

as Huby. These obscure origins of *la nouvelle théologie* in an English seaside town are little understood, however, and would make a fascinating doctoral research project.

The ‘suspended middle’ title comes from the description in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s study of de Lubac’s theology (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) — currently the only introduction available in English — of de Lubac’s predicament ‘in which he could not practise any philosophy without its transcendence into theology, but also any theology without its essential inner structure of philosophy’ (p. 11). Balthasar concluded his own book by emphasizing the paradoxical character of the resulting theology. Milbank, however, perceives the aporetic quality that abides, in which philosophy is sometimes practised before theology, and some theology beyond philosophy. These shifting boundaries become particularly apparent, I would add, in de Lubac’s essays on concrete issues like church-state relations.

The argument later moves into new territory. Milbank, inspired by Thomist phenomenologists like Olivier Boulnois and Jacob Schmutz, interrogates de Lubac’s ‘stuttering’ (p. 7) with the type of interpretation of Aquinas for which he is well-known and which tends to elide various dualisms: spirit is linked intrinsically to grace, rather than being purely natural; the entire created order is drawn, through humanity, to beatitude; grace is gratuitous because contractual, and thus presented as *influentia* or providential teleology rather than gift. The result is a ‘non-ontology’, or in Claude Bruaire’s words, an ‘ontodology’ (p. 96). This discussion proceeds with Milbank’s characteristic flair and panache and is the most arresting part of the book.

The brief final chapter on the limits of de Lubac’s theology in a receptive feminine model of the Church and of its laity raises questions that could provide openings for future work. Milbank bases this concluding assessment of de Lubac on the latter’s meditation on Teilhard de Chardin’s 1918 essay ‘The Eternal Feminine’, which presents both these great thinkers at their weakest, especially when under the scrutiny of the modern academy. De Lubac’s extensive ecclesiological writings, or the outstanding study of them by Paul McPartlan, receive in contrast no attention. Related images in de Lubac’s later monograph *The Motherhood of the Church* include birth, baptism, feeding, education, martyrdom, and attractive spiritual power, and suggest a more active notion of womanhood and lay ecclesiology than the obviously dated notion of femininity. They also provide suggestive models for the mutuality of nature and its sustenance which transcend the crude extrinsicist views of grace whose incoherence de Lubac and Milbank both convincingly demonstrate. They should go at least part of the way towards providing ‘something paradoxically passive-active, and radically passive only in the sense that the most active human action is passive in relation to God’ (p. 105). Perhaps de Lubac is even greater than Milbank is yet willing to admit.

DAVID GRUMETT

**WHY STUDY THE PAST? THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL CHURCH**  
by Rowan Williams, *Darton, Longman and Todd*, London, 2005, Pp. 129,  
£8.95 pbk.

Marc Bloch once remarked that ‘Christianity is a religion of historians,’ which is certainly true when we think that we look back to Jesus who lived in a specific culture and time in the past, we continually read – and give authority to – many ancient texts from a variety of times and cultures, and we continually refer – or at least many Christians refer – to the past as ‘the tradition’ and see continuity with that past as a vital part of our identity. Henry Ford, on the other hand, remarked that ‘history is bunk’ and ‘not worth five cents’.

Many people today, and many Christians, also share this latter sentiment, and it is not unknown for preachers – particularly of the evangelical variety – to imagine that

one can have a Christianity that is without a history or which ignores history as having any 'relevance'. It is this latter group that is the most obvious target audience of this little book of four chapters. However, its real achievement is not that it offers a justification for why a Christian must take history seriously, but that, given that Christians do engage with history, they do so with appropriate sensitivity and critical judgement.

In terms of historical sensitivity the book explores in a skilful way the most controversial topic in historical hermeneutics: given that 'the past is a foreign country', can we justify any study of it as 'our past' without falling into the pre-critical illusion that the past is simply the prologue to the present? In tackling this, we see Williams the systematic theologian at work: fully aware of the epistemological issues he is dealing with, he suggests a solution from the inheritance of theology. On the one hand, there is the need to recognise that the past is different and that if that is not acknowledged – he charmingly described that fallacy as 'seeing the past as the present but in fancy dress' – then not only is the past not understood in itself, but any contemporary theological judgement purporting to be based on the past is rendered false. On the other hand, we are the inheritors of the past and there are consistent Christian concerns that manifest themselves variously over time but which ensure that we are not just a continuity of people but of faith. Williams concludes that this demands from the Christian reading history as part of the narrative of faith (for it is not a problem that troubles historians as such) that they read the past analogically: recognising sameness in apparent differences along with difference in apparent continuities. So if an analogical reading of the past is what characterises Christian reading of their own narrative/tradition, what does this look like in practice? Williams's answer is the two test cases: perceptions of the Church in the early patristic period and at the time of the Reformation.

In the two chapters devoted to the two very different imaginings of the Church we see Williams not only as an historian, but as a pastor putting forward an ecclesiology that seeks to identify the essential concerns of Christians within any vision of the Church that can truly claim to be authentic. When looking at the early period he sees a continuity in the sense of Christians seeing their assembly as being the 'resident aliens' in human society, always fearful that their loyalty to the Lord would be compromised; and he sees this concern being manifested repeated in history as, for example, in the concerns of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany.

In the chapter on the Reformation period he sees similar concerns in several of the reformers, in their concerns that the Christian body would have a distinct identity in contrast to the general society in a time when society was seeking to identify itself without reference to the clerical services that a structure of clergy and canon law provided for it. From this study of how the situation in the sixteenth century affected the way people perceived the body to which they belonged, the author proceeds to ask some key questions about our perceptions today, and these questions are particularly pointed when it comes to questions of ecumenism, the unity of the Church, and what precisely we mean by phrases like 'organic unity' (see p. 82 for example). All the while in these chapters the Archbishop notes how historical evidence is abused to make cases: for instance, in the idea that there was a perfect past – if only for a fleeting moment – to which we must 'return'.

The final chapter is more tentative in its style and examines how groups of Christians today look back to the past to fix parts of their identities or seek to recover from the past to supply a new imaginative setting for faith. Here the danger lies in the notion that one can simply re-create the past or one can 'by-pass' a less amenable present. However, if the past can be held in tension with the present, if it can question the world of today with an alternative vision, then the past can be seen as a treasury for Christian memory.

This is an important book for anyone who is interested in what we mean when we speak of 'church', 'tradition', 'the witness of the tradition' and 'church unity', and its

importance lies in the frame within which the Archbishop presents these questions to us. As to its value in raising the key methodological questions in historical theology as a fundamental mode of theology, it suffices to note that I have already made it mandatory reading for my undergraduate class on the methodology of historical theology.

THOMAS O'LOUGHLIN

**CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE NESTORIAN CONTROVERSY: THE MAKING OF A SAINT AND OF A HERETIC** by Susan Wessel, *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, Pp. 380, £63 hbk.

This book cannot be recommended as a useful introduction or guide to the Nestorian controversy, or Cyril's part in it. Wessel's intention is to 'tell the story of how one bishop rose to prominence and another was sent into exile'. At a basic level, then, we are dealing with church history. But although there is an historical *narrative* here, there seems very little engagement with historical *problems*, and I found myself wondering if I had learnt anything more from it than I had from B. J. Kidd's narrative, published more than eighty years ago.

The second section of the book is entitled 'The Rhetoric of the Nestorian Debates', and a short answer to the author's question how Cyril became a saint and Nestorius a heretic might be that the former was better at appropriating rhetorical method. There is certainly more than theology at issue in this controversy, and an author is entitled to explore other issues at the expense of the theological ones. But the theological issues are, nevertheless, of central importance, and Wessel lacks sureness of touch in dealing with them. This is the source of my major misgiving about this book. For example, on page 44 we read that 'the immolated ram signified that Christ did not himself suffer death because by his very nature it was not possible for him to suffer: he was impassive (*apathes*) . . . By claiming that the Word suffered in his own body, not in that of another, Cyril constructed a vision of Christ that was singular and undifferentiated. By assuring his congregations that the essence of Christ's incorporeal deity did not suffer on the cross, only the temple born of the Virgin, Cyril carefully avoided attributing to Christ a dual nature'. This seems to betray a very confused understanding of what Cyril is actually saying in this passage from his *Fifth Festal Letter*.

On p. 288 the four privative adverbs of the Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith are ascribed to Leo, and we are told that 'For the strict Cyrillians of Egypt, Leo had not spoken like Cyril'. But a standard handbook would reveal that Cyril was comfortable with at least three of these adjectives, and all four of them are sometimes said to have been drawn from his works.

Nestorius is variously said to have held that the two natures of Christ were 'loosely connected by the *prosopon*' (p. 1), 'linked . . . by a single *prosopon*' (p. 133) or 'intimately and definitively joined together through the single *prosopon*' (p. 276). I think Nestorius likely to have been as surprised at this instrumental role of the *prosopon* of the union as he is to have been startled by the advice offered here that 'he would have been far more effective . . . if he had said that Cyril's Christology made Christ no better than an ordinary man'. It is surely not the case that 'his listeners would have recognised that he was using the same rhetorical manoeuvre that Cyril and his party had used so often' (p. 248). It is much more likely that they would have supposed that the strain had become too much for him, and that it was time for him to be found secure lodging in a compassionate monastery.

There is a similar fuzziness about the Arians. On page 132 we read that they 'had claimed that Christ was an exalted man, promoted from his inherently lower status'; but on p. 221 that they 'believed in a pre-existent Son of God who changed into a