

is advocating 'a totalizing, absolute metanarrative' which 'must necessarily entail a certain violence and exclusion of difference in spite of his claims to the contrary' (p. 66). This is problematic on two fronts: (a) as I have recently argued elsewhere, in contemporary theology the language of metanarrative is batted about (and not just by Hyman) with an initial tip of the hat to Lyotard, but then launches into a notion of metanarrative that has nothing to do with Lyotard's analysis. For Lyotard, metanarratives are distinctively modern systems of legitimation which appeal to (illusory) universal human Reason as the ground of their legitimation (because, for Lyotard, the 'postmodern condition' is precisely a legitimation crisis). As such, Milbank is obviously not offering a 'metanarrative' since his work sets out to critique the very idea of a universal 'secular' reason. Further, it is not at all a question of their *scope* (tribal narratives tell all encompassing stories, but these are not *metanarratives*); so for Lyotard, the problem with metanarratives has nothing to do with being 'totalizing' or 'exclusionary.' So, if Hyman wants to charge that the problem with Milbank's 'metanarrative' is totalizing and violent because it is exclusionary, he must first concede that this is no longer within the Lyotardian universe of discourse. Instead, Hyman criticizes Milbank for offering a 'metadiscourse' which 'positions' other discourses (p. 4), making theology as 'master discourse' which thereby 'masters' other discourses (p. 79). But then we must then note that this critique only holds if one adopts the 'logic of determination' noted above; but the acceptance of such a logic is not required. Further, this would seem to commit Hyman to a notion that any principle of organization unjust and violent. (b) Part of the problem stems from Milbank's own lack of precision regarding what he means when he (sometimes) asserts that theology is a metanarrative or 'metadiscourse.' Here again, it cannot mean what Lyotard means, since Milbank's project is a *confessional* one: the story is not told by Reason but by and from *faith* (a term conspicuously absent from Hyman's analysis).

(3) There is a lack of precision regarding three key terms: philosophy, theology, and religion. This is due in part, I would concede, to Milbank's own lack of precision regarding these terms. I think Hyman's book will move our discussion forward if it becomes an occasion for us to more carefully delineate the definition and relation of these terms in a 'postmodern' context.

JAMES K.A. SMITH

**SPIRIT AND REALITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS** by Patrick Sherry, *SCM Press*, London 2002, second edition. Pp. viii + 184, £14.95 pbk.

It is a measure of our nihilistic culture that it has become almost as difficult to speak of beauty as it is of love. Beauty is now more often connected with food and personal appearance than with any transcendental experience. But in some small circles, despite it smacking (unjustifiably) of elitism, transcendental language is kept going. Does the Church promote such language? With beauty, only to a limited extent. Patrick Sherry, recently retired as Professor of Philosophical Theology at Lancaster University, made an important contribution to this language ten years ago and *SCM* are to be thanked for having re-issued, in a slightly expanded and updated edition, a

book that was originally published by the Oxford University Press in 1992.

Sherry's book is about the Holy Spirit as much as about beauty and it is a contribution to Trinitarian theology but, as he maintains that a weaker form of his argument could be accepted by Unitarians, Jews and Muslims, beauty remains the point of focus. In the stronger argument, beauty is a form of revelation and is a source for doing theology on a par with the usual sources (scripture, tradition, etc) and prayer, liturgy and personal experience. Beauty is a reflection of divine glory and its perception is an act of grace promoted by the Holy Spirit, just like the Son who 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature'. God is himself beautiful and it is the Holy Spirit who beautifies the world. Beauty has an eschatological dimension, as through it we have glimpses of a renewed creation. Beautiful things are also an aspect of sacramentality as 'outward and visible signs' of the divine nature. This is reflected in the writings of the Church Fathers who were much influenced by Platonism, but Professor Sherry resists this philosophical tendency to give a more integrated theology of creation.

In his exposition, Sherry draws on a number of Christian authors West and East, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, namely: Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, Bulgakov, Evdokimov and von Balthasar. Yet his main point is that aesthetics has been an area insufficiently exploited in the history of theology. Looking back over the ten years since the first edition (as the author does in his own Postscript) we can note that it appeared just three years after George Steiner's *Real Presences* with its withering attack on deconstructionism and certain forms of postmodernism. Invigorating as Steiner's criticism was, that book was less successful at building a positive and constructive (theological) response to recent relativism. In that context Patrick Sherry, though not obviously influenced by Steiner (there is only one reference to him in this book), made an important positive theological statement of his own about the reality of beauty, drawing on earlier Christian writers. It looks as though the greatest influence here is Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics* appeared in this country in 1982–1991.

If there is a weakness in Sherry's book it is that it is too wrapped up in historical exposition and theological discourse at the expense of analysing theologically particular artistic creations. One of the author's intentions, however, is to reflect on the lack of beauty in modern Church practice, especially in the liturgy where an emphasis on a passive 'hearing the word' has stifled the creativity of congregations. Nonetheless, congregations have been more active than in the recent past. If not much religious building is being completed and little is on offer in Christian art, music is in better shape. If we can resist the banalities of recent evangelically inspired religious music in our public liturgies, we might then respond better to the higher aspirations of someone like James Macmillan. Sherry is certainly convinced that a renewed interest in beauty could transform our preaching with a language that incorporates radiance, joy and humour.

GEOFFREY TURNER