

other side happens *post-mortem* in purgatory, parallel to the evangelization of the dead in Christ's descent to hell. But not every atheist will be saved, according to Bullivant, but only those who have endeavoured to lead good and moral lives. Bullivant tries to avoid any ideas of the *apokatastasis*, but he is also aware of a possible accusation of Pelagianism, which he tries to get around by emphasizing the importance of the presence of grace already in the work of the non-believer.

The work of Stephen Bullivant is a remarkable study on the topic of the possible salvation of atheists, which tries to avoid the traps of post-modern relativism. Nevertheless three questions remain for a debate with the approach of Bullivant. The first question is just a short remark, because while Bullivant discusses the concept of Rahner's 'anonymous Christian' at length, he only touches the thinking of Von Balthasar, whose idea of Christ descending into hell in order to live his solidarity with the dead in all its consequences, raised some questions about the possible idea of the *apokatastasis* in the theology of Von Balthasar. A more comprehensive discussion with this approach is unfortunately missing in the work of Bullivant. The second question is related to the critique of the concept of implicit faith in atheists. Bullivant rejects on the one hand this idea as problematic, but on the other hand he has to refer to this idea himself, when he introduces his own interpretation of Matthew 25, which requires the implicit presence of God's grace in the works of the atheists. In this sense it seems to me that the idea of an implicit presence of God's grace in every human being and his works is absolutely necessary, in the sense of a transcendental presupposition of human existence as such, but in order to avoid any incorporation of atheists as anonymous Christians against their consent, it is necessary to emphasize the absolute free character of the act of faith. This leads to the last remark on the work of Bullivant. An atheist is not just someone who does not believe in God; he also rejects the whole idea of eternal salvation. If, as Bullivant points out, a conversion is necessary for salvation, how does this act of faith remain a free act of the human subject if the atheist encounters God's reality in purgatory? Does the atheist really have the chance to resist and to say no to God? Apart from these minor questions the study of Bullivant shows that the question of salvation for non-believers belongs deeply to the tradition of Catholic theology, and with his own model of the ethical praxis of atheists, within the line of Matthew 25 and the spirituality of Mother Teresa, and the possibility of a later *post-mortem* conversion of an atheist, Bullivant succeeds in making an important contribution to the contemporary debate on atheism and Christian faith.

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**THEOLOGY, AESTHETICS AND CULTURE: RESPONSES TO THE WORK OF DAVID BROWN, edited by Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. xiii + 313, £65.00, hbk**

How to communicate christianity to a generation which has largely lost touch with religious practice is perhaps the churches' most pressing concern. This is the focus of the extensive writings of David Brown, which are thus relevant to a much wider readership than theological aestheticists. As Robert MacSwain points out in his introduction to this collection, Brown's best-known early work was a defence of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, which also pleaded for a better integration of theology, philosophy and biblical studies. It was the Incarnation that fuelled Brown's growing interest in what people actually believe, what might actually constitute religion *for them*. So he champions culture and imagination in the practice of theology, while being careful to try to integrate them with reason.

He also insists that rather than merely instrumental, or transcendent, art may be a particular site of divine presence. So far from generalising abstractions, Brown works on actual works of art. The titles of his books which structure the nineteen essays in this collection are a clear guide:

*Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change*  
*Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth*  
*God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience*  
*God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*  
*God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama*

It says much about Brown's intellectual generosity that in *God and Grace of Body* he not only treats visual art and classical music, but also dance and pop, which, he admits, took him out of his comfort zone.

In view of such 'breadth and depth', it is not surprising that the essays are broad, often pulling in very different directions. Margaret Miles responds with a valuable consideration of historical contexts for different philosophies of mind/body, while Tina Beattie engages with Brown's reading of the New Eve, analysing four paintings, beautifully reproduced in colour (and no doubt contributing, unfortunately, to the book's high price, which will probably confine it to libraries). Graham Ward responds to Brown's speculations on the ascended body of Christ, while Clive Marsh asks, 'What if David Brown Had Owned a Television?' (he did not from 1976 to 1986, and thereafter found it 'much more brash', p. 185). Marsh pleads for David Brown – and us – to go much further than Brown has already gone in engaging with popular culture as mediated by TV, which is, after all, the culture of most christians.

The essays are followed by a response from David Brown himself, and a postscript from Taylor Worley on *ekphrasis*, the act of describing a work of art, with all its difficulties and uncertainties in the face of a surplus of meaning. Brown's response is thematic rather than individual, and I follow his example in addressing a central problem in his and his respondents' work. How can we be reasonably sure that a work of art actually 'presents' the God of Jesus Christ?

That it might present something different is suggested by Kimerer LaMothe, who argues that christian theology is a prisoner of its own exclusion of dance as something bodily and thus feminine (a somewhat sweeping judgement: Nicoletta Isar has shown that a choreographic consciousness disappeared from christianity rather than being deliberately excluded). But she goes further in arguing that by starting with dance, movement will make the divine real *for us* – 'as goddess, as universal rhythm, or as the fruit of our own bodily becoming – in our lives' (p. 142). And David Fuller, arguing that for many people in secularised society, 'engaging with religion through belief is just not possible' (p. 225), so their religious practice is shifted to the experience of divinity in poetry.

What divinity? Of course, there is no conclusive test for 'Christness' in art. Like religion, art addresses existential questions. And art's very ambiguity and even portrayal of human failure may open a space to a saving God. (Brown is moving on the story of the fallible King David of 1 and 2 *Samuel* as mirroring us and our relationship with God, p. 287). But what if it is destructive? Take a Nina Simone song quoted by Judith Casselberry, which brings Obeah (West Indian folk magic religion) together with christian imagery. The result is: 'To get to Satan you gotta pass through me/ 'Cause I know the angels name by name/ I can eat thunder and drink the rain' (pp. 179–80). Casselberry speaks of 'lived religious complexity' (p. 179), but Simone's song shows an alarming similarity to the stolen secret knowledge and cosmically destructive behaviour of the fallen angels in the apocryphal 1 *Enoch*, an expansion of *Genesis* 6.

The trouble is that in Brown's work there is no norm against which experience can be measured. And while Brown upholds tradition as well as scripture as revelatory, he also holds that revelation is fallibly mediated in scripture, as (much as?) in tradition and art. Jeremy Begbie pleads that notwithstanding God's generous presence in art, and the importance of extra-biblical sources for construing scripture correctly, Brown should still treat scripture as normative (pp. 149–50). Brown responds that the Church can and does move against the numerical weight of scriptural texts (for all that scripture is 'indispensable', p. 285). This, with refusing to allow that God speaks more in the writing of the scriptures than at any other period, are the kinds of ambiguity that undermine the christian character of Brown's aesthetics.

What this perhaps points to is the inadequacy of many existing theological systems to do this pressing job of engaging with real experience and culture, which Brown has so generously begun. But apocalyptic, both canonical and apocryphal, being so full of visual images, poetry, music and cosmic movements, has led Margaret Barker to an increasingly deeper treatment of Jewish and christian art, music and even dance. Her 'Temple Theology' could offer Brown and others some interesting hermeneutical criteria.

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