

Molnar, the key to Barth's Christology is his denial that Christ's humanity, as such, reveals, and he faults Jenson, Gunton, and McCormack (etc.) for failing to observe this principle. What does that principle come from? Molnar's answer is *sin*: fallen, creaturely nature cannot reveal God. So it is not the human Jesus who reveals God, but the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity. Bruce McCormack has shown that Barth's 'anhypostatic-anhypostatic' Christology aims to avoid violating Kant's objections to the appearance of the infinite (God) within the finite (creatures). Thus, as Molnar repeatedly reminds us, the incarnate Christ does not simply 'reveal God', but, rather, 'veils and unveils' the divine, veiling God as 'incarnate,' or creaturely, unveiling as divine. Revelation has to be dialectical because there is no *analogia entis*; the medium is not the message, that's the pure Barthian position. But, unless it can be shown, from Scripture, tradition or even reason that 'sin' univocally negates the revelational capacities of creation, the purist Barthian use of 'sin' as 'revelation-blocker' is just a fig-leaf for the opinion that the finite must anchor within the frontiers demarcated by Kant, unable to reveal the infinite. So the question is whether Molnar is not only contending (against Torrance the immoderate Nephew et al.) for a true appreciation of Barth, but also, ultimately, for an authentic appreciation of Kant, the Barthian one? If so, his Trinitarian voyage no more escapes from human, subjective and philosophical compassings than Rahner's does. For all his devotion to Barthian dialectic, Molnar wants the propositional clarity of early 20th-century Catholic philosophical theology plus all the Trinitarianness of the *Church Dogmatics*. It seems undeniable that he has achieved this aim, despite or because of the albatross.

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BEYOND THE BLUE GLASS: CATHOLIC ESSAYS ON FAITH AND CULTURE by Aidan Nichols OP, *The Saint Austin Press*, London, 2002, vol I Pp. 216, vol II Pp. 200, hbk.

A motive of credibility is a reason for taking the claims of the Catholic Church seriously. It does not demonstrate their truth by natural reasoning, for we can only properly assent to them by the supernatural virtue of faith, but it does dispose us for receiving the divine gift and, at the very least, presents a challenge to the mind. But where do we find motives of credibility? The First Vatican Council encourages us to look in the Church herself, with her 'wonderful propagation, outstanding sanctity, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in everything good'. Her capacity for survival and growth against all the odds, the heroism of her saints, and the goods of human culture

inspired by her faith: these naturally accessible truths ought, in principle, to convince the non-Catholic that accepting the Catholic faith would not be an unreasonable thing to do.

Fr Aidan Nichols's collected writings on faith and culture constitute a kind of motive of credibility, not only in their subject matter but also in themselves. They are not explicitly proposed as a Catholic apologetic, but that is how I see them and intend to use them. Give these two volumes to an intelligent non-Catholic, or to some dissident son of the Church, and you will probably find he feels provoked, but I doubt if he will feel bored, and I suspect he will be forced to admire the intellectual vitality both of the author and of the Tradition and traditions he represents. The 'touchstone' of these essays, Fr Aidan tells us, is 'epiphany', which he defines as 'the illuminating and transforming impact of a plenary Catholicism on a world which already participates, by the creative action of God, in the divine fullness of being and goodness, truth, and beauty'. Notice the word 'plenary': for Fr Aidan, the only Catholicism that can illuminate and transform human culture, the only true Catholicism there is, has the note of fullness and wholeness, an integrity of faith and practice undiminished by concessions to that fashion of the world which, with its wisdom, is passing away.

The subject matter of the two volumes of *Beyond the Blue Glass* – the title comes from Geoffrey Hill, the poet whose Christian themes are discussed in the second volume – is in itself an exuberant display of plenary Catholicism's 'inexhaustible fruitfulness in all that is good'. Under the rubric of 'Theology' in the first volume, Fr Aidan considers the perennial wisdom of his fellow Dominican, St Thomas Aquinas, in relation both to his own century and to the 20th, in the middle of which some of his disciples were moved to resist, as they saw it, the harmful influence of the movement known as the *nouvelle théologie*. One of the representatives of that movement, Hans Urs von Balthasar, is the subject of two chapters, and in a third, there is an examination of Balthasar's clash with the latter's erstwhile *confrère* and collaborator, Karl Rahner. The Trinitarian doctrine of the 19th-century Cologne theologian, Matthias Scheeben, is retrieved from the oblivion to which it has so unjustly and for so long been confined, and another German, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, to whose theology Fr Aidan devoted a whole book in the 1980s, appears in his true profile, not as 'poacher turned gamekeeper', but as the gardener of theology, who has to prune as well as tend his plants, since the garden of modern Catholicism is 'vital but rank – in the eloquent Cockney idiom, "blooming awful"'. 'Liturgy', a permanent and ever increasing preoccupation of Fr Aidan's, is represented by essays on Odo Casel and Catherine Pickstock, and by a measured comparison of the conciliar *Sacrosanctum concilium* with the papal *Mediator Dei*. In the second volume, Fr Aidan takes the demonstration of the

fruitfulness of classic Catholicism out of the lecture-hall and sanctuary and into the wider culture, first in a general 'Sketch for a Christological Aesthetics', and then in an examination of three artists, a composer and two writers, inspired to some degree or other by the Catholic faith: Olivier Messiaen, Geoffrey Hill and G.K. Chesterton.

Testimony to the Church's tradition of sanctity is given in the second volume with three studies. First, there is an exposition of the spiritual doctrine of the recently beatified, turn-of-the-century Benedictine, Columba Marmion, who by his retreats and spiritual direction guided and encouraged countless priests, religious and laymen in the pursuit of Christian perfection. Secondly, returning home-wards, Fr Aidan discusses the utility of the Rule of St Augustine for the sanctification of friars-preachers. Thirdly, writing more systematically, he sets forth the nature of the Christian priesthood and the priestly call to holiness.

As for what Vatican I calls the Church's 'wonderful propagation', that becomes evident in the essays on 'Ecumenism'. For example, in the chapter on Solovyov, Fr Aidan explores the power of attraction that the papacy, 'not simply as an icon of the Church's unity but as organizer of her world-transforming action', was able to exert over a 19th-century Russian Orthodox. In 'A Catholic Commemoration of Karl Barth', Fr Aidan shows how the 20th-century's greatest Protestant theologian, who had 'taken on and seen off' both the 'academically entrenched forces of theological liberalism' and the 'atheistic and Promethean' ideology of National Socialism, perceived more clearly than so many Catholics did at the time the 'menace' latent in the *aggiornamento* of the early 1960s, namely, the 'overtaking of the Church by the world'. Barth's warning, taken up by the young Ratzinger in his book on the last session of the Council and renewed here by Fr Aidan, points to the need for Catholics to recover that non-conformity to the world which, in every age, has been essential to the secret of the Church's 'wonderful propagation'.

Not only the subjects discussed in *Beyond the Blue Glass*, but also the qualities of intellect exhibited by the author in discussing them are persuasive motives of credibility for the Catholic religion. If there is a Catholic culture anywhere in this country, it is here, in the prolific work of this Cambridge Dominican. Is there anyone, in either ecclesiastical or secular academies, with anything approaching his scholarly range? Here is a distinguished commentator on Fathers and Doctors and contemporary divines who can also summarize the history of militant Islam in 12 pages, and tell you how much a three-week holiday in Switzerland would have cost a mid-Victorian Englishman. With a generosity of mind that is characteristically Catholic and Thomist, Aidan Nichols is interested in everything, whatever is true, good, and beautiful, as so many participations and likenesses of the First Truth, the Supreme Good, and Uncreated

Beauty. Read him, and you'll begin to share something of his own very Dominican *gaudium de veritate*. Of those writing in English, I can think of no one who is a more exhilarating apologist or, better, preacher, in the cause of 'plenary Catholicism'.

JOHN SAWARD

PROGRESS, APOCALYPSE, AND COMPLETION OF HISTORY AND LIFE AFTER DEATH OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS edited by Peter Koslowski, [A DISCOURSE OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS] *Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 2002, Pp. viii + 142, £40.00 hbk.*

This is the fourth volume in the beautifully produced set of five, the first two of which were reviewed in an earlier issue of this journal (*New Blackfriars*, 2002, pp. 542–4). They originate in a series of dialogues which contributed to the EXPO 2000, Hanover (Germany), whose overall theme was *The Human Person, Nature and Technology*.

The dialogues involved philosophers and theologians from five religions, and what was meant by a world religion, and which were chosen, were identified as a problem in the earlier review. The religions chosen were Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the set of contributors to each volume is different and comes from a wide range of national and religious backgrounds, making a rich input of perspectives. The intention was of promoting an encounter of persons, discussion of issues, and defusion of potential clashes between civilizations and religions. The editor points out the clear agenda of going beyond tolerance to recognition, and asking religions to clarify and shape their conversations and the basis of their co-existence, to give reasons for their truth claims and make them understandable to those who believe in other religions or are outside religions. The final volume will be on *Philosophical Dialogue of the Religions instead of the Clash of Civilisations in the Process of Globalisation*.

There is a dual emphasis in the texts on dogmatically neutral philosophies of religion and the confessional theology of religions, which, the editor asserts, would fail if it did not demonstrate the unity of humanity before God. It is suggested that there are three ways of finding commonality between religions : the investigation of the ethical/moral; the exploration of the common experience of mysticism and the 'third and perhaps most difficult way' of these volumes – seeing what religions have in common in their metaphysical statements about God, the human person, nature and technology. Almost all of these statements can be challenged for their assumptions and terminology from the diverse perspectives in religious traditions and philosophies and, in any book of varied voices, this becomes apparent.