Church teaching that articulates a politics of communion – of living alongside with others – exists but remains underdeveloped.

For example, the author points to the ‘common life we have missed’ during the pandemic, described as ‘the life of sociality, negotiation, jostling and plurality. The life of more than one household’ (p.223). With an appeal to the ‘life of sociality’, Rowlands shares Simone Weil’s view that people tend to ‘recoil from the other’ (p.299) and that it is by God’s grace that people hold the other in loving attention. Politics, therefore, requires a culture of ‘“not-doing”’ (p.174) in order that we attend to the ‘space between us’ (p.3) as the location of self and mutual realisation. We might well ‘fall towards’ this politics of communion, yet the call is to do so attentively otherwise ‘others with intentions we cannot guarantee will fill that space’ (p.301).

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IN REASONABLE HOPE: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON ULTIMATE MEANING by Patrick Masterson, *The Catholic University of America Press*, Washington, D.C., pp. viii + 208, £32.95, pbk

A few decades ago, the question of life’s ultimate meaning was not taken very seriously in academic circles. As Rom Harre writing in 1970 put it, ‘no one of any discretion writes about the Universe, Man, and God’. However, in recent years there has been a dramatic shift. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has a recently updated article on the meaning of life, and there one discovers that since the new millennium, thirteen books have been published which focus exclusively on this topic. So it seems that the time is ripe for a book on life’s ultimate meaning that addresses this question in a manner that is sympathetic to the Catholic philosophical tradition. In his new book *A Reasonable Hope*, Patrick Masterson argues that the question of ‘What does it all ultimately mean?’ can be answered most convincingly from a theistic viewpoint. By drawing on what is best in metaphysics, phenomenology and theology, Masterson is able to offer a very thoughtful and compelling account of this most important of questions.

Masterson’s book comes in two halves: the first half is theoretical in nature and introduces some rather abstract philosophical ideas relevant to the question at hand, and the second half, whilst still philosophical in nature addresses the question in much more personal terms. This two-part structure is motivated by the conviction that whilst impersonal theoretical arguments for theism are still essential, many people in our world today are unmoved by these arguments and are better served by theistic intellectual reflections that appeal to a person's own sense of self and of openness to a transcendent love which Christians believe God has revealed to us.

In the first part he begins by considering two prominent viewpoints from which this question might be considered: correlationist humanism and scientism/scientific naturalism, after which he presents the theistic viewpoint. According to correlationist humanism, human life provides the fundamental context for discussing the ultimate meaning and value of existence. What is specific to correlationist humanism compared to other kinds of humanism is that it posits that human thought and extra-mental being, although distinct, may never be affirmed as subsisting independently in themselves. It is only through this correlation between being and human thought that any sense can be made of meaning and value. Proponents of correlationist humanism such as Quentin Meillassoux recognize that their viewpoint poses particular difficulties for claims about the prehuman condition of the universe. Although attempts have been made to address these difficulties, Masterson explains why he is unconvinced and, hence, unable to endorse answers to the question of ultimate meaning that adopt a correlationist humanism stance.

The other viewpoint that Masterson considers, is inspired by empirical science and comes in two forms, one form being scientism, which supposes that the whole of reality can be reduced to and determined by the behaviour of its microscopic parts, and the other form being scientific naturalism, which admits that while the behaviour of physical systems cannot be reduced to the behaviour of their microscopic parts, nothing nonphysical is required to determine a system's physical behaviour. Scientism endorses logical positivism as typified by A. J. Ayer in which only tautologies and empirically verifiable propositions have meaning and value. For this reason, scientism rejects all teleological claims. Attempts have been made within scientism to address the question of ultimate meaning and these are typically expressed in terms of scientific progress, but as Masterson notes, such attempts typically attribute a purposefulness to science which is difficult to reconcile with a rejection of teleology. Scientific naturalism fares slightly better than scientism. Masterson discusses Thomas Nagel's account of scientific naturalism which affirms the reality of purposefulness and teleology in the temporal unfolding of nature. However, what Masterson finds lacking in scientific naturalism is that it offers no explanation for why there is any teleological order at all, and thus he argues that it fails to provide a satisfying answer to the question of ultimate meaning and value.

Next, Masterson turns to the theistic viewpoint. Here he discusses both the metaphysical reasoning characteristic of traditional natural theology as well as more contemporary defences of theism in terms of phenomenology and linguistic philosophy. Masterson certainly recognizes the importance of these contemporary trends in the philosophy of religion. For instance, the fact that he devotes the second half of his book to his own lived experience as a person of faith is a testimony to the value he places on the phenomenological presentation of religious belief and practice.

Where Masterson differs from many other proponents of phenomenology and linguistic philosophy is that he sees that whatever is valuable in these viewpoints should not be seen as rejecting traditional metaphysics, but rather as complementing it. So whereas someone like Jean-Luc Marion thinks that a mystical experience is an encounter with God's transcendence and that God's transcendence is only intelligible as something given in experience as a structure immanent to human consciousness, Masterson believes that there can be no direct phenomenological experience of God's independently possessed transcendence. Nevertheless, for Masterson, phenomenological experiences which have an air of transcendence to them can sometimes be taken to be a trace or cipher or created effect of divine transcendence. Accordingly, we should not be dismissive of such experiences, and they are worthy of phenomenological analysis. But at the same time, they do not negate the need for indirect metaphysical causal arguments that establish God's existence.

In the second and more personal half of the book, Masterson takes his inspiration from Saint Augustine's saying 'Only through love can one enter into truth'. Here he begins by considering his own self-involving love of God envisaged indirectly as a totally adequate object of desire, and he proceeds by way of a rationally articulated hope to a confident and assured affirmation of his reality. He argues that his own desire for God is not just another illusory aspiration but one inspired by an experiential intimation or cipher of an objective reality. He thus argues that God is a reality in whom he has good reason to hope and to pledge his absolute commitment, hence the title of his book, *In Reasonable Hope*.

It is here that we see Masterson adapting some of Marion's ideas such as the idea of saturated phenomena in order to explore how one's love for a finite good can lead one to confidently affirm the reality of the infinite good. As an example, Masterson speaks about his love for his deceased wife, Frankie. He speaks of his love for her as something present rather than as a past memory. His love for her is one that developed over time, first beginning as a self-interested love, but later becoming a love which valued her for her own intrinsic goodness. Reflecting on his own experience of being in love with someone who no longer has a physical existence makes it manifestly obvious to him that there must be emergent realities that transcend the physical order. Anyone who experiences such love and recognizes that its object cannot be reduced to the laws of physics will conclude that there must be some ultimate principle, namely God, that sustains this object of love in existence. Moreover, through the gift of faith we can affirm that Jesus Christ transforms our finite love so as to participate in the infinite love of God. And it is this raising up of human love into the love of God that answers the central question of the book, 'What does it all ultimately mean?'

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LOOKING EAST IN WINTER: CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT AND THE EASTERN CHRISTIAN TRADITION by Rowan Williams, *Bloomsbury*, London, 2021, pp. 266, £20.00, hbk

Rowan Williams's long-standing interest in the Orthodox Church is brought into constructive dialogue with modern Christian thought in this thoroughly engaging book. Its central assertion is that the common perception of the *Philokalia* – the rich collection of texts by Orthodox spiritual masters compiled between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries – as unduly influenced by Platonism, and therefore dangerously dualistic, is radically mistaken. Indeed, at the heart of the *Philokalia* Williams detects a profound understanding of human knowing which is inimical to dualism in all its forms. It is true that the language can often mislead; the frequent praise of 'angelic' forms of knowledge, for instance, often looks like an invitation to disembodiedness. In reality, however, the deployment of angels in the *Philokalia* is much more often a means to understand the comprehensive significance of the world as inseparable from its relation to God.

Williams is adamant that the ontology and epistemology of the *Philokalia* pose a fundamental challenge to all fragmented accounts of human knowing in a way that makes room for a 'capacity to see the material world … as communicating the intelligence and generosity of the Creator' (p. 29). This is essentially a Trinitarian perspective: to be 'natural' is to be as God intends, to be anchored in the life of the Spirit – that 'perfect mutual *eros*' (p. 35). The 'erotic' mutuality of the Trinity makes us aware that contemplation is no 'static gazing' but 'a steady expansion of desire' (pp. 41–2). Finite beings are always moving 'erotically' towards mutual relatedness, to a future that is inescapably involved with other subjects, so that to be 'created' is both to derive from the act of another and to be the conduit of generative gift to the rest of creation. It follows that any truthful representation – and therefore any truthful reasoning – needs to be grounded in the divine begetting of *Logos*, which is another way of saying that, in telling the truth about the divine life through the generation of the Word, God simultaneously tells the truth about all finite reality.

From this basis, Williams proceeds to explore a wide range of frequently misunderstood Orthodox notions. *Theosis*, for instance – the idea