

a prioristic reading of the history of doctrine such that the gains which actually derive from a wider intellectual conversation are ascribed instead to the interior fruitfulness of the faith once delivered to the saints.

The questions *What is Truth?* arouses in this reviewer's mind are twofold. The first concerns fundamental theology. A dogmatic theologian will wonder whether at work here is an incomplete understanding of the concept of revelation itself. The notion of the unsurpassable fullness of revelation given with the definitive Mediator is the idea of a global whole, exhibiting a wonderful richness of internal relations as well as a myriad connecting-points not only to the previous biblical history but also to creation at large. Is this only eschatological, a truth to be awaited or (as in Rist's picture) dialectically induced? Or is it also Pentecostal, a gift transacted, and from the start fructifying in apostolic minds? The question cannot be answered simply by historical-critical methods – though even with those methods more could be made of the proto-credal summaries found in the New Testament than Rist sometimes allows. It requires for an answer participation in the corporate response to revelation of the 'bridal' – the covenantal – Church. What John Rist terms historical apriorism I would prefer to see as what I have called elsewhere a 'hermeneutic of recognition'. The developed pattern of Catholic doctrine should be a guide to discerning the shape intrinsically emerging in earlier more inchoate forms.

My second question concerns the conversation partners Rist seeks for the Church. This review may have given the impression that *What is Truth?* has straightforwardly adopted the 'seminar in permanent session' view of the Church, not the least of whose inconveniences is its disregard of inappropriate extra-ecclesial influences that may lead Christians astray. But careless accommodationism (which is, we gather, a particular sin of clergy and former clergy) draws down in fact the author's ire. On the 'radical alternative' to secular modernity he would commend, compatibility with the rule of faith handed down by papal and episcopal guardians belongs to truth's being. But by what criterion are we to select our dialogue-partners for truth's advancement, its fuller well-being? The question is hardly a bagatelle, granted Rist's own admission that conversation with philosophy has not always enhanced the faith. Sometimes, as he admits, it has damaged it, delaying its right articulation. For Rist himself, it is the 'divine inspiration' of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus with which, above all, we are to enjoy ecumenical relations.

Despite the voracious character of the author's intellectualism, *What is Truth?* seems to me to be, *au fond*, a plea for Christian Hellenism. Perhaps the author would not find himself so much of a stranger as he thinks in the Orthodox Church.

AIDAN NICHOLS OP

THE SENSE OF CREATION: EXPERIENCE AND THE GOD BEYOND by Patrick Masterson (*Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008*). Pp. x +153 incl. index, UK£50

In this subtle and important book Patrick Masterson [PM] deals with three questions: what is meant by the term 'God'; does God (i.e. the being meant by the term) exist; if so, how is the world related to him? He begins by remarking that the belief – which is a religious belief before it is a philosophical conclusion – that the world was created by God is fundamental to the three related Near Eastern monotheisms (p. 1). The remark is obvious but too often overlooked or thought insignificant. Genesis begins: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." The intellectual history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam,

and of the philosophy of religion in the West, is the history of reflection on that original belief: what is the meaning of 'in the beginning'; what is meant by 'to create' (which is a version of PM's third question); what is God? PM's second question, 'does God exist', which today dominates even believers' imaginations, arose later. Both Anselm and Aquinas are best known for their proofs of God's existence and yet, in the one hundred and two chapters devoted to God in the first book of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas devotes only four to that question.

Anselm is now known primarily, and almost exclusively, for his proof of God's existence, but here PM illuminatingly concentrates on Anselm's description 'that involves understanding [God] to be necessarily unlimited perfection – the highest good requiring nothing else. . .'. That description leads to the 'consideration that God plus the world, or God plus any creature, cannot be conceived as "greater" or "better" than God alone' (p. 7). "Things, Anselm wrote, can in no way exist without You, though You do not exist any the less even if they return to nothingness" (pp. 7–8). Aquinas' expression of the same thought is that creation adds nothing to God: 'the divine goodness neither depends on the perfection of the universe, nor receives any addition from it' (SCG I.86). For Anselm and Aquinas, God is not part of the world as were, PM holds (p. 8), for Plato and Aristotle, the divine realities. What is relevant here is not the interpretative issue but rather the clarification and the consequent question: how is it that if X creates Y, such that Y is distinct from X, it can be that Y adds nothing to X? Otherwise formulated: is X, in that case, possible?

There is, at first sight, a paradox, which is a constant theme and which, in the second chapter, PM begins to face. Crucial to its resolution is Aristotle's account of an efficient cause: A causes B iff the existence of the effect, B, depends on A; but B changes from not-being-caused by A to being-caused by A without any change in A; as when someone [B] coming into range of a ringing telephone [A] begins to hear it ringing; B changes from not-hearing to hearing without any change in A. And yet, paradoxically, the ringing telephone begins to cause. How can it begin to cause without any change in itself? Aristotle's answer is that it can do so because the cause is cause when the effect occurs; hence, cause and effect are simultaneous; to say that B is caused by A or that A causes B are simply two ways of considering the same event. PM, following Aquinas, distinguishes a real relation from a relation of reason: 'Creatures, he (Aquinas) argues are really related to God in a relationship of radical dependence upon him for their being but God is only imagined as, but cannot really be or be truly represented as, reciprocally related to creatures' (p. 15). The relationship is asymmetrical. God is distinct from creation, not an aspect of it. This concept of God – present in Anselm and Aquinas – is fundamental to the book. The final chapter clarifies it by contrasting it with Richard Kearney's idea of a God who "depends on us to be" (p. 123) and who, therefore, can be neither necessary, for what necessarily exists can depend on nothing (Avicenna), nor all perfect, for what is all perfect cannot become more perfect (Anselm).

In chapters 5 and 6 PM examines 'ciphers' – indicators – of this asymmetrical relationship of which the ringing telephone is a crude example. In Chapter 5 he considers knowing. When I move from not-knowing to knowing there is a change in me (the knower) but none in the thing known. If, for example, I ask how the area of a circle increases as the radius increases, I do not yet know the answer; when I discover the answer, I have moved from not-knowing to knowing. The change is in me, not in the circle. When I understand correctly, I know what is the case, and was already the case before I knew it. PM's argument depends upon his analysis of human knowing; that the analysis is not universally accepted, so that an argument convincing within one analytical context may not be in another (pp. 110–111). If, as relativists incoherently claim, there is nothing beyond diverse contexts, there is no more to be said; which issue is the theme of the fourth

chapter on some Wittgensteinian analysts – not I think Wittgenstein – of religion and religious language.

What is done for knowledge in the fifth chapter is done for morality in the sixth. As we transcend ourselves in knowing – correct understanding is a discovery of what is the case – so we transcend ourselves in our moral life in that we seek not only what seems to us good but what is good. As PM recognizes, the argument will convince only those who accept his analysis of moral action. Here the context is that worked out by Lévinas: ‘ultimate meaning and value ... is achieved ... by attending to what is more basic than presence to oneself, namely, presence of the Other – which calls the egoism and arbitrariness of the self into question and invites one to aim beyond freedom to justice’ (p. 72). It may be worth remembering in passing that the Roman definition of justice – the virtue of justice is the constant and enduring willingness to render to each what is due – goes beyond the egoism and arbitrariness of the self. Lévinas does not so much invent a gnomic and enigmatic account of moral action as bring occluded aspects of a tradition to the fore.

These ciphers of transcendence, asymmetrical relations, do not directly show that God exists. (The third chapter argues against Anselm’s proof of the existence of God, but accepts Anselm’s description.) What they suggest, when metaphysically deciphered, is that God, conceived as the all perfect and necessarily existing Being, may be affirmed, as their theoretical truth-condition, to be positively possible, and so, briefly stated, PM’s argument for God’s existence is : if an all perfect, necessarily existing being is positively possible, then such a being exists. But we can argue by indirect *a posteriori* argument from experiences of asymmetry to the positive possibility of such a being, and hence to its existence. Evidently, not all contingent possibilities are realized, and so this argument from positive possibility to actuality is valid only in the case of that which is necessary if positively possible.

Crucial to the entire enterprise is the meaning of the word “God”. The first chapter is PM’s answer which readers must constantly keep in mind if they are to make sense of the whole. The penultimate, in some ways the most illuminating and challenging, chapter of *The Sense of Creation* examines the co-existence with the world of this utterly transcendent being – the God beyond of the subtitle – who is its cause.

GARRETT BARDEN

SEEKING MEANING AND MAKING SENSE by John Haldane (*Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2008*). Pp. viii + 148, £8.95 pbk

In the past twenty years John Haldane has established himself as a philosopher who has something to say to the non-specialist. Through articles in British Catholic weekly newspapers and Scottish daily newspapers he has assumed not only the mantle of a Public Intellectual, but a Catholic Public Intellectual, an altogether rarer breed.

Seeking Meaning and Making Sense collects twenty pieces of Haldane’s journalism of the past decade. That this represents only a part of Haldane’s newspaper output during this time is clear from the fact that he has also published in 2008 another collection of articles, *The Church and the World*, where Haldane’s Catholic interests are much more to the fore. (The latter was reviewed by Margaret Atkins in the January 2009 issue of *New Blackfriars*.)

Yet there are points of continuity. A philosopher is interested in ideas, and bringing one’s Catholicism to one’s philosophy not surprisingly helps make one receptive to ideas from the past, especially from classical and medieval thought.