

be almost the final word on the art history of the book of *Revelation*, this book is also a contribution to the newly fashionable area of biblical studies called reception history; and the authors further succeed in their stated aim of showing the continuing importance of the images of *Revelation* as symbolizing fundamental aspects of human existence and experience. While it is true that due to their immediacy images have the power to provide a more accessible and arresting way of making theological and ethical nuances, and the book shows well how they can serve as an interpretative and exegetical tool, nevertheless *Revelation* is a special case. It is the only visionary text in the New Testament and as such obviously lends itself to this kind of treatment. A new stage in the discussion of the problem of theology and imagery would be to consider theologically what is the theological relationship between word and image, particularly with regard to the normative status of the Word of God, and in view of the fact that the Oxford lexicographers have recently declared that the emoji, an image, is actually a word.

MARY CHARLES-MURRAY SND

**A CULTURAL STUDY OF MARY AND THE ANNUNCIATION: FROM LUKE TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT** by Gary Waller, *Pickering & Chatto*, London, 2015, pp. xi + 219, £60.00, hbk

In 1973 Gerhard Richter made a series of canvases of the *Annunciation after Titian*. They are based on a postcard of Titian's *Annunciation* in Venice's *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*. In the series Richter blurs and abstracts the form and colour of the postcard of Titian's painting, creating works with many echoes. To anyone who has an interest in the cultural presence of religious iconography and images one meaning leaps out. Richter's series of paintings is about the blurring and disappearance of the sacred. This series illustrates Max Weber's well-known tale of the disenchantment of the modern world. But as Gary Waller points out in this fascinating book Richter never *erases* Titian's *Annunciation*. It is still there. Weber's story is one about the decisive collapse of the enchanted cosmos and the coming of rational modernity, but as Richter's series can be taken to show maybe the sacred continues to haunt.

To some degree Waller's book takes up the question asked by Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Taylor wants to know how it can be that it is no longer possible to believe in the sacred universe which was simply taken as given in 1500. But whereas Taylor writes at the level of the grand narrative, Waller focuses on the specificity of the Annunciation and how its transforming meanings and weightings over the past five hundred years or so cast light on changing 'structures of feeling'. In other words, Waller's concern is to examine how Mary and the Annunciation's central

role in the structure of feeling of the enchanted cosmos ‘in the early modern period...came under pressure’ (p. 4). The book covers the period from the narrative in *Luke* up to the early modern period.

Waller takes the phrase ‘structure of feeling’ from the cultural analyst Raymond Williams, and from Williams is also taken the methodological principle of the book. Structures of feeling are what Williams calls, ‘social experiences *in solution*’ by which he means that they were not yet solidified. Rather structures of feeling have to be found in the streams not the main rivers, or in the eddies disturbing the otherwise calm surface. Changes in structures of feeling are therefore best found in the tensions of artworks, stories, and rituals where an experience ‘in solution’ begins to disturb what was previously solid, before solidifying in their turn.

This methodological principle informs the content of the book. Waller begins with the stark and beautiful purity of *Luke*’s narrative and follows its development into the cult of the Virgin and its association with the emergence of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The discussion takes Waller from biblical exegesis and hermeneutics to ritual sites such as Walsingham (about which he has previously written with insight), theology and current feminist debates. Throughout the discussion identifies how cultural texts and practices are unsettled by the emergent ‘social experiences in solution’. This insight leads to an especially fine discussion of Renaissance and early modern artistic representations of the Annunciation.

As Waller makes clear these works were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand they were attempting to tell the story of Mary and the Annunciation in a doctrinally appropriate manner (as Waller reminds us, most of the paintings we now see in galleries were designed as settings for Mass). Yet on the other hand these art works were also struggling to resonate with the emergent structures of feeling following from the assaults of rationalist humanism and, of course, Protestantism. What was once taken for granted now becomes a cause of some unease. For example, Simone Martini or Giotto could imagine a meek Mary accepting the Annunciation and only being a little amazed by the appearance of Gabriel. But by the time of Lorenzo Lotto’s 1535 *Annunciation*, Mary has become almost terrified by the angel’s sudden appearance and she turns towards us rather than towards the messenger (p. 90). Some 125 years later in the Protestant North, the Annunciation story has been secularized and rather than *wanting to be left to be like us* (as in Lotto), with Vermeer’s *Girl Reading a Letter*, Mary is *one of us*, trapped in a secular space into which the sacred irrupts – but whether or not it can be seen for what it is (or indeed whether the sacred really does still irrupt) is left undecided. Here, almost everything is *in solution*.

Waller’s book stops just as disenchantment solidifies. Consequently it is to be hoped that a subsequent volume brings the story up to the present and, more precisely, shows how the story of Mary and the Annunciation continues to haunt contemporary culture. Here a key painting for Waller’s scrutiny ought to be Edvard Munch’s provocative (in all

senses of the word) *Madonna*. Munch painted Mary stripped bare and either sexual being or corpse (the different versions of the painting give the body of Madonna different hues). In the margin of the painting lurks a homunculus – the Incarnation as ghoul. And yet still the Annunciation haunts the painting. Munch perhaps takes the ‘structure of feeling’ following the collapse of the cultural hold of the story of Mary and the Annunciation as far as it can possibly go. His Madonna is completely without any spark of divine mystery – and yet precisely because the absence is so stark it is virtually present. Disenchantment itself dissolves even in one of its strongest statements.

This is a valuable and stimulating book. Waller writes as a ‘candid friend’ of Christianity who regards the story of Mary and the Annunciation, ‘perhaps with nostalgia for a world we have (regrettably) lost’ (p. 15). But a recollection of the losing can sometimes also be a way of finding.

KEITH TESTER

**THEOLOGY AND SANCTITY** by Romanus Cessario OP, edited by Cajetan Cuddy OP, *Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida, 2014*, pp. xiii + 277, £20.00, pbk

This book collects what the editor judges to be the more significant essays of Romanus Cessario, an American Dominican who has taught in various institutions in the USA and has published many books in the areas of moral theology and the history of Thomism. The title is apt for what the essays and the editor seek to emphasise: that any separation of morality, doctrine and spirituality fails to do justice to the vision of Saint Thomas Aquinas for whom theology is both speculative and practical, for whom moral theology is a *scientia operativa* whose conclusions therefore concern concrete actions and not just general propositions, and for whom *sacra doctrina* is needed because God has established as the *salus* (integrity, salvation, holiness) of human beings something that is attainable only by grace, namely friendship with God established in the Son by the power of the Spirit.

Each chapter is preceded by an introductory note from the editor, in which he identifies its theme and situates it in relation to the other essays in the collection. The book opens with a reflection on Dominican spirituality, which immediately rejects the use of the term ‘spirituality’ in relation to the Dominican form of life. That form of life originates in Saint Dominic and continues to live from his inspiration. It is to be found not in handbooks but in the practices of Dominican life, the regular observance of a rhythm of prayer and study, fraternal life and preaching, all for the salvation of souls.