

bulwark against assaults of aggressive secularism. Costigan elucidates the arguments and teachings of the ultramontanes by expounding the writings of Orsi, Ballerini, Muzzarelli and, most fascinating of all, Perrone. The papalist reasoning basically depends upon Christ's promises to Peter, though exposition is not simply and solely scriptural. Surely, they argue, as Costigan puts it: "it is unthinkable for the sheep to second-guess the shepherd?" The scriptural metaphors are exhaustively deployed. Docility and obedience are expected of the sheep. How, ask these papalists, could papal teachings be held to be, as Gallicans do, reformable? Such dangerous teaching has to be resisted. The Gallican stress on 'consensus' would disastrously qualify papal authority and plunge the Church into uncertainty. In an eloquent passage, Muzzarelli asks: "My God, where is the remedy sure, universal, prompt and efficacious that you have given to the faithful for all times, and for all days, against nascent heresies, against the ruses and snares of the errant?" (*L'Infaillibilité du Pape* 1826) - a rhetorical question demanding inescapable response.

In the added wording to *Pastor Aeternus*, Gallicanism received its coup de grace. The authority of the pope is "ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae". Though the definition of papal infallibility was certainly not all that extreme ultramontanists would have wished, these additional words secure the triumph of papal authority. Critics at the time said, as Hans Küng put it a century after the definition: "There is no disguising the fact that... no one can prevent the Pope from acting arbitrarily and autocratically in matters of doctrine..." (*Infallible?* p.86). What if he promulgate error? To this papalists reply: but it will *never* happen! Nevertheless, say Gallicans, it *has* happened in the past and the Church has survived. Both Muzzarelli and Perrone half-heartedly take this dilemma on board, but do not suggest what procedures could be followed to resolve it.

This magisterial survey of leading exponents is admirably even-handed, but one need not read too intently between lines to discover where Costigan's sympathies lie. By explicitly snubbing the episcopate with the "ex sese" phrase, the cause of collegiality was firmly relegated for many years. Now, more than forty years on from Vatican II, we await practical steps which are implied theoretically in chapter III of *De Ecclesia*. Might this generous and brilliant study move the matter forward somewhat? There are formidable stumbling blocks in the way. Meanwhile we can congratulate ourselves and the author that justice has been done to both sides of the argument - something that has been long awaited in the case of the Gallicans.

TONY CROSS

WRESTLING WITH ANGELS: CONVERSATIONS IN MODERN THEOLOGY by Rowan Williams, edited by Mike Higton. *SCM Press London 2007 Pp xxv + 305, £21.99 pb.*

These essays were written over a twenty-year period (1978-1998), during which Rowan Williams went from promising theologian to prominent Bishop. Few treading such a path manage to maintain both erudition and wisdom. This collection demonstrates that Williams is the exception. There is very little in the history of theology and philosophy (both Analytic and Continental) that Williams hasn't read. What's more, he manages to read it reverently, discreetly, soberly and in the fear of God.

The "conversations" of the subtitle take place with Lossky (chapter.1); Hegel and a postmodern Hegel via Gillian Rose (2, 3 and 4); Balthasar, singly and in contrast with Rahner (5 and 6); Barth (7 and 8); Rene Girard (9); Wittgenstein together with Bonhoeffer (10); Simone Weil (11); Don Cupitt (12); Marilyn

McCord Adams (13) and Maurice Wiles (14). In addition to these principal conversation partners, we meet many others, from Aquinas to John Howard Yoder. The range in itself invites awe. There are not many public figures who know their Roy Bhaskar as well as their Dionysius the Areopagite.

Dr. Williams is undoubtedly a good reader. Mike Higton makes much of this in his somewhat starry-eyed “Editor’s Introduction” – Williams apparently “performs” the texts he reads, in “a process of ‘ecstatic’ attentiveness”. But Higton also mentions Williams’ “theological vision”. And theological vision requires not just good reading or good “performance” of others’ texts. Theological vision requires some work in composition too, some creation. In conversation, the man of theological vision doesn’t just listen – he speaks.

Williams’ work is made for posterity. He refuses arguments and positions which will only ever be things temporal, and keeps his thinking trained on things eternal. This twenty-year retrospective shows how often he is right. The case made in his 1979 essay “Barth on the Triune God” still seems pertinent – “If it can be shown that Barth is actually operating (even unconsciously) with a concept of revelation defined in advance of his exegesis of the records of revelation, substantial questions are raised about not merely the ground but also the *shape* of his articulation of the doctrine.” Similarly Williams’ refusal of Cupitt’s overbearing theological Puritanism quite early in the Cupitt project (“On not quite agreeing with Don Cupitt”, first published in 1984) looks like a better decision year on year. The same might be said for his challenge to “Doctrinal Criticism” as practised by Maurice Wiles – his 1992 *Festschrift* essay is a nail in the coffin of 1970s liberal theology, hammered in with love. But it is not just analytic philosophical reduction that Williams resists. His quarrel with Marilyn McCord Adams’ work on the Problem of Evil seems well chosen (“I suspect that it is more religiously imperative to be worried by evil than to put it into a satisfactory theoretical context”); but equally he is keen to oppose those whose post-modern enthusiasms leave them identifying the sacred with the void. That such an identification leads to a “basically dishonest rhetoric of risk or cost, “re-describing resignation as heroism”” (the quotation is from Gerald Graff) is a recurring theme.

Furthermore, Williams doesn’t just make good critical decisions. He also makes perceptive, interesting choices of whom to champion. Taking up Balthasar in the early 1980s was brave, reading orthodoxy from the political left in a way that must have inspired the young John Milbank. The same bravery and independence of mind can be seen in the championing of Russian 20th Century Theologians. The essay here dealing with Vladimir Lossky and the *Via Negativa* (“substantially a chapter from a doctoral thesis”) shows how well Williams makes connections: “there is much in his work for those struggling to achieve some kind of rapprochement between systematic theology and what is inadequately called “spirituality”. The same making of connections made Williams’ engagement with René Girard influential. And whoever thought that Cambridge would produce a postmodern Hegelian? The work on Hegel in this collection is particularly substantial and thought provoking.

So what of “theological vision”? Williams has stuck to a task he set himself very early on: to seek an apophatic theology which, whilst it corrects the distortions of cataphatic theology, yet acknowledges distortions of its own. This entails taking a *via media* between “an eternal return to the same” (modernity) and “an eternal alienation between thought or speech and the void” (postmodernity). That middle way is fraught with difficulty, an obstinate struggle for a Christian Truth that is “profoundly elusive”. Intellectual conclusions from such a project will be minimal. Devotional benefits will be great. Above all, Williams teaches us a God-attentive patience.

But can anything this nebulous in thought, and fatally Prufrockian in expression, really be called “vision”? The writing, necessarily tortuous, at times becomes

complacently so. It is absolutely guaranteed that when loins are girded up for a paragraph of the type “This does not mean *x*, in fact it means *y*” the quantity of words expounding *y* will be with comic inevitability three of four times those of *x*.

Fans of Williams will not mind this at all, but maybe fans are the problem. Williams’ introduction thanks Mike Higton for “initiating and carrying through” the publication, which, with touching naivety, Williams calls “an exemplary work of selflessness”. Presumably it is Higton who set the time-frame for the essays (which otherwise seems a little arbitrary), who selected them (could others have been included?) and who decided on the non-chronological order: “I have tried to arrange it so that, if read from start to finish, the reader might be aware of being taken on a wandering and circuitous but continuous journey.” Such a journey is called a wild-goose chase; and the promise of it is hardly going to tempt one to read the book “start to finish”. Williams needs no help producing a work to be left unread on the shelf of the vicarage study. What he does need, if he is to be more than a superb theological reader and critic, is a bit less awe.

GRAEME RICHARDSON

THE ART OF THE SACRED: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AESTHETICS OF ART AND BELIEF by Graham Howes, *I. B. Tauris* London, 2007, Pp.ix + 190, £17.99 pbk.

Islam and Evangelical Christianity have come to denote the resurgence of religion of late in ways that have delivered profound unsettlements to the more secularised sectors of academia. These concerns disguise more subtle processes operating in contemporary forms of culture that have deeper implications for the understanding of religion, notably Catholicism. The changes relate to how organised religion is to be regarded. This reflects the advent of visual culture where the Internet has expanded the virtual in ways inconceivable a generation ago. A premium has now been placed on ways of seeing and of deciphering icons and images that is as unexpected as it is significant. Seeing as believing has become a motif of this form of culture.

Against this background, Howes has produced a very timely, illuminating and wide ranging introduction to a topic that can only increase in theological importance. He comes to the study as ‘a historian by training, a sociologist of religion by adoption, and also an art historian manqué’ (p.2). Very clearly written and artfully embodying an enormous amount of reading well assimilated, Howes has accomplished a wonderful work of compression that is stimulating, accessible and lively. There is not a dead line in this study. Working from a query of Ruskin, as to how far Fine Art is conducive to the religious life, Howes explores what is known as visual piety, a term well explored by Morgan in the U.S.A., but given an English understated Anglican appreciation in this study.

Starting with a sketch of four dimensions of religious art, Howes moves to a paradox that as Victorian intellectuals gazed at the tide of Dover Beach ebbing away, the rising middle class, benefiting from printing, were placing images of Christ (notably those of Holman Hunt) on their suburban walls. Intellectuals might have suffered religious myopia; the middle classes, on the other hand did not – they knew what they needed to see to believe. This produced what Howes denotes charmingly as an ‘inverted secularism’. Howes is especially good on the complexity of English attitudes to sacred art in all its contradictions. These are well illuminated in two chapters on art and patronage and the response to the exhibition, *Seeing Salvation* at the National Gallery in London in 2000. The paradox of an apparently disbelieving nation coming as pilgrims to London to