

of the Bible. In short, faith is multi-dimensional: it is not merely volitional or intellectual, but also practical.

There were many Catholic theologians and philosophers of the last century who distinguished themselves by commenting on faith and reason, and their voices complement, and sometimes contrast with, the approach of people like Pope John Paul II (who merits a chapter in the book under review) and Hans Urs von Balthasar. John Paul II could occasionally be quirky in his comments. For instance, in his encyclical of 1998, *Fides et Ratio*, he observes that 'the Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one philosophy in preference to others'. This was certainly not the case in 1917–18, when the *Code of Canon Law* insisted that philosophy and theology in Catholic institutions of learning were to be studied according to the method and teaching of Thomas Aquinas (Canon 1366). Careers were unilaterally ended for not complying with this canon, and theologians were compelled to take an Anti-Modernist Oath right up until the eve of the Second Vatican Council.

The discourse of *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, were it to be amplified into a larger tome, could in addition to the worthy people it probes, draw attention to Joseph Maréchal, Henri de Lubac, Jacques Maritain (briefly mentioned on p. 143), Marie-Dominique Chenu, Karl Rahner, Claude Geffré, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, and David Tracy. All these have commented trenchantly on faith and reason. Moreover, discourse on faith and reason in England alone last century was enhanced by acutely perceptive philosophical minds, such as those of Michael Dummett, Herbert McCabe, and Elizabeth Anscombe.

This is a rich field of continuing discussion, and *From Hermes to Benedict XVI* is a much to be welcomed part of it.

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THE CONTINUUM COMPANION TO RELIGION AND FILM edited by William L. Blizek, *Continuum*, London, 2009, pp. x + 426, £85.00

FILM, LACAN AND THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS FILM ANALYSIS by Steve Nolan, *Continuum*, London, 2009, pp. xii + 219, £65.00

Religion makes the eternal and unchanging really present to and in the empirical world. By this token film would seem to be a remarkably unproductive site of religious and theological investigation. After all, film is formally marked by rapid change (24 frames per second) and, even in the hands of an *auteur*, it is made with at least one eye towards money. When all is said and done films are commercial products, made to attract audiences in the market place. They are made according to criteria directly contrary to those of religion.

Furthermore the sheer plethora of films undermines religion, and this in two ways. First of all, they are complicit in what amounts to a contemporary over-production of the visual. Honest Protestant reflection ought to identify this as a massive problem; if films are one strand in the contemporary cultural dominance of the visual any theology which stresses the encounter with the word is challenged. Quite simply visual culture means that the word can never be confronted directly. Or as Blizek puts it in the Introduction to his collection without however – maybe understandably – taking the point to its logical conclusion: 'I believe that the power of film comes in part from the power of the visual (over the written word or sound)' (p. 1). What then is the future of Protestantism in a visual culture? The same point applies to Islam and it is noticeable how Ramji's otherwise thoughtful contribution to the Blizek collection rather fudges

the issue. Her chapter entitled 'Muslims in the Movies' follows on from discussions of Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, film and, in so doing, displaces the question of a distinctly *Islamic* film. Can there be Islamic film? Yet Catholicism also has a problem here: if the visual is dominant, what happens when resonant signs are put into independent filmic contexts? This is the problem of what might be called *Catholic kitsch*, a *kitsch* which empties certain signs of meaning precisely because they are used out of context, now for largely narrative or narcissistic ends. Second, thanks to the technology of films even a Counter-Reformation interior as sumptuous and overwhelming as that of Rome's Gesù becomes a little, shall we say, *inanimate*. The mind does slightly wander, wondering what the technicians of *Avatar* might make of the angels. This is the aesthetic of transcendence reduced to computer technology. Yet precisely because religion is implicated in the empirical world, film cannot be ignored.

Why not? Three reasons come to mind. First, since there are only a limited number of stories in the world (admittedly with multiple variations), and given that religion can be understood as their practical retelling, it follows that film is likely to rework the religious retelling. This happens obviously when filmmakers turn their attention to events in the Bible (leading to films ranging from the likes of *Quo Vadis?* to *The Passion of the Christ*), but there are also less obvious traces. For example, for one example from an almost endless list, the character of Jill in Leone's epic *Once Upon a Time in the West* is an explicitly Magdalene figure. Meanwhile the work of directors like Ford, Hitchcock, Scorsese all draw on the living old stories. Ford concentrated on redemption on the Western frontier, Hitchcock on sin and the profits of evil. Scorsese made 1970s Manhattan something approaching an Unholy Land inhabited by people struggling to find salvation in a world with no authority other than violence. Second, subtle filmmakers like Bergman, Rohmer, Tarkovsky, Bresson and now Haneke (yes, they are all European), use film as a scalpel to find God in the body of these days: either to shout at His silence, search for His lurking presence, glory in His Creation, or to intimate what is presently permitted. He has been pushed aside by a visual culture become too real. Third, and most directly, if we are literate about film, if we watch films, then perhaps they can be used for evangelisation. If all of this is pulled together the conclusion is obvious: despite their very real ontological differences (the one focused on the eternal, the other inherently transient), the relationship between religion and film is complicated.

William Blizek's edited collection is a resource book, intended to map the relationship and, thereby, also to offer guidance for future explorers. It covers a vast amount of ground in 29 chapters each of around ten pages. This is evidence of the careful, respectful, firmness with which Blizek has handled his contributors. Each chapter is engaging, accessible and stimulating, although there is a recurrent tendency for the papers to fall into the trap of contemporaneity, and often second-rate recent films are given too great a weight to bear, a weight which could perhaps have been borne by movies chosen from a longer time span. There is also a tendency to reduce Anglophone cinema to Hollywood, whilst European cinema gets caught in a pincer movement between the Second and Third Worlds, although Alyda Faber uses the theology of Rowan Williams to cast interesting light on Haneke's *Hidden*. For example, Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* might have become a little *passé* (although the reasons why are themselves worthy of study – they almost certainly have a lot to do with fashion) but it still stands as a major exercise in twentieth century theology and therefore demands more than a couple of passing references. Much the same point can be made about the volume's treatment of the work of Kieslowski; more bombastic than Bergman to be sure, but still an original attempt to use film as a medium with theological weight. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the evenness of the volume considered as a whole; ensuring the similarity of chapter length has run a little counter to the

possibility of identifying high points. Indeed, this relative failure is implicit within the design of the book. Blizek has – understandably – put together a collection which aims to be comprehensive, but in so doing everything rather counts equally. It would have been useful for the collection to be supported by a website where films are reviewed and judgements made. When all is said and done *The Seventh Seal* is a greater – more profound, authoritative, *eternal* – film than Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (which is given far more attention). However, that might have taken Blizek's project away from the focus from which it undoubtedly benefits – the collection is a fine and non-partisan map of a field of study, and it offers firm points for subsequent departures.

The Blizek collection is useful because it sees religion and film as existing in a *relationship*. They are not the same. The distinction is consciously blurred in Nolan's theoretically heavy volume which turns its gaze towards liturgical practice as opposed to religion as such in order to explore 'the idea that *liturgy can be understood as a medium of representation* that parallels the representational medium of cinema and that understanding liturgy in this way allows the *film theory concepts of suture and narrative space to be applied to liturgical representation*' (p. 4; all the emphasis is original and is likely to make repressed memories return for anyone who ever thought it worthwhile to read Althusser and his ghastly ilk). When Nolan uses the word 'suture' he is acknowledging theoretical debt to Lacan, for whom the term refers to processes through which the subject (in a more human frame, the person) is 'stitched' into a position which creates an impression of reality within representation and narrative flows. This reality is however within the 'symbolic register' of language and culture. Nolan places such emphasis on the term because he identifies his approach with the theoretical approach to film associated with the journal *Screen*, which sought to show how film narrative creates tension by delaying suture or achieves identification through the 'stitching' of the spectator into the narrative. The concept of 'narrative space' refers to the field in which the 'stitching' of suture happens; from within it is evidently infinite but, like all spaces, it in fact has limits and therefore restrictions. So, in film the spectator is 'stitched' into the narrative space and, according to Nolan something similar happens in liturgy: 'in identifying with the priest in the *Anamnesis*, worshippers are sutured into the sacramental narrative, becoming participants in the narrative and, through submission of their volition and intellect, in Episcopal (ideological) "reality" it supports' (p. 4).

Nolan's book is theoretically sophisticated, but one does wonder if the theory gets in the way of plausibility. Nolan is aware how the Lacanian system upon which he draws was also exploited by Louis Althusser in his attempt to explain the subjective working of ideology, and this is where a problem arises with the approach. Nolan lets an unfortunate cat out of the bag when – in the quotation given above – he links ideology and liturgy. For Althusser this would have been a legitimate move, but it does mean that Nolan is rather pushed by the logic of his theory to see the Church as one of Althusser's ideological state apparatus and the priest as a functionary of ideological power, much like to police office or armed soldier. This is almost certainly not what Nolan intends but there is a devil in the detail of his theoretical approach – the devil of the dissolution of liturgical practice and its authority into ideology pure and simple.

Nolan explores the relationship of religion and film through what might well be an inappropriate theory while Blizek's book is less ambitious. It wants to encourage us to think, explore, watch for ourselves. And Blizek's book is also aware of something too much film theory forgets all too quickly – films can be enjoyable too.

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