

retellings of immediacy and transparency previously conceived in terms of revelation or catalepsis). As it stands, the story of modernity told in this volume has all the streamlined characteristics of a polemical target, while the clerical armoury matched against it is repeatedly recognised as inadequate. What are we to do? Dupré and Guerra ask. What is to become of us? Green, Hitchcock, Dougherty and Fortin ask. Maybe the answers to those questions would be less negative if modernity itself is viewed as more varied. Postmodernity and modernity, Lyotard continually repeats, are not period concepts. Until we have a more nuanced view of the cultural shifts between the late Medieval period and today's eclecticism, despondency is to give away far too much far too early.

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RELIGION AND REVELATION. A THEOLOGY OF REVELATION IN THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS by Keith Ward, *Clarendon Press*, Oxford, 1994. pp.350.

This book rests on the thought that a proper understanding of the Christian faith depends upon an acquaintance with the beliefs of other religions. For instance, we might suppose that our assessment of the idea that the Bible is an inerrant document should take account of the fact that other faiths have advanced the same kind of claim on behalf of their scriptures (p.325). In this sort of fashion, Ward develops a case for a 'comparative theology', which is to be distinguished from traditional theology by its inter-faith perspective, and which differs from religion studies on account of its interest in the truth (and not merely the history or sociology) of religious claims (p.40). A comparative theology can be undertaken from a confessional point of view, but the confessionalism of such an approach is to be tempered by a serious resolve to understand the other faiths on their own terms.

Ward applies this comparative method to the question of revelation in particular. He concludes that Christians have good reason to regard all of the major world faiths as revealed. Thus they may consider the Koran in the same light as the Old Testament, at least in so far as it is treated as more than a merely human construct (p.190); and in a similar way, Buddhism may be taken to provide a useful resource for Christian theology, for instance as a corrective to the tendency of some Christians to downplay the role of individual responsibility (pp.334-335). Ward's survey of the different faiths also includes a valuable discussion of primal religions. Here again, he proposes that Christians may regard other faiths as genuine conduits of revelation, even if these faiths are also subject to various distorting influences (p.80).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this general project. And Ward is particularly well-equipped to undertake it, given his wide-

ranging interests in Christian theology, philosophy of religion, and world religions. As a detailed and clearly argued attempt to develop such an inter-faith perspective, this book bears comparison with John Hick's *An Interpretation of Religion*, and will hold more appeal for many Christians in so far as it seeks to discriminate between the cognitive standing of the different faiths, rather than considering them, in the style of Hick, as equally adequate 'mythological' representations of the truth. To this extent then, Ward's approach is broadly 'inclusivist', adopting the standpoint of the Christian faith, but willing to attribute important insights to other traditions, including insights which have been overlooked in the Christian tradition. But at the same time, Ward, here like Hick, supposes that the primary function of revelation is not to provide information, but to relate the person to a supreme value (pp.215–216). In so far as this verdict applies to the Christian faith also, and in so far as all the major faiths provide a way of relating practically to the divine, the Christian claim to 'include' the others will need to be interpreted accordingly. Indeed, Ward's view seems to point towards a 'meta-pluralism', in so far as he implies that members of the different traditions are equally entitled to adopt an inclusivist interpretation of the other faiths (p. 217). In keeping with this general approach, Ward's procedure is not so much to argue for the superiority of the Christian view, but rather to offer a Christian explanation of why other faiths should lack certain insights (in relation to Buddhism: p. 166), to demonstrate how hostility to Christianity may in some cases reflect a misunderstanding of Christian belief (in relation to Islam: p.181), and to establish the coherence of the Christian scheme (for instance, in his exposition of the doctrine of the incarnation: pp.265–273.)

It seems to me that Ward is absolutely right on the central methodological point: a credible modern theology must indeed be constructed within an inter-faith context. Of course, for Christians, the thorny issue concerns the extent to which Christian claims should be relativised as a consequence. In this work, by contrast rather with his earlier treatment of these issues in *A Vision to Pursue*, Ward seeks to combine a sensitivity to the insights of non-Christian faiths with a broadly orthodox affirmation of his own tradition. Others will say, of course, that the consistent adoption of such an approach will call for a re-thinking of central elements of the orthodox view. Whatever the outcome of this debate may be, it marks, surely, an exciting new episode in the history of theology. Ward's book is to be commended as a carefully researched and stimulating contribution to this developing discussion.

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