

religions which (along with Christianity) feature most frequently in the headlines in our time. Surprisingly, surely, Edwards dedicates the next 140 pages (a quarter of the whole book) to a history of Christianity and to the better-known protestant cults. This does seem an unbalanced allocation of space in a book about world-wide religious belief. On the other hand, to dispose of the Roman Catholic Church, which currently half the world's Christians belong to, one-sixth of the world's entire population, in a mere eleven of those pages does seem a trifle perfunctory. Moreover, this little bit of space is not particularly well used. Cardinal Newman occupies nearly two of these pages, Opus Dei nearly one, and Vatican II one-third of a page.

However, the book closes with two chapters which reveal that Edwards is ready to push her boundaries further than do most writers of books of this genre. She devotes a chapter to modern pagan, occult and esoteric thought, though it is disappointing that, of native religious traditions (so important to understand if we are to begin to comprehend religion in sub-Saharan Africa and in parts of South America and of Eastern Asia), she only gives mention to those in North America. Lastly comes a chapter on the development of 'personal growth' movements, the humanistic and secular equivalents of religion. The book's appendices (charts of numbers and places, and a glossary) are simple but good.

This is an intelligently organised book, it is easy to find one's way about it, and it is lucidly written. It has some quite serious imbalances, attributable mainly to the fact that the book is aimed primarily at the protestant American market. All the same, bearing in mind its scope and the type of readership it is principally intended for, *A Brief Guide to Beliefs* is a welcome guide.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP

A THEOLOGY OF THE SUBLIME by Clayton Crockett, Routledge, London, 2001. Pp. 160, £45.00 hbk.

In an essay entitled 'The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy', John Milbank has written that, in modernity, the 'Kantian sublimity of pure infinite possibility' becomes confused with the 'traditional theological notion of a divine darkness that is not the abyss of contentless will, but rather the darkness to us of an utterly dazzling light'. Clayton Crockett's book makes just that modern confusion, argues that it has its merits, and develops it into a postmodern theology.

Chapter One argues that, like Kantian epistemology, postmodern theology is a formal discipline, characterised by an approach of 'ceaseless questioning', and sets out to justify a reading of Kantian critical philosophy as negative theology. Chapter Two mounts a defence of Kant against the perceived attacks of 'Cambridge Radical Orthodoxy'. Chapter Three discusses the use made of Kant by Heidegger and Lyotard. For Heidegger, notions of temporality and imagination are taken from the First Critique to fashion his own motif of subjectivity, *Dasein*: this is seen as an

'ontologisation' of Kant. For Lyotard, for whom phrases are the only indubitable object, a 'linguicization' of Kant occurs. Phrases occur to us in genres which are brought into a conflict, a *'differend'*. A particular example of such a differend appears when reason and imagination conflict in the sublime judgement of the Third Critique. Reason, for Lyotard, is not to be seen as the final arbiter of the mind, given the involvement of imagination in aesthetic judgements. For Crockett, by extension imagination is similarly involved in all judgements, and this acknowledgement allows us to construct a concept of reflective judgement superior to the mere nuts-and-bolts of the understanding, described in the First Critique.

Chapters Four, Five and Six continue this interpretation of Kant, taking cues both from Deleuze and Derrida. The central problem is that of Transcendental Schematism: 'The inability to reproduce or image a schema, because of the temporality of the act of understanding, severely compromises or undoes the objectivity of the understanding Kant desperately wants to establish in the realm of appearances' (p.4). This problem is also the problem of the Transcendental Imagination, and therefore, a problem in theological terms about ultimacy, and ultimate concerns. In the final chapter, the Tillichean bent in the author is brought to the fore. After a brief discussion of Freud, Crockett concludes: 'The logic of the unconscious is in important ways posited rather than clearly understood, and its effects are felt in a disorienting 'anaesthesia' (Lyotard) which is the source of religious meaning today. Kant perceives this central insight, that it is the discord of human powers that disrupt human understanding and subjectivity, and give rise to the sublime, even though he strongly resists these conclusions' (p.111). Given this situation of discord and muddle, a 'theology of the sublime, however, situates itself in the interstice between a dissolution of all established orders of thinking and any new reconstructive thinking.. '(p. 112).

This is a difficult and very ambitious work. Its publishers have called it 'a constructive and radical theology.., a challenging and compelling argument for Kant's relevance to postmodern philosophy and contemporary theology.' Unfortunately, it scarcely lives up to that description. Throughout, the argumentation is not really measured or succinct. The prose is often repetitious and clunky: e.g. 'Even Barthianism, which defines the possibilities for current theological debate to a great extent, eclipses the radicality Barth fashioned his theology with, which is in many respects a great modern theology.'(p. 5). There are even occasions of total disjunction in the prose from one paragraph to the next, and the author's obsession with textual 'signposts' ('In this chapter, I...') actually confuses rather than elucidates what is being said (see the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5).

The reason for the hyperbole of the blurb, and also perhaps for this study's (surely premature) publication, is not difficult to find. 'A Theology of the Sublime' is also, we are told, 'the first major response to the Radical Orthodoxy movement.' This claim ignores (as does Crockett's bibliography) *Radical Orthodoxy — A Catholic Enquiry* edited by Laurence

Hemmings, which appeared in book form in the year 2000. Furthermore, the 'major response' that Crockett offers is only one chapter in length, shorter, in fact, than many of the review articles responding to Radical Orthodoxy. Of these, Crockett only seems to be aware of Douglas Hedley's essay in the *Journal of Religion* (2000). To claim that this one chapter is the crux of the work, therefore, seems a little disingenuous, and more to do with marketing than scholarship.

For a 'major response', moreover, the scholarship has major defects. Crockett's central contention that Kant is Radical Orthodoxy's *bête noire* (the reason why he's writing about it) is more controversial than he thinks (Duns Scotus seems a more obvious choice — Kant is not the beginning of wicked 'modernity' but rather the highpoint, according to Radical Orthodoxy). But then Crockett has a rather sketchy acquaintance with the movement's writings. Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock are ignored, and the focus falls largely on John Milbank. Strangely though, he doesn't refer to Milbank's essay 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent' the piece by Milbank most relevant to Crockett's Kantian thesis, and published, accessibly enough, in 1998, in Paul Heelas' book, *Religion, Modernity and Post-Modernity*. In the essay, Milbank outlines fully his reading of the sublime in Kant: he believes it to be unjustly divorced, following Kant, from the beautiful, and thus to have become identified with a subjective notion of transcendence, impoverishing for us true transcendence. Crockett doesn't discuss this: instead Milbank's argument is paraphrased as 'claiming that secular modernity establishes itself by denying the transcendent'. But as the essay on 'Sublimity' makes clear, it is not that modernity *denies* the transcendent, but that it empties it of the possibility of immanence, and therefore of the possibility of meaning. This is the primary error from which many follow.

Two in particular stand out. Firstly, Crockett has misunderstood the notion of 'original harmony' in Milbank's work. It isn't simply that once there was peace and after Kant (or Duns Scotus) there was violence. In fact it's Milbank's claim that the *ideal* of original harmony inspires true Christian theology, an ideal that was recognised but not always realised in the Middle Ages, and insufficiently recognised (for philosophical reasons, with catastrophic results) in the Modern Era. This mistake leads him to claim (as he sees it, contra Milbank) that violence is intrinsic to Christianity, giving as examples, the Thirty Years' War, anti-semitism, and the crucifixion. But the concept of original peace as developed in *Theology and Social Theory* is an antithesis to the myth of original violence, whereby all of life is hanging by a thread over a great chasm of chaos and destruction; a myth which, despite its occasional Christian proponents, Milbank sees as fundamentally atheistic. In this sense, then, Crockett's counter-examples are *supportive* of Milbank's thesis, in that they display the disruption of God's original peace by the violent sinfulness of humanity, a process which is *intrinsic* to Christianity but not *original*. Of course from the dense pages of *Theology and Social Theory* it may be seen that I too have got Milbank's thesis wrong here: but even on

its own terms Crockett's argument is hardly compelling.

Secondly, Crockett has misread Milbank on Kant and infinity. Milbank's main objection to Kant is seen to be that he is 'dogmatic' in laying down the limits of finitude. Crockett does agree, here, cautiously. But he says that Kant need not be read as dogmatic. He can also be seen as a 'more heuristic, less rigid' thinker, a 'quasi-transcendentalist' (to borrow Roland Gasché's description of Derrida). But this misses Milbank's point, which is not an objection simply to Kant's 'dogmatism' (it's hardly credible that Milbank could balk at this particular quality in anyone) but to Kant dogmatically laying down limits and therefore presupposing the infinity beyond the limits (a point made by Wittgenstein). Crockett demonstrates his mistaken presentation of Milbank when he goes on, in the same paragraph, to describe his own understanding of theology 'as the knife edge between faith and doubt embodied in a radical and unsettling interrogation of the limits of experience'—again, ascribing to the idea of discernible limits. It may be that Milbank's argument is wrong, but Crockett would do well, as a preliminary to refutation, to find and read it (it's in Part 2, Section 5 of *Theology and Social Theory*, and in Chapter 1 of *The Word Made Strange*).

This book is clearly an attempt at good theological work in an unfashionable area. After all, what could be less *sexy* than Tillich and Kant? Sadly, that good work has been seduced into an ill-advised liaison with Radical Orthodoxy. A moral should be drawn.

GRAEME RICHARDSON

THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH: A SHORT HISTORY by Norman P. Tanner, *The Crossroad Publishing Co. New York 2001. Pp. xii + 132, \$22.95 pbk.*

Norman Tanner SJ was the general editor of the two-volume *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (1990), an English version of Giuseppe Alberigo's *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* of 1973, which provides the texts of all ecumenical councils in both the original languages and in English. In this present work, Fr Tanner has set himself the more modest twofold aim of providing an introduction to the role councils play in the Church's life and history, and of helping students of the councils evaluate the importance and relative authority of their decrees.

Tanner's main concerns in this short book centre upon the historical and textual issues he has dealt with for so long. In the introduction he distinguishes four areas of investigation: which councils may be considered ecumenical; which documents ought to be considered as truly conciliar; the different levels of authority to be recognized in doctrinal decrees; and, finally, establishing accurate texts of decrees, where several different versions have circulated. Although he approaches his subject in the light of these four concerns, Fr Tanner seeks to bring out of the particular councils themes and issues he supposes will appeal to the contemporary reader, such as the

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