

how the moral sphere reveals the way in which human desires are brought to fulfilment through response to the divine invitation (and call) to agapic encounter.

These newly released editions published by The Hildebrand Project are timely contributions (interventions, even). They are beautifully designed and accompanied by perceptive prefatory remarks by Alice von Hildebrand, John Finnis, and Rocco Buttiglione, respectively. These new editions provide a great opportunity to further discover Hildebrand since, as I have noted elsewhere, '[d]espite his major contributions to philosophy of religion and Christian culture, Hildebrand has, until more recently, remained a niche figure, well-known to only a particular segment of Catholic academia'. This is in spite of the fact that Popes Pius XII, John-Paul II, and Benedict XVI have heralded Hildebrand as one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century. Indeed, Benedict XVI said that 'when, at some time in the future, the intellectual history of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century is written, the name of Dietrich von Hildebrand will be most prominent among the figures of our time'. It is thanks to the Hildebrand Project that Ratzinger's prophecy may be realised sooner rather than later. Through its efforts, headed by Alice von Hildebrand and John Henry Crosby, the life and legacy of Hildebrand is becoming more widespread, especially in North America and Continental Europe.

REBEKAH LAMB

SOCIETY AND GOD: CULTURE AND CREED FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT by William Charlton, *James Clarke & Co*, 2020, pp. 195, £65.00, hbk

William Charlton is never afraid to bring tough philosophical argument to bear on big questions, not least those of religion. He does this with a rare combination of creative independence and respect for traditional Christian faith, integrating his expertise in metaphysics with that in politics and ethics. His masterly knowledge of the ancient world and his first-hand experience of living on a Polynesian island often enable him to observe our easy assumptions with fresh eyes. His style is not that of an apologist arguing to precise, dogmatic conclusions. Rather, he offers a view on how Christian ideas might best be rationally defended.

One of these assumptions is that we know what we mean by 'religion'. Charlton argues powerfully that this is a far from neutral concept, and that 'we apply the label to ... whatever in societies other than our own most resembles Christianity'. He offers a working definition of the word as it is currently used: 'a sub-society for life, not essentially confined to one nation or race, existing within a larger society, ... which [has] practices and beliefs at variance with those present in the larger society' (p. 43).

We are religious, then, insofar as we are social. Indeed, Charlton argues, we are human insofar as we are social. He makes short work of atomistic individualism in the manner of J.S. Mill, and develops a tri-partite view of human beings, familiar from his previous writings, as combining egoistic, social, and altruistic elements. Our social nature means that we have a range of emotions and attitudes towards our society and its culture as such, not only towards individuals within it. As social beings, we make the practical judgement (expressed in our practical decisions) that the customs of our society are, on the whole, right. This is neither a weakness nor a source of pride: it is an essential part of what it is to be human.

Christianity is a society not only with customs, but with beliefs. (Again, Charlton lets us take nothing for granted: 'belief', he argues, is a concept inherited from Greek philosophy, and many non-European languages do not have a word for it.) These include the existence of the Trinitarian Creator, and life after death. Building on Aristotle, Charlton argues that to say God is Creator is not to give a causal explanation of how the created order began, but rather to make a claim about its purpose: 'God is responsible for the natural order as we are responsible for our actions,' (p. 67). Whether or not we are capable of accepting that belief is in large part a question of the kind of people we become, as with all judgement of others' intentions.

Christians believe they are saved through Jesus Christ. The soteriology Charlton offers involves a double rejection of atomism. We are saved as social beings, by incorporation into the body of Christ, like the branches of a vine. We are also saved as part of a single story: incarnation, crucifixion, ascension, eucharist, and so on are a continuous, and continuing, whole, as we grow into the life of Christ by sharing the sacramental life of the Church. Regretting the lack of contemporary Christian exploration of the afterlife, Charlton continues this theme with philosophically disciplined imagination: the purified faithful, he suggests, might grow into sharing God's very creativity, extending their own love and sympathy in so doing.

Learning to live with Christ's life begins on this earth, and Christians form a sub-society not least because of their ethical beliefs and practices. Charlton makes some shrewd points about the slippery language used in debates about euthanasia and abortion ('right to life', 'person'), and concludes that Christians may have to choose between acting against their principles and abandoning medical roles. The sub-society is 'at variance with' the larger society.

Is it in any case a good thing to have sub-societies? Charlton's answer may seem surprising for a member of a Church which is and has often been a persecuted minority. He argues that multi-culturalism is incompatible with state education, for education is nothing if not 'the transmission of the customs of a society and the concepts associated with them from one generation to the next' (p. 159). A genuine plurality of cultures, and therefore of systems of education, would imperil social cohesion, while children from a sub-culture educated by the state are pulled in two socially.

Is the only way forward, then, ‘liberal’ indoctrination for all our children? Charlton’s unexpected and brilliant finale is to describe all those elements of worth in our own culture that are valued even by liberals - education, arts, history, public celebrations, sport, and so on - and show that liberalism only possesses these insofar as they are inherited from Christianity, while physicalism, psychological egoism and competition for honours are far from attractive compared to their Christian alternatives. Future generations, he concludes, might, to the surprise of the liberals, ‘prefer Christianity to secular liberalism not only as being more cheerful and providing more inspiring ideals, but as being more rational and even more liberal’ (p. 177).

A philosophically imaginative book inevitably raises questions. It was unclear to me, for example, whether the suggestion that ‘the bodies of the risen are the risen bodies of Christ himself’ (p. 120) denies the personal individuality of our risen bodies. The chapter on natural law focused on rather familiar points about the debate about *Humanae Vitae* and the theories of Grisez and Finnis and missed the opportunity to apply the implications of Charlton’s own understanding of human nature to personal ethical questions more widely. On multi-culturalism, it would have been fruitful to explore the possibility that ethical systems can be partly shared and partly divergent (an implication of some versions, at least, of natural law theory), which might give more room for circumscribed subsidiarity within cultures and educational systems. Finally, Charlton’s social reading of salvation might benefit from closer engagement with sympathetic readings by New Testament scholars such as N.T. Wright.

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VIRTUE AND MEANING: A NEO-ARISTOTELIAN PERSPECTIVE by David McPherson, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 230, £75.00, hbk*

David McPherson’s *Virtue and Meaning*’s primary contribution is to debates within *Neo-Aristotelian* ethics, but it will also appeal to those who more generally seek to overcome reductive accounts of human conduct. The book bears witness to the variety of contemporary approaches in virtue ethics, and highlights the different starting points and background assumptions of those who work in this tradition.

As the title suggests, the specific issue McPherson examines is the connection between the life of virtue and the manner in which meaning pervades human conduct. Although McPherson characterizes his own understanding of virtue as *Neo-Aristotelian*, his principal targets of criticism in the book are those fellow *Neo-Aristotelians* who follow Aristotle in understanding human agency through analogies with other natural agents.