

Denys Turner, *God, Mystery, and Mystification*

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The breadth of Denys Turner's scholarship is on display in this collection of eight mostly unpublished essays, many delivered as lectures beginning in the 1980s. The collection is reminiscent of Herbert McCabe's *God Matters* in its diversity of topics, unified only by the underlying concerns of the author (the last of Turner's essays is dedicated to McCabe whose influence on Turner remains significant). In this as in his other works, a central concern for Turner is the interplay between negative and positive theological language arising from an openness to the mystery of God, which leads to an ongoing spiral between knowing and unknowing. The mystery of God sustains both affirmations and negations without absolutising either, since God is beyond both. The essays are divided into three sections moving from (1) theoretical concerns around God language in the section entitled 'Mystery' to (2) attentive readings of the interplay of knowing and unknowing in medieval mystics in 'Mystery and Mysticism' to (3) politics and cosmology transformed by the mystery of God in the final section, 'Mystifications'.

In the first chapter Turner takes up the problem of evil; he argues against Hume's classic formulation as suspending rather than solving the problem of evil by removing God. This removal is premised on a conflict between divine activity and human activity, which mischaracterises how God acts. Drawing on Julian of Norwich, Turner argues that evil and redemption are fitting, which neither solves nor suspends the problem but maintains the honest incompleteness of the human perspective on God's narrative with creation. The second chapter places prayer within (what Turner takes to be) the limits of human knowledge of God and God's unknowable nature. God's unknowability is an invitation for human reason to transgress its limits, hence his controversial (and not altogether convincing) argument affirming the possibility of proving the existence of God by opening oneself to the unknowable. Turner parallels this with prayer as an unfolding of oneself before God. One transgresses the limits of reason in contemplating God, and of desire in petitionary prayer: both are journeys into the same mystery. Chapter 3 is a revised version of a chapter in *Redeeming Truth, Considering Faith and Reason* (London: SCM Press, 2007). Turner recants his defence of the First Vatican Council's *Dei Filius* in *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* after Fergus Kerr's demonstration that the council did not support Thomas' argument for rational demonstration of God's existence or anything like a proof for the existence of God in Thomas' sense. Despite this historical correction, Turner maintains his broader argument that a sacramental understanding of reason opens reason to what is beyond it and thus to God.

Beginning the second section, chapter 4 sketches the diversity of medieval readings of the Song of Songs. The spectrum of medieval readings stretches from thoroughly literalist in Nicholas of Lyra to John of the Cross' poetic appropriation to Bernard of Clairvaux's allegorical approach, which Turner argues is the only one of the three to do justice to the eroticism of the text. Chapter 5 sets out a complex answer to a

seemingly simple question, why was Marguerite Porete, the onetime Beguine mystic, burned? Her *Mirror of the Simple* proceeds through a dialectic of self-annihilation as one abandons oneself to divine love. Such annihilation is taken to transcend the ecclesial, though not necessarily to repudiate it. Turner concludes that in the ecclesial politics of 1310 it was easier to condemn such a woman than embrace her challenging orthodoxy.

The final chapter in the last section is a revision of a lecture given at Blackfriars, Oxford, on Herbert McCabe, truth and politics. The essay traces how an account of the eucharist parallels a Christian politics, but also how the eucharist *leads to* a Christian politics. The eucharist is not something added to human eating but rather reveals the depth of human eating. So too Christianity is not an additional concern added to the political but – in moving through sin and death – anticipates a profound politics of human society transformed. The agents of such transformation must often suffer in overcoming sin and ideology.

These essays suffer by being too narrowly written for their original presentations; particular references and foci which were no doubt effective at the time of delivery seem out of place in print. Nevertheless, the collection offers stimulating new angles on familiar themes in Turner's work – I find myself envious of the audiences when these talks were first given.

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Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God*

**(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019), pp. xii + 257.
\$49.99.**

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Daniela Augustine's work on the Spirit and the common good offers a vision for the transformation of society through the transcending of one's own ego for the flourishing of the anthropic and non-anthropic other. This work is inspired by the peacebuilding endeavours of a Pentecostal community within the region of Eastern Slavonia during and after the 1990s war in the former Yugoslavia. Thus the reconciliation work of a Christian community in post-war Europe serves as a catalyst for a theology of kenotic and altruistic self-giving.

The backdrop is the brutal conflict in Europe where rampant nationalism combined with the driving force of a religious crusade created warring Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim factions, which, in turn, gave rise to horrific crimes. Augustine argues, however, that in this context the Spirit was also able to inspire in humanity a sense of wonder in relation to the other, revealing human beings one to another as also made in the image of God, thereby enabling 'genuine forgiveness and reconciliation in the form of unconditioned hospitality towards the other – ethnic, religious, political, cultural – even the