

**ALIEN SEX: THE BODY AND DESIRE IN CINEMA AND THEOLOGY** by Gerard Loughlin, *Blackwell, Oxford, 2004, Pp. xxx + 306, £19.99 pbk.*

When I was about eight, I went with some friends to a film called 'Imitation of life' in the expectation that it would be about androids. It turned out to be a Lana Turner weepy about race relations in fifties America. Now I have to review a book called *Alien Sex* and it turns out to be a book about the cinema, the body and theology. Life is disappointing.

Androids and aliens have their place in this book, as the films discussed tend to the fantastic, to science fiction and the unreal. Nonetheless the discussion is centred on the human body, and aliens and androids are taken as metaphor for the human body perceived in a certain way: distorted, infantilised, de-sexed but still human. The cinema is seen as a way of thinking about that body. That the cinema is a distinct way of thinking is fundamental to the claims of this book to be more than just theological ruminations illustrated by various films that the writer has seen.

The cinema is not a work of theology, but our society is still pervaded by the debris of Christian themes, and sometimes debris can be more startling than the pristine works they once were. Greek ruins and their damaged statues grip us more than the buildings might, if they had been continuously maintained to this day, as indeed some very ancient buildings are in Italy. Yet Christianity cannot be content to lie in ruins. It reasserts itself and *Alien Sex* may be seen as a commentary on the shards of Christianity to be found in many films, from the perspective of a believing Christian who sees these fragments as themselves indications of the redemption all seek. This is why, as various grim cinematic scenes are brought to our attention, we are consoled by considerations of the hope Christian theology offers us. Many theological writers appear in this book, admirably well summarised and shown as beacons of light that make theology itself a sort of cinema. The pessimism of the films about the body highlights, in every sense, the optimism of Christian hope. The enthusiastic summaries of great Christian writers, from Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa to von Balthasar, are beautifully done.

Loughlin has criticisms to offer, though. One is a well-worn objection, relevant to the body, that too many theologians take a male perspective and this affects their perception of the Trinity. The male perspective is a belief that only the male desires and loves. Barth and von Balthasar are particularly criticized for this. I think a response to this could be made: there is, of course, a circularity in any true relationship between man and woman. Of course, both love and are loved, both desire and are desired, both give and receive. What is different is the entry into this circle. A man desires to love someone who loves him; a woman desires to be loved by someone whom she loves. Neither would reasonably want to love without being loved, or to be loved without loving, but one desire will always have primacy over the other. When applied to theology it is clear what our perspective is: we seek to be loved by the divine but we would not seek to be loved by a God who was not lovable. Without grace we would have no confidence that either is possible.

What is the connection between cinema and the body? On the one hand, the screen is a sort of body touched by the light of the projector. Yet the point of the cinema is to forget the screen and to be absorbed by the images. The films that are selected here are films that make us very aware of the body, but this is because we see the body subjected to pummellings of various sorts, from 'Fight Club' with its brutal bare fistfights to the symbolic murders of the film 'Seven' based on the seven deadly sins. The cinema is not a natural medium for the body compared to theatre, where every muscle of the actor can be part of the performance. To make us aware of bodiliness, the cinema tends to over-compensate. The cinema is more like a dream than a bodily experience, something internal, and this may affect our thinking. Redemption is a theme of the book, but the redemption of the body may easily be seen as an escape from the body. Platonism haunts us in many forms, and outside

the careful selection of films in this book, the cinema usually shows us bodies which are unreal, ageless and tireless. *Alien Sex* is right therefore to concern itself with such a strange body of cinema, where the distorted bodies are in fact more real than the bodies of mainstream cinema.

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**DISCUSSIONS AND ARGUMENTS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS** by John Henry Newman, introduction and notes by Gerard Tracey and James Tolhurst, *Gracewing, Leominster & University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN, 2004, Pp. xlix + 490, £25.00 hbk.*

*Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects*, originally published in 1872, is the seventh volume to be released in *The Works of Cardinal Newman: Birmingham Oratory Millennium Edition*. Works by Newman previously re-published in this series include titles such as *The Arians of the Fourth Century* and the *Church of the Fathers*. Unlike these two particular works, *Discussions and Arguments* is a collection of essays developed by Newman over a period of approximately thirty years (March 1836 through June 1866). I would argue that one could read this volume as a whole or in parts. As a whole, the essays provide insight into how components of Newman's thought developed over the course of an important period of his life. In parts, these essays offer insights into Newman's thinking on topics ranging from biblical exegesis to political philosophy. Regardless of how one chooses to read this text, *Discussions and Arguments* provides an indispensable view into the thought of one of the Church's most significant theological voices.

As a result of the efforts of Gerard Tracey and James Tolhurst, this edition of Newman's *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* comes with an introduction and notes. Earlier versions published by Longmans Green and B. M. Pickering lack such resources. Gerard Tracey died suddenly while working on the notes; however, James Tolhurst, the editor of this series of Newman's works, completed the notes and then added the introduction. As significant Newman scholars, Tracey and Tolhurst's efforts come together to offer invaluable insights into the significance of this collection of Newman's work. For example, in the notes the symbolic nature of many of Newman's references is afforded greater clarity. Meanwhile the primary purpose of the introduction is to offer an understanding of the unique context out of which each one of these essays emerged. However, one potential weakness of the introduction is that it fails to include any assessment of the significance of *Discussions and Arguments* as a whole. As a result, at least one important theme – such as clerical identity – that runs through this volume of Newman's work goes un-evaluated.

Read as a whole, many of the essays in this collection offer insights into Newman's understanding of clerical identity and how it relates to his larger view of ecclesiology. For example, in 'How to Accomplish It', Newman, as an Anglican, writes that 'By that time we may have buried our temporal guardians: their memories we shall always revere and bless; but the successors of the Apostles will still have their work—if the world last so long—a work (may be) of greater peril and hardship, but of more honour than now' (p. 24). In 'An Internal Argument for Christianity' Newman, now a Roman Catholic, argues that 'Faith is not simply trust in His legislation, as the writer says; it is definitely trust in His word, whether that word be about heavenly things or earthly; whether it is spoken by his own mouth, or through his ministers' (p. 395). Over the course of time spanning the development of these two essays, Newman becomes convinced that the true bearer of apostolic succession is Rome, not Canterbury. While this theme does not dominate the essays