelation, the distinction between dialogues is not established without the aid of philosophical distinctions.

Not only does Morerod call on philosophy to clarify what is going on in ecumenical dialogue as such, but in Part II he also makes use of philosophy to address a principal question for that dialogue, that is, the historic division over justification. Morerod thinks that, since Luther intended to banish philosophy, the strictly philosophical distinctions between Catholics and Protestants have been ignored by ecumenists. He characterises Luther as having nevertheless imbibed a roughly 'Scotist' metaphysics, and he examines the questions that arise about the relationship between God and humanity in a manner not unfamiliar to Thomists. Morerod argues that Luther (and many others) fall foul of a false competition between divine and human action, where something cannot be entirely the work of God and entirely the work of a creature, where a role for the human will in justification is excluded by divine activity. Morerod notes that various moderns have rejected God in favour of human freedom, a choice made on the basis of the same philosophical presuppositions.

Against this false dichotomy and the theological impasse it engenders, he presents Aquinas's understanding of the radical difference between God and humanity, the compatibility of primary and secondary causes, where each in its own order is entirely responsible for an effect, and the notion of instrumental cause, by which the life of grace is well integrated, theologically speaking, into the life of humanity. Morerod suggests that a disengagement by Protestants from the philosophy that has dominated the Reformation and modernity would better serve the very cause of the Reformation. His argument is very much one for Thomism as the solution to ecumenical difficulties, and it makes me wonder what account Morerod would want to give of a healthy theological pluralism. Perhaps he will engage with that question elsewhere – in this book he has already promised to address not only the question of what is the proper goal of ecumenical dialogue but also of what should be the nature of the debate between ecumenical partners over the interpretation of what God has revealed to us.

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**Wittgenstein's Religious Point of View by Tim Labron (*Continuum*: London, 2006). Pp. 163, £60 hbk.**

In his book *Dying for God*, Daniel Boyarin discusses the attitudes to martyrdom of Rabbinic Jews and Christians. For Boyarin differences between the Talmud

and the writings of orthodox theologians such as Ambrose do not result from the former being any more tolerant of those who are deemed to act contrary to their faith, rather it is in the 'forms of textuality and authority that they generate and venerate' (p. 66) that the two groups differ. To illustrate his point Boyarin uses as an analogy Mikhail Bakhtin's distinction between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Ambrose and other patristic authors correspond to Tolstoy, with much stricter control on their texts, restricting the limits of the conversion within the bounds of orthodoxy. In contrast Rabbinic Jews are participants in a community of debate with an unwritten text which is not controlled by any particular individual or group, but which remains open for future questioning.

It is not my purpose here to debate the accuracy of this depiction, rather it is to draw light to a similar opposition that Tim Labron describes in *Wittgenstein's Religious Point of View*. Labron's thesis is that we can gain greater insight into certain aspects of Wittgenstein's later thought if we draw an analogy between what Wittgenstein is attempting to do and the practice of religion in the Jewish Rabbinic tradition. For Labron it is a mistake to identify Wittgenstein's thought as religious. Rather, his aim (following Norman Malcolm) is to draw an analogy between his philosophical practice and religion. This is not in order to provide an explanation (which after all would be most un-Wittgensteinian!), but to show certain points of similarity.

In order to draw such an analogy, however, we need some notion of religion. Labron argues that attempts to uncover a general notion of religion which underlies Wittgenstein's thought will fail. First, because they lack any content that is specific to religion alone, and secondly, because they run counter to Wittgenstein's instance that in order to understand beliefs we must look to the particular practices and forms of life within which they have meaning. If a general notion of religion cannot illuminate Wittgenstein's thought could a particular religious practice throw light on it? In contrast to Malcolm, who was unsure of ascribing any particular religious attitudes to Wittgenstein, Labron takes a lead from a remark Wittgenstein made in a letter to his friend M. O'C. Drury: 'my thoughts are one hundred percent Hebraic' (p. 4). This remark was made as the conclusion of a contrast Wittgenstein draws between the Jewish emphasis on the seriousness of this life and the Greek emphasis on the ephemeral nature of earthly life in comparison with spiritual contemplation of the eternal forms.

Labron further argues that far from having a negative attitude to Jewish thought (and his own Jewish origins) Wittgenstein placed the highest value upon it. Here Labron distinguishes between the Rabbinic tradition of Hebraic thought, and the medieval thought of those theologians such as Maimonides who imported alien Greek ideas into the Hebraic tradition. In opposition to Greek thought with its emphasis on ultimate foundations beyond our everyday practices, the Hebraic tradition reconnects us with the practices within which our religious concepts have meaning.

This opposition is used by Labron to read the development of Wittgenstein's thought from the earlier *Tractatus* attempt to show the ultimate logical structure of reality, to the later criticism of philosophies which seek to find external foundations for our practices. In order to throw light on this reading of Wittgenstein Labron contrasts it with that found in Philip Shield's *Logic and Sin*. Shield focuses on the *Tractatus*, arguing that Wittgenstein equates philosophical confusion to sin, a result of our disobedience to the limits set by logic. To this end he draws a comparison between Wittgenstein and Reformed tradition theologians, such as Calvin, arguing that just as they place the individual before God's will as the ultimate ground upon which all creation is dependent, so Wittgenstein places the individual before the demands of logical form, the ultimate ground of all meaning.

Labron argues that the search for the logical form of the world in the *Tractatus* came to represent for Wittgenstein a form of idolatry: an expression of the Greek

desire to find ultimate foundations. The narrative of Wittgenstein's philosophical development is familiar, but what is original to Labron is the comparison with Rabbinic thought, as Wittgenstein moves away from the Greek search for pure forms to the Hebraic observation of the concrete practices with constitute religion.

The project Labron attempts is extremely ambitious involving not just a narrative on Wittgenstein's philosophical development, but an attempt to situate it in the context of a dialectic between Greek and Hebraic thought. As such it should be viewed as the beginning of a conversation, particularly as Labron admits that his characterisations of Greek and Hebraic thought represent only certain elements of those vast traditions, and moreover that he is making no claim of direct influence from Hebraic thought on Wittgenstein. Nevertheless it opens up new avenues for investigating Wittgenstein's philosophy and has the great value of connecting contemporary philosophical questions with Rabbinic thought.

Conversations (even friendly ones) need not end in agreement and I shall end this review by raising two challenges to Labron's narrative. First, there are question marks in regard to his reading of Wittgenstein and his religious point of view. He discusses the saying/showing distinction in connection with Shield's treatment of it in the *Tractatus*, but does not trace its development in the later works. Hence he fails to address those readings of Wittgenstein according to which religion concerns not just particular language games, but the very possibility of language (to equate such a concern to the foundationalism of the *Tractatus* is surely to pre-judge the issue). In relation to this it is arguable that Labron fails to see the continuities between the earlier and later Wittgenstein and overemphasizes the distinctions. To this end some analysis of the influences upon the *Tractatus* and particularly that of Frege on the saying/showing distinction might help to clarify the continuity and changes in Wittgenstein's thought.

The second concern I raise concerns the direction of interpretation between Hebraic thought and Wittgenstein's writings. I noted that Labron makes no claim to represent the whole of Hebraic thought; however, my concern would be that his interpretation has been tailored to fit a certain reading of Wittgenstein. Just as, particularly in the reformed tradition, Platonic Greek thought is contrasted with the God of revelation, so here I wonder if Labron's reading of the Hebraic tradition has been conditioned by a desire to find a neat fit with Wittgenstein's rejection of Greek metaphysics (of course the reading of the Greek tradition is extremely narrow, to say the least). Labron must be thanked for opening up these questions and for providing the start of what promises to be a fruitful conversation.

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**BLASPHEMY IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD: A HISTORY** by David Nash  
(Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007). Pp. 269, £35 hbk.

Recent cases concerning allegations of blasphemy – in the unlikely forms of an English satire on the American talk-show *Jerry Springer*, and the naming of a toy bear – make Nash's history of the concept most topical, corroborating the book's contention that blasphemy is once again relevant in the Western world. According to Nash, in chapter one, the point at which blasphemy regained its relevance was Muslim anger at the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. The fallout made 'blasphemy part of a globalised world, thereby introducing the West to new religious groups claiming the status of insider' (p. 104); these groups requesting blasphemy law be extended to protect them.

Prior to the Rushdie affair blasphemy was increasingly regarded in the West as an anachronism, a throwback to an earlier 'repressive' age. The age in question, and the gradual move away, are well-detailed in the second and third chapters,