many different things, some of which seem to be plain contrary to their original purpose. So, for instance, he details the many diverse religious and secular uses to which churches are now often put. He also contrasts the conversion of disused churches to various public and private secular uses, with the starkly secular, utilitarian styles adopted by many modern churches, whose stated intention is to appear more amenable to secularised mindsets. At the beginning of a second century since the one in which these buildings were created, we are faced with the urgent need to decide how to conserve them, and to what purpose. The greatest contemporary enemies of the Victorian church include not just secularists, but those believers who reject the architectural language of vertical transcendence in favour of one of horizontal social relevance. Yet must we therefore see the buildings bequeathed by our ancestors as stifling authentic developments in the expression of faith and worship? Or can we not apprehend in their aesthetic and architectural language an eloquence not unlike that of the creeds and theology transmitted to us from past centuries, which, though requiring exegesis and interpretation, can still form and enrich us?

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CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE TRUTH: A KEY FOR FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY by Joseph Stephen O'Leary, [Thresholds in Philosophy and Theology], *University of Notre Dame Press*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015, pp. xvii + 404, £47.95, pbk.

This is the final volume in a trilogy on contemporary fundamental theology, the first two volumes being *Questioning Back* (1985) and *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth* (1996). A priest of the diocese of Cork and Ross, Joseph O'Leary has spent the greater part of his teaching career at Sophia University in Tokyo and his work is significantly informed by his engagement in inter-religious dialogue, especially with schools of Buddhist thought.

The present work is in two parts. In the first two chapters he explains the methodology he will use, the application of theological judgement understood as 'open-ended reflection' and guided by the interplay of conventionality and ultimacy. Although he says that this is developed by combining a Kantian background with a dyad of ultimate and conventional taken from Buddhism, as the book proceeds it is Heidegger's critique of onto-theology which most often directs his evaluation of earlier theologians, a critique which combines neatly, it seems, with the Buddhist material. His reasons for proposing this approach are that it is intellectually satisfying, therapeutic, ecumenical (including also non-Christian religions), and ensures freedom for experiencing realities marked by ultimacy.

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The distinction of conventional and ultimate as used here is not a simplistic one, as if all religions are simply different expressions of the same reality. O'Leary is clear that he is not proposing some form of relativism or skepticism (his disclaimers may not convince all his critics). We might be tempted to see an earlier form of this distinction in Aquinas's statement that the act of faith terminates not in the articulations of faith (the conventional) but in the reality (the ultimate) thereby brought within our knowledge. We might see it again in Rahner's distinction of transcendental and categorical, or in the distinction of undifferentiated and differentiated with which Ps.Dionysius explains his approach in the *Divine Names*. However we understand theological judgement – and O'Leary considers the three thinkers just mentioned as each failing in different ways to do justice to it, or at least as each failing to have done it in a way that can continue to be helpful today – it is not a simple question of 'breakthroughs to ultimacy' relativizing the conventional. The articulations are not disposable simply because it is through them that we touch the reality. O'Leary's concern is to give full weight to both the conventional and the ultimate, the latter always sending us back to the fabric of conventional discourse which is 'the indispensable vehicle for breakthroughs of ultimacy'.

The second part of the book is the remaining seven chapters in which he visits a series of *loci theologici*, not necessarily the traditional ones of fundamental theology, in order to explore and develop the account of theological judgement and the status of conventional religious utterance given in the opening chapters. The *loci* he chooses are literary modernism, the overcoming of metaphysics, scripture and revelation, religious experience, negative theology, interreligious dialogue, and dogma. His considerations of these topics vary considerably in length and in depth. The chapter on scripture and revelation, for example, seems too short for the importance of the topic, whereas that on negative theology seems longer than it needs to be. Perhaps the reason for dwelling on negative theology, particularly as found in Ps.Dionysius, is because it is there that western readers, faced with the introduction of the Buddhist themes, might be tempted to say 'but we have these ideas also in our philosophical and theological traditions'. And O'Leary's reason for spending so much time in the consideration of Neoplatonism is not too far from this: what would be helpful today, he implies, is 'a phenomenologically satisfying version of Neoplatonism' (p. 269).

A large cast of literary, philosophical, mystical, and theological authors is reviewed, from Gregory of Nyssa to Samuel Beckett, Augustine to Balthasar, Aristotle to Heidegger, from Eckhart and Aquinas to Luther, Schleiermacher and Barth. A key criterion is 'the phenomenality of being', O'Leary's way of pressing the critique of Heidegger, to encourage a way of thinking that allows realities to be encountered for what they are. This refers to both the ordinary 'down to earth' realities of human experience as well as those realities he refers to as 'ultimate'. Perception

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of the latter is not possible without a prior purification of conventional languages that might once have served their purpose but which are now more likely to hinder rather than to help access to ultimate truth. How to encounter afresh, for example, the realities carried by scripture and liturgy in spite of (rather than because of) the conventional conceptual and dogmatic languages in which those realities were once successfully encountered? In praising the work of Gregory of Nyssa, O'Leary indicates the kind of theological judgement he believes is necessary: 'Gregory's negative theology ... never goes beyond common sense or yields to inflationary tendencies, and its use of Hellenistic rhetoric remains in subordination to biblical and ecclesial concerns. The course of history will take us far from this starting point' (p. 237).

O'Leary's main concern, as seems right in fundamental theology, is to present and teach the Christian faith to people today. If this is to be done in ways that are intellectually satisfying, therapeutic, ecumenical, and effective in achieving their purpose of facilitating encounter with the realities themselves, then (this is his argument) it must be accepting of Heidegger's critique of all earlier metaphysical thinking, it must be open to the stimulus coming from the Asian religions, and it must remain in contact with the 'originary simplicity' of the Christian experience as it is found in the Bible and in the ongoing life of the Church.

A controversial figure in some corners of the blogosphere, O'Leary is not deliberately provocative in this book. He simply presents what he has come to regard as a wise approach to theological judgement, based on wide reading in western and eastern traditions, and taking account of horizons shaping the quest for meaning today in other intellectual, artistic and spiritual enterprises.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

C. S. LEWIS AND CHRISTIAN POSTMODERNISM: WORD, IMAGE, AND BEYOND by Kyoko Yuasa, [foreword by Bruce L. Edwards], *The Lutterworth Press*, Cambridge, 2017, pp. xi + 197, £ 18.50, pbk

Is it reasonable to consider Clive Staples Lewis from the viewpoint of Christian Postmodernism? The answer to this question depends on the definition of the ambiguous term 'postmodernism'. The first merit of Kyoko Yuasa's book, the outcome of her doctoral research, consists undoubtedly in having circumscribed a useful description of postmodernism in order to re-read C.S. Lewis's *Works* in a new way. In other words, Yuasa shows how Lewis is still relevant in the twenty-first century, because he can be considered as a 'harbinger of Christian postmodernism' (p. 1).

If postmodernism is read as a nihilistic way of thinking, a high-cultural expression of the same relativism which emerges from contemporary

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