

Anglican decision to ordain women. A convergence towards a common understanding of *episcopate* is reported to have surfaced in all four dialogues and this is closely allied to the shared perception that *episcopate* needs to be exercised in a collegial fashion (p. 123f). It is stated, for example, that collegiality is expressed on the Reformed side by 'the synodical polity', and on the Catholic side by the episcopal college, 'the understanding of which is in process of further development'. This last clause might strike many Roman Catholics as somewhat optimistic in the light of their experience of how authority in their Church is exercised at the present time.

Indeed, there is an element of mutual exhortation just below the surface of this fascinating book, as Catholics drop strong hints to the others on a variety of issues and the others, notably the Anglicans, hint diplomatically about their interest, for example, in the idea of the *reception of doctrine by the faithful* currently being developed by Catholic theologians. Both sides occasionally convey the feeling that if only the other lot would just loosen up a bit on this or that issue then things could move forward much better. For the most part the language used to express disagreements is polite and decorous: we read of how Anglicans 'hesitate' on the issue of papal infallibility (p. 140), of how Methodists are 'reticent' on some other point, and there are many occasions when it is said that 'further dialogue is necessary'. It comes as all the more surprising, therefore, to come across the word 'repugnance' repeated several times by the Reformed Church in its response to the use of the term 'infallibility' by the Catholic Church – but much better to have this clear statement than too much of the coy and diplomatic.

While this is a most valuable book, it is not an easy read. With reference being made to dialogues on similar issues over many years with four different partners, there is inevitably a good deal of repetition; at the same time the differences in degrees of agreement between the Catholic Church and the other four can make it difficult to form a clear view of how things stand with any one of them, for example on an issue such as the duration of the Lord's presence in the eucharist. The authors have done much to help the reader, however, with clear headings and sub-headings and very useful summaries at the end of each chapter. The final chapter entitled 'Some Preliminary Conclusions' is particularly helpful both for celebrating what has so far been achieved and in identifying the problem areas where further dialogue is needed.

JOSEPH FITZPATRICK

AGAINST THE TIDE: LOVE IN A TIME OF PETTY DREAMS AND PERSISTING ENMITIES by Miroslav Volf, *William B. Eerdmans*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 2010, pp. xii + 211, £11.99 pbk

Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School and is already well known internationally for his contributions to theology. Yet to introduce him seems to be the clearest explanation of what this book is trying to achieve. A collection of short articles, almost invariably no more than three pages in length, spanning over a decade's work is a fresh way to present the thoughts of this leading theologian. In previous books, Volf focused on forgiveness and reconciliation in societies that seem stripped of grace. The publication of *Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities* draws together many of the lessons of these previous explorations and presents them in fresh contexts across a number of topics including culture and politics, giving, mission, other faiths, and evil. The background picture Volf presents is that of a world characterised by selfishness. Indeed Volf is quite

fond of Philip Roth's succinct characterisation of people as "black holes of self-absorption": manipulating, cheating, deceiving, and exploiting others.' As bleak as that sounds stated baldly, it is a platform for an alternative vision: a hope. This hope is for a life that takes the dignity of others seriously and is founded on the love of God in his judgement and forgiveness.

The original place of publication – the popular US theological magazine *The Christian Century* – may account for the brevity and immediacy of these essays, but their depth and challenge is testament to the personal and dialogical elements in each. These elements come out most in the tremendous sensitivity Volf displays in anticipating potential objections to his arguments. This sensitivity allows the objections to function as springboards to bring the reader to the substance of the argument more quickly. This makes subtle and challenging theology possible in short spaces and makes for very accessible reading.

A particularly noteworthy example of this is the essay *Evil and Evildoers*, the first of a number of essays on this subject. This article, as with many in this book, is based on an argument Volf had with a friend. Volf's friend is arguing that it is inhumane to call someone evil and we should instead note the pernicious influences and circumstances to be blamed and addressed. Implicit in this argument is that a strong insistence on labelling someone as evil can have a dehumanising effect, casting them as some kind of 'shape-shifting' demon, which is fundamentally unhelpful since it presents an obstacle to learning and makes the person in question vulnerable to vigilante action. This is hard to deny. Volf manages to argue to greater depth by introducing, with great subtlety, a perspective from the Christian tradition: when his friend charges that Bin Laden is unhelpfully seen as evil incarnate Volf agrees that it is indeed unhelpful but also impossible for the Christian tradition because evil cannot be incarnate. Those who do evil remain good creatures of God: though they commit evil they are not qualitatively different from the rest of us. Volf is therefore concerned to recognise Bin Laden as part of the human race by naming his evil and drawing attention to our unity with him as good creatures with the potential to cause evil, all of whom are answerable to and capable of being forgiven by God.

The dialogical style and the personal stories used in this and many other articles lend a very engaging immediacy to the arguments. Personality is quite important to the appeal of this text. Volf is himself a very interesting character: belonging to a religious minority in a war-torn country (the Evangelical Church in Croatia), imprisoned by an oppressive regime, and now a leading academic at one of the world's best universities (having studied with Jürgen Moltmann in Tübingen). The shape of his life and the seriousness with which he takes his witness in theology comes across, lending credibility to his words. As appealing as these aspects make the text, a question nonetheless hovers: for whom is this book meant? Those already familiar with Volf's work are unlikely to find much that is new here. The picture is similar to many of his other books. That should not be surprising since this collection spans many years and should perhaps be considered more of a summary than an advance. Since the nature of the collection creates an overall sketch of the shape of Volf's theology, clergy and lay people may find this quite a user-friendly ingress into political theology: that is, a theology concerned with how Christian faith is lived out in this world. The immediacy with which complex theological ideas are expounded make it well suited as a further reading text for theology undergraduates in their early stages. The confessional depth of these articles may even make this book useful as a sort of 'thought for the day' devotional for some; certainly each article deserves its own space to be pondered.

This book is an excellent example of the unity of thought in theology across the diverse range of topics in contemporary life. Those seeking a snapshot of this

fine and well-ordered thinker and reflector on Christian faith will find here much to stimulate them.

A.D.R. HAYES

SECULARIZATION AND THE WORLD RELIGIONS edited by Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt, *Liverpool University Press*, 2009, pp. x + 325, £70 hbk, £14.95 pbk

Unexpectedly (for sociologists of religion) the term 'secular' has of late become a battleground over the place of Christianity in Europe and in British society in particular. For those within Catholicism, it has emerged as a nefarious process that marks the hostility of political and cultural elites who conspire to discredit and marginalise the faith. From the other side, it has become a strategy of desire to defenestrate Christianity, with all its antique prohibitions on sexual emancipation, from the public square. In short, the 'secular' has become the battleground for cultural wars.

Yet, despite, its significance and seeming fusion with modernity, the term is remarkably under-theorised and is deeply perplexing in sociology, not least because of a realisation, that when compared with the vitality and significance of religion in the USA, Europe is markedly exceptional. This suggests that there is something parochial if not misplaced about European, and especially British, assumptions that religion is fated to collapse with the advance of modernity. Also emerging is a realisation that secularisation embodies far more complex processes than many in contemporary disputes seem to realise.

Nobody seriously interested in debates on multiculturalism, faith communities and on the place of religion in modern society can neglect this highly important and original collection. It manages to draw out the distinctively Christian basis of secularisation, but at the same time points to the distinctive formats that emerge from the responses to modernity of non-Christian religions such as Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Whilst these responses have been raised elsewhere in more specialist venues, it is difficult to think of an equivalent collection of essays that brings these issues together in an accessible way, hence its enormous value.

The collection, impeccably produced by Liverpool University Press (though sadly lacking an index) emerged from the *Forum für Verantwortung* series and is based on a conference, directed by Hans Joas, at the European Academy, at Saarland and held in April 2006. Impeccably translated by Alex Skinner, the essays are masterly, scholarly, highly readable and replete with many unexpected insights. With the exception of Casanova and Martin (both of whom are in fine form), the contributions are German in origin and this lends a further novel property to the collection. The introduction by Joas is exemplary. While many of the contributors are specialists in religion, their contributions flow well in a coherent and fruitful sociological direction.

Containing thirteen essays covering Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, the collection also has essays on the religious situation (as relating to secularisation) in Europe, the USA, and East Asia, the use of the European model of secularisation in relation to America and Africa, and a very original contribution on the desecularization of the Middle East conflict. Standing alone is Fischer's essay, chapter 8, 'Science Doesn't Tremble: the secular natural sciences and the modern feeling of life'. The essay has much to commend.

Fischer is professor of the history of science at the University of Constance and writes well, with authority and with a sense of topicality. By contrasting the forms of rhetoric employed in the natural sciences with that proper for characterising