

reconciliation, alienation, or friendship at the movies, that is a spiritual experience... We have been drawn into the story because of its humanity; we leave the movie transformed because we have met divinity' (p. 18). I believe this is closer to what Tillich meant by a revelatory experience. Also, as Brant himself admits, it would have been more interesting, and a better test of Tillich's theory, to carry out a second study in the local multiplex. This would have proven whether the cinema somewhat dismissively labeled 'commercial' might itself be a medium of revelation for a wider expectation-free audience.

Brant's book is an excellent and invaluable resource for scholars who are interested in the interaction between theology or religious studies with film studies and film theory, as well as Paul Tillich's systematic theology on the possibility of revelation through culture, not to mention research methodologies. However, due to its complexity and academic style, this is definitely not a book for a mass readership.

ALEJANDRO CROSTHWAITE OP

EQUALITY, FREEDOM, AND RELIGION by Roger Trigg, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. ix + 184, £ 25, hbk*

Has modern liberal democracy become intolerant of religion? Have secular individualists corrupted the very religious tradition from which modern society draws its strength? Are irreligious humanists replacing eternally valid principles of law and social organisation with relativistic incoherence? These issues are acutely current in North America and Britain. Professor Trigg's opinion is clear: religion is suffering in modern society, in large part due to a legal myopia about equality. In his view attempts by liberals, humanists, secularists and philosophical relativists (he appears to use the terms interchangeably) to increase the judicial equality of individuals has led necessarily to a reduction in social freedom, particularly freedom of religion.

To support his argument, Trigg makes numerous ontological, theological, philosophical and sociological claims, with little supporting argument, throughout the book: existence after death is an essential part of human nature and true religious belief; knowledge of supernatural agency is universal; treating people equally marginalises them and their beliefs; the only defensible morality is based on eternally valid principles, to identify but a few. The case studies of recent legal decision in Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia are ambiguous regarding his basic premise that religion is being persecuted by the judiciary. Most are either split decisions, suggesting that religion is still taken seriously by the courts, or accompanied by judicial commentary which shows careful consideration of religious rights by individual judges.

Perhaps Trigg's most interesting contribution, however, is his suggestion for a novel legal concept: not the right to belief but the right of belief. 'Human rights protect people not beliefs', he points out. Although he does not entirely approve of the language of rights in its post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment form, he suggests a remedy: adding to this vocabulary the right of belief itself – belief, as it were, as species of Dawkinsian meme which has its own ontology and stability as it is passed from generation to generation and into which each individual is born. Belief of this kind remains constant and is not even really a matter of choice by individuals no matter how much they insist it might be. It is this eternally valid belief which must be protected in law. 'It is absurd', he claims, 'for justice not only to refuse to favour people, but also ideas, beliefs or principles'.

So beliefs themselves should be attributed rights. But unlike people, all beliefs cannot be considered equal. 'A respect for diversity of belief must ultimately

be meaningless. Beliefs cannot be equal even if the people holding them are'. He wants this translated into law. 'No country should take a neutral view about the worth of beliefs'. What counts for Trigg are beliefs which are religious. He admits to imprecision about what constitutes religious versus other kinds of belief but he knows what religious belief excludes: liberal, secular, humanist, relativistic beliefs about democratic society. These are temporary, unreliable, and not robust enough upon which to build a truly free society. Religious beliefs are superior to these, even superior to conscience which is a typical liberal individualistic concern. While he is unclear who is competent to define such beliefs, he has no doubt that some religious beliefs are better than others. And if there are 'better' beliefs there must be 'best'. It is these which must be recognised juridically and whose liberty must be defended as in the legal system: 'Rights to equality [of persons] cannot trump those of religious freedom [of beliefs themselves]'.

Equality, Freedom, and Religion has a genre problem. If its claims are purely philosophical then its extrapolations into theology – from the constituents of human nature to the transcendental nature of the divine – are theosophical and of suspect orthodoxy. If its claims are based on divine revelations, it does not disclose either their content or source and the reader is left confronting a vague fideism. The book may consequently alienate even those 'liberals' who are sympathetic to his views on the importance of religion in political life. Those who are unfriendly toward religion are likely to be horrified by the enormous, and enormously undefended, claims. His conclusions will confirm the suspicions of any who believe there is a conspiracy by the religious right to return to the good old days of conservative persecution of almost any group not adhering to true belief.

Equality, Freedom, and Religion is a polemic, and probably effective as such. But its contribution to the current political debate is therefore likely to be at the extremes, among the fundamentalists of the left as well as the right, who will only be reinforced in their opinions by it.

MICHAEL BLACK

POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE APPARENTLY 'NON-ACTING' PERSON by Pia Matthews, *Gracewing*, Leominster, 2013, pp. xxvi + 286, £15.99, pbk

This is an important book. Its topic is the status of people with profound learning difficulties and those in a so-called 'persistent vegetative state' (PVS) understood from the perspective of bioethics and of the theology of disability, and in particular through the writings of Pope John Paul II.

The author shows an extensive knowledge of the works of John Paul II (with more than three quotations on most of the more than three hundred pages, and references to a wide range of material not only the more well-known encyclicals). The book also includes a well-researched account of the current state of bioethics and links the idea of human 'non-persons' found in academic bioethics with the more populist idea of people in PVS being 'better off dead'.

The longest chapter (Chapter 9) engages with what is perhaps the most controversial area in contemporary Catholic moral theology, the treatment and care of people in PVS. This chapter is a robust and well-argued defence of the teaching of John Paul II on the requirement to provide assisted nutrition and hydration to people in this state. The key arguments of Matthews are not new. They were articulated by Anthony Fisher OP in the pages of *New Blackfriars* two decades ago. What makes this analysis fresh and gives it a depth not found in previous treatments of the subject is the placing of these arguments within an extended theological reflection on the significance of a life with profound disability. It should be required reading for any who mistakenly believe that, in his teaching