

# HORIZONS

Volume 37

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## REPORT OF THE COLLEGE THEOLOGY SOCIETY

Plus Reviews of 30 Books

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLLEGE THEOLOGY SOCIETY

PUBLISHED AT VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY



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# HORIZONS

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The purpose of the College Theology Society is to improve the quality of the teaching of religion: by stimulating and sharing scholarly research; by developing programs of theology and religious studies which meet student needs and interests; and by exploring, evaluating, and encouraging effective ways of teaching which are interdisciplinary and ecumenical.

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## ***From the Editor***

Yet another recent discussion of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* has appeared, this time in the November 2010 issue of *New Blackfriars*. This one is especially interesting for Taylor's response to the sociologist Kieran Flanagan. In noting our distance from "Christendom" and the need for "new itineraries towards faith, ones that have no exact correspondents in earlier periods," Taylor points to a typology from Roger Lundin's *Believing Again* (2009) as particularly helpful:

There are people who "believe still," that is, who have managed to recover much of the pathway to the faith which was available in previous centuries, and there are those who "believe again," starting from a very different place, and by different paths. We have both kinds in our contemporary Church, and this is as it should be. . . . But I see myself as a "believer again," and I think that these people will bulk larger and larger in the Church as time goes on.

Taylor's description of these different ways of access to belief is indeed enlightening. But in light of the constant drumbeat of moral failure among religious leaders, the recent statistical data about religious illiteracy (which echo our own experiences in the classroom), and the Pew Forum report on the surprising attrition rate in American Catholicism, (cf. Peter Steinfelds' "Further Adrift," *Commonweal*, 22 October 2010), one might well ask if "believing again" in this particular sense is even literally conceivable.

There is a new book that provides a positive response: *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us* (2010) by the Czech philosopher, sociologist, psychotherapist, and Catholic priest Tomáš Halík (before the fall of the Communist regime, Halík was secretly ordained and served in the underground Church). He confesses that, as a believing Christian, he sometimes feels closer "to the skeptics or to the atheist or agnostic critics of religion" because "with certain kinds of atheists I share a sense of God's absence from the world." But he differs from them in a fundamental way: their interpretation of "the ambivalent nature of the world" is too hasty, too impatient. "What atheism, religious fundamentalism, and the enthusiasm of a too-facile faith have in common is how quickly they can ride roughshod over the mystery we call God. . . . One must never consider mystery 'over and done with.' Mystery, unlike a mere dilemma, cannot be overcome; one must wait patiently at its threshold and persevere in it. . . ." The three forms of patience he recommends are faith, hope, and love. His appeal is directed to all those on the margins—like Zacchaeus watching Jesus from a distance (Luke 19:1–10)—who are "unwilling or unable to join the throng of old or brand-new believers, but [are] neither indifferent nor hostile to them" and are waiting to be invited by name to discover the richness and fulfillment afforded by God's offer of salvation.

The invitation-by-name that makes the religious imagination more plausible by being made more "available" is exemplified in this issue. Each contribution diagnoses from its particular angle (whether cultural visual studies, personalist philosophy, political theology, pneumatology and sacramentology, pedagogy, or science and religion) the varied character and needs of our contemporary context (thus "calling it by name"). And each tackles in a productive fashion the necessary intersection of belief and contemporary culture. We hope you find them to be stimulating sketches of some of the "new itineraries" for the religious adventure in which we all participate.