

'orthodox' and 'critical mass' institutions that refuse to separate faith from knowledge, and which seek to ground appropriate academic freedoms within the framework of authoritative traditions, teachings, and clerical structures. He examines especially the attempts in the Catholic Church to renew the vision of John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University* as that has been re-articulated and developed in the 1990 Vatican document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. It is clear that the author's sympathies lie with these attempts and with such 'orthodox' and 'critical mass' institutions.

Readers may question this account at several points: the diocesan hierarchy and the Roman curia are described as 'the Church' (e.g. p.111), which appears to confuse the part with the whole, even if we agree that they are parts with a determining role in what counts as Catholic; and the 'authoritative teaching' or *magisterium* of the Church is assumed to be wholly external to the university, something to which an institution adheres, or measures up to, rather than something which it might help to construct. There is little sympathy for religious orders (especially the Jesuits) as the bearers of distinctive theological traditions, nor much consideration of how orthodox belief develops in part through disputed questions. However, this reader, at least, is convinced by James Arthur's view that religiously affiliated institutions have a positive role to play in the future of higher education and that it is 'orthodox' and 'critical mass' institutions which will successfully play that role.

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**THE WAYS OF JUDGMENT** by Oliver O'Donovan, *Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, Pp. 356, £19 hbk.*

In *The Desire of the Nations* (CUP, 1993), Oliver O'Donovan defended the political and theological relevance of Christendom as the idea of a 'professedly Christian secular order' (p.195). Even though that order was only imperfectly realised during the Middle Ages it nonetheless came into being not by the Church's seizing alien power, 'but by the alien power's becoming attentive to the church' (p.195). In *Desire of the Nations* the author outlined the shape of a Christian 'political theology' by showing how political concepts embedded within Jewish and Christian speech about God's redemptive action did once – and still should – generate definite expectations for political life. In the concluding pages of that book O'Donovan assumed a further obligation: to set forth a Christian political ethics whose agenda would be delivered by *political*, rather than theological, questions. *The Ways of Judgment* fulfils that obligation masterfully.

True to its aim, the book begins from political practices (e.g. lawmaking, punishment, economic exchange) and proceeds to show how Christian theology illuminates their meaning more than do secular accounts. Turning over page after page I felt as though I had entered into a vast laboratory where politics was the study and where present and past events were the experiments I was being taught to interpret. By careful and detailed analysis the author leads us to consider how the U.N., the European Court at Strasbourg, and the problematic doctrine of 'human rights' can best be interpreted, corrected, and, where necessary, defended in the light of theological concepts and practices. His introduction makes clear the urgency of this task: 'Western civilization finds itself heir of political institutions and traditions which it values without any clear idea why, or to what extent, it values them. Faced with decisions about their future development it has no way of telling what counts as improvement and what as subversion' (p.xiii). Pushing social theory beyond the tedium of 'critique' the author indulges in neither deconstruction nor simple legitimisation but rather assumes the properly theological task

of educating a people in the practical reasonableness required for their political acts (cf. p.xv).

Based upon his 2003 University of Oxford Bampton Lectures the book contains 16 chapters, many of which are revisions of previous oral and written communications, and is divided between 3 parts. The first explores the nature of 'judgment' as the paradigmatic political act. It is an act of moral discrimination which 'pronounces upon a preceding or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context' (p.7). In its essence, political judgment is responsive to societal structures immanent within the order of creation; man does not invent society, nor is human will the efficient cause of its coming into being. Rather, political judgment responds to goods that include, but are not exhausted by, those routinely identified within popular legislatures and political assemblies. Christians must learn to re-conceive the possibilities of politics 'within a transcendent horizon' (p.237). This means political judgment must keep before it a range of goods that liberal society typically relegates to the private and non-political. In the case of religion, liberal society has too long acted like a clumsy judge who refuses the defence an opportunity to call its own witnesses to the stand. On the author's view, the Natural Law, the teachings of the Church and the testimony of Holy Scripture are all relevant witnesses that political judgment must take into account. Political judgment is responsive in another sense too. If in essence it responds to goods given within the natural and supernatural orders, in its form political judgment is responsive to *wrongs done*. Echoing Romans 13, the author conceives the act of judgment as a response to 'injury to the public good' (p.59). Political judgment does not constitute society (as if anything but God could accomplish that!); it simply defends it. O'Donovan calls this the 'reactive principle' and with it we touch upon the anti-totalitarian impulse that has beaten all through the history of Western politics.

In these chapters O'Donovan's explorations are exciting, though exacting. He puts great expectations on his readers and navigates us over a wide terrain. Yet for all this, one wishes he would have done more with the other great political theme in the New Testament, the Petrine. In 1 Peter 2 the apostle portrays government's task not only as being responsive to harm done but as actively *praising those who do good*. Does this not add something to Paul's vision of government? Or is it simply a restatement? Perhaps this might have been made clearer for the rest of us who have not spent as much time considering the political implications of these texts. In any case, in the author's view all human judgment, though necessary, is provisional. Steering clear of both idealist and realist tendencies, O'Donovan represents the Christian interpretation of the act of political judgment as always standing under the final judgment of Christ. Our judgments anticipate the judgment of God – echoing but never fully enacting the perfect justice which faith apprehends and love calls us to imitate, however imperfectly, in this present age (cf. p.27).

Part 2 describes in what sense political institutions are 'representative'. With repeated reference to the history of political philosophy and Ian Brownlie's *Basic Documents in International Law* (OUP, 2002) individual chapters, 'Political Authority', 'Representation', 'Legitimacy', 'The Powers of Government' and 'International Law' lead us through a web of contemporary political institutions and legal decisions to draw out the lines of argumentation whose intelligibility can be grasped only, so the author contends, with reference to Christian theology. Given the complexity of political realities, this is ambitious. One example illustrates the scope of the author's élan. In his scintillating chapter 'The Powers of Government,' O'Donovan tells us why the British Parliament decided to incorporate the European Convention of Human Rights within the framework of Scottish and English law. He then goes on to explain how, unless we transcend the limits which the early modern doctrine of the Three Powers (the tri-fold division

of the branches of government into the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial) imposed upon us, liberal democracies will continue to encourage an unhealthy autonomy of the courts; and further, that this sickness, presently experienced within Canada, is soon to spread unless the contagion is bottled – unless, in other words, we recover what Christian societies have understood but secular ones do not, namely – the significance of ‘the judicial character of *all* the powers of government’ (p.198). All this and more convincingly delivered within the space of five pages. The book is packed. How good its arguments are will, in one way, be determined by how clearly its explanations ring true for those who know what to listen for.

The third Part identifies ‘communication’ as the *clavis* opening the door to our understanding of social life. The climatic final four chapters describe human society as it exists before, after, and apart from, judgment (p.242). Already indicated in Part 1, judgment is but a moment in the life of social communication. Even the judgment of God is provisional insofar as it is not the last state. That belongs to happiness. And with the pilgrims of the Van Eycks’ *Adoration of the Lamb* we too by God’s grace will experience the fullness of sight in the Heavenly City (p.232). In other words, the Church’s hope for heaven has implications for social theory. Even the distant view of Zion tells us a lot about what London ought to look like. As O’Donovan claims, a society which finds itself under the influence of the Church, the only truly catholic community, ‘will be restrained from universalising its own local experiences and perspectives’ thereby gaining for itself ‘a continual stimulus to reflect on the meaning of its local traditions’ (p.291). The Church refuses society the indulgence of blind traditions. This includes, pertinently for us, the tradition of *total criticism* (of the Marxist, Feminist, or Postmodernist varieties), that tide of disbelief that presently threatens to submerge the defending-walls of our social institutions.

To sum up, the movement between the three Parts of the book goes something like this: O’Donovan has led us through the two fundamental political acts of judgment (Part 1) and representation (Part 2) out to the other side of temporal social existence only to shine the light back into the cave (Part 3). Household and city, the Church, the meaning and value of property, work, and Christian conscience, are all looked back upon in the new vision afforded by the light of the Gospel. After having passed through the ways of judgment, even our own judgment, we are able to look upon the shape of social existence with the hope of an eschatological vision but suffering from none of the idealist’s fever. What do we find? Genuine sociality: constituted not by an absolute bestowal, as once argued François Fénelon, nor by a simple exchange between persons, as today John Milbank argues (pp. 245–46). Rather it is the holding together of *common goods*; the social act of sharing goods material and immaterial ‘as a common possession’ (p.244). Readers familiar with his *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Eerdmans, 2002), or directly with *De Civitate Dei* XIX, will find in these final chapters a stimulating reworking of this central Augustinian theme.

*The Ways of Judgment* is the most recent instalment of a project which intends to initiate an entire educated class into a forgotten tradition of Christian moral reasoning. If O’Donovan is correct, ‘Christendom’ is nothing other than the practical political consequence of the Gospel’s proclamation. And it’s well worth reviving. Christendom so understood can take on many forms. Its latent possibilities were by no means exhausted during the millennium and a half during which it animated politics in Europe. Unlike many modernity critics, however, O’Donovan’s best contribution may well be his refusal to allow our vision to be blurred by the abstractions common to those who so often fail to attend to the realities they wish to dismiss. As the author has modelled for years, the true vocation of the

Christian intellectual ends neither at deconstruction nor at legitimisation but at the recovery of sound vision. For in this and every age of present darkness the light of the Gospel fails not to shine forth with all the resplendence of eternity, and not the least through the structures of our political life. If only we would have eyes to see.

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