

unclear. Even with that, this kind of work is much more satisfying than the ventilation of this or that party position, whether philosophical, theological or political. It illustrates how we continue to be in need of fresh breakthroughs in moral theology. Alongside MacIntyre's new Benedict, then, we should perhaps be praying also for another Thomas Aquinas.

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**WHO ARE WE NOW?: CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND THE GLOBAL MARKET FROM HEGEL TO HEANEY**, by Nicholas Boyle, *T & T Clark*, Edinburgh, 1998. Pp. x + 348, £24.95.

Coming into the rooms of a Cambridge don for the first supervision on my research into British foreign policy and German unification in the nineteenth century, I was courteously greeted and asked to take a seat. Just as I was about to do so, however, a voice yelled out, "Not there, but over there. I prefer to have Americans sit in that chair—it's older than your country." That, I suppose, was meant to be my first lesson: history was to be perceived differently in Britain. For all sorts of reasons, but not least because you could sit on it. The British have been sitting on their history for a long time. Very reluctantly (as if obliged to vacate a favourite easy-chair) are they coming to accept that the old furniture no longer supports their identity as comfortably as it once did.

Readers of *New Blackfriars* will already know that Nicholas Boyle is one Cambridge don with a different lesson on history. Versions of four chapters of his book were first published in this journal. For over a decade now, Boyle has been challenging himself and his compatriots to come to terms with how little their national past can prepare them for our global future. In the foreword, he tells us that this book was born of an "urgent necessity" to respond to an "historic crisis which must inevitably undo the British national identity constructed over the last three centuries." So "born" at a time when Mrs. Thatcher was coming off her third successive General Election victory and the Berlin Wall had but a little over a year to stand. Boyle need not perhaps then have felt constrained by his countrymen's preference for understatement. Ten years on, under a different government headed by a *new* party and with Europe slowly reconstructing rather than deconstructing, he may have a harder time convincing them of the urgency or the crisis.

All the more reason for re-reading his 1988 essay "Understanding Thatcherism" (here reprinted unchanged). It may not have been understood. For there has been no real turning back on the revolutionary transformation of Britain which Boyle, for the benefit of those not fixated on personalities, had endeavoured to place in the context of a more general and yes, inevitable, historical movement towards rationalised, centralised modern societies organised along the principles of economic accountability. The global market had finally and irreversibly extended, and with the usual painful social consequences seen elsewhere, its scarcely 'invisible' hand into the last imperially-minded national construction of old Europe—excepting the Soviet Union of course, whose turn was about to come. Or did one think it had been all to the blame or credit of Mrs. Thatcher? That what had been so often mistakenly attributed to her would go away with her? Boyle's historically perceptive analysis of Thatcherism, extended in a follow-up essay written for this book, should have pre-empted such anachronistic thinking about

who or what moves history. Though, undoubtedly, he will have welcomed the change in government and (probably) party since, the burden of his initial critique rests with the need for a still more revolutionary change: the national surrender of that truly invisible source of British identity, its unwritten constitution.

Not that merely writing one out would give an acceptable answer to Boyle's questioning title. The full argument of this book, and one worthy of the author of the *Philosophy of World History* named in the subtitle, is that as the British have only come lately to recognise the end of their imperial past, so we are all only coming lately to recognise that it is the end of the age of nation-states and so also of their capacity to define who we are and how we live. What matter how old the chair you happen to be sitting on or whether you live in a republic or monarchy, if from the one and the other you can reach across the globe via the Internet? That *we* in the title is meant to be all-inclusive *now*: "nowadays, we need to think above all about the ways in which our world is one and not the ways in which it is multiple—about what is unifying it, and how the contradictions and conflicts it contains are part of a single system and not chance historical confrontations." The reality of that one world network, according to Boyle, gives the lie to the unanchored self of post nation-state "postmodernity". Postmodern fatalism or supermanism is largely a result of the inability of the market (and the consumerist ideology which underpins it) to provide a more collective or rational sense of who we are. So if we cannot give a face yet to an identity corresponding to the single system in which now live, it may be because we have yet to permit ourselves the political institutions and religious convictions which Hegel saw as fundamental to our sense of who we are. Boyle thus urges the rediscovery of those Hegelian priorities. Not as if they were in opposition to something called 'material' conditions, but as they are the essential means by which we commonly, collectively, and rationally understand ourselves to be more than economic beasts. What the nation-state and national religion have been for personal identity, and cannot be any more, Boyle challenges us to create or rediscover on a global scale.

*Who we are now* cannot thus ultimately be answered until we can imagine our one-world system to be more than a global market. For that reason the last two chapters turn their attention to the poets: "not because poetry is some kind of refuge from the political and economic world but because that world is not in the end comprehensible without a moral idea which only poetry—a Christian poetry—is subtle and honest enough to put into words." Read this book—whatever the chair you are sitting on—only if you are ready for their not very comfortable words.

Boyle is a Reader in German Literary and Intellectual History. He is unabashed to write as a "liberal Catholic humanist" and "British and European."—a few concluding words then to help identify what range of poets get a look in and also some hint at what a global identity might begin to look like.

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