

be conveyed here) centres on Christ's descent into hell, and builds primarily on certain patristic understandings of Christ's proclamation 'to the spirits in prison' (1 Peter 3.18). Very briefly put: just as the righteous of the Old Testament were brought to the necessary 'epistemological relationship to Christ' in the *limbus patrum* prior to attaining the beatific vision in heaven – either by Christ himself, or (in the case of righteous gentiles according to Clement of Alexandria) by the apostles upon their own deaths – so too may a similar solution be hypothesized for the potentially billions of (inculpably) unevangelized non-Christians ever since. In addition to the many virtues which D'Costa himself identifies in this schema, probably the strongest argument in its favour is its very close adherence to the linguistic subtleties of the letter of *LG*. The text consistently speaks of those who 'have not yet [*nondum*] received the Gospel', or who 'have not yet [*nondum*] arrived at an express recognition of God'. Yet there is no suggestion whatsoever that this will occur in their earthly lives. Indeed, it would be absurd if there was: *LG* 16 would merely be stating that converts can be saved. Vatican II itself, therefore, would seem to point to a post-mortem solution such as D'Costa supplies in chapter 7.

Admittedly, as it currently stands, D'Costa's account is *not yet* (*nondum!*) perfect. No sustained exposition is given, for instance, of the qualification that rings like a refrain throughout the Council's pronouncements on the salvation of non-Christians: *sine culpa* ('without fault/blame'). *Only* those who are 'without fault, ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and his Church' are able to be saved. Yet D'Costa, following the Council Fathers, passes no comment on what this might mean. Elsewhere he errs in attributing a particular interpretation of 1 Peter 3.18, central to his argument, to Augustine rather than to Robert Bellarmine (cf. pp. 172–73). Doubts might also be raised against his interpretation of Clement's mention of 'the saving and disciplinary punishments' meted out in Hades (p. 169). These do not, however, affect the cogency and power of D'Costa's argument. (Nor, needless to say, does the book's near-consistent misspelling of *votum ecclesiae* – which, except on one occasion, is missing its final letter.) Finally, in chapter 8, D'Costa helpfully distinguishes his post-mortem account of salvation, from that of other major theologians, including Joseph DiNoia (to whose purgatorial schema he owes a great deal) and Hans Urs von Balthasar. In the latter case, D'Costa weighs in on the burgeoning controversy in Balthasarian studies, occasioned by Alyssa Lyra Pitstick's *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (2007) and its *de facto* charge of heresy. Generally speaking, he sides with Pitstick.

Christianity and World Religions is a significant and timely work. On at least one issue (and perhaps several others upon which I am not qualified to pass judgement) it makes a remarkable, and probably enduring, contribution. For this, as indeed for several other reasons, it is very highly to be recommended.

STEPHEN BULLIVANT

THE KINDNESS OF GOD: METAPHOR, GENDER AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE by Janet Martin Soskice (*Oxford University Press* 2007) Pp. 224, £23

Janet Soskice has long-standing interests in the philosophy of religious language and in feminism. This volume of essays focuses on the vocabulary of kinship between God and humanity, attempting to reawaken our sense of its daringness, and to link it with the dynamic movement of the Christian life, from birth to our eschatological fulfilment. 'Kinship imagery', she writes, 'is both compelled and resisted by the Hebrew scriptures, compelled for reasons of intimacy, and resisted

from fear of idolatry' (p. 2). Dr Soskice's attentiveness to the complex and subtle fluidity with which we use religious vocabulary is one of the strengths of this volume.

It begins with a reflection on love and attention, contrasting the classical understanding of the contemplative life as withdrawal from the world with the attentiveness of a mother: 'Of life's experiences, none is so 'unserving' as attending to a baby' (p. 25). Such loving attention requires humility and self-discipline, and is 'rewarded with reality' (p. 27), which, for us as creatures, is something that both changes itself and changes us as we attend to it. The 'imago Dei', the second chapter argues, is dynamic, as we grow into the image of Christ. All of us, male and female, share our identity with Christ, as the image of God. Yet, Dr Soskice argues, sexual difference has a more than instrumental purpose: it is through 'the reciprocity of our human condition, through being in relation to others who are different from ourselves' (p. 51), that we learn to love. Relatedly, she concludes in the next essay that Christians cannot respond adequately to problems in bioethics without grounding their arguments in the mystery of our identity as 'imago Dei'.

The central chapters of the book directly raise questions shaped by feminist concerns. Can a feminist call God 'Father'? If not, can a feminist be a Christian? The feminist critique goes deeper than the obvious claim that Biblical and ecclesial language has excluded women, and targets all idea of binary hierarchy. Using Ricoeur, Dr Soskice argues that the great reserve in the Old Testament about the use of 'Father' for God provided a space in which Jesus' 'Abba' could seem 'audacious'; the meaning of the term is not already fixed and understood, but rather disclosed precisely through the ministry of the Son. The humanity of Christ, meanwhile, has allowed material elements to be used as powerful expressions of our relationship with God. Dr Soskice explores the way in which blood has functioned as a symbol of *both* impurity *and* nourishment and fecundity. 'Birth as well as death is a type of sacrificial giving' (p. 91); the blood of women, like the blood of Christ, is life-giving. The most demanding essay in the book draws on theoreticians of French feminism in examining the charge that Trinitarian language places both maleness and hierarchy at the centre of God. It makes the curious suggestion (citing Jean-Luc Marion) that it is only with the death of the Son that the distinctive nature of the fatherhood of God is established. The more familiar point, that God's being is intrinsically relational in a way that overcomes the polarisation between 'One' and 'Other', seems independent of this point.

The final three chapters focus on relationships. A comparison of Augustine's *De Trinitate* with Julian of Norwich's *The Revelation of Divine Love* finds an unexpected degree of shared ground in the linking of Trinity, image of God and our union with the God of love. However, Augustine's privileging of the mind and *sapientia* over the body and *prudencia* contrasts with Julian's use of physical and familial imagery, and her insight that it is through our very fragility and fallenness that we progress in love. Thus our sensual nature is to be valued in its own right. Through our bodily life, we 'travail', that is both travel and sorrow, with Christ, and thus become his kin, through *his* love: '*De Trinitate* speaks of our thirst for God, Julian of God's thirst for us' (p. 152).

The Christian tradition has also, and equally daringly, used the language of *friendship* with God. Dr Soskice suggests that Cicero's ideal friendship based on shared virtue is unrealistic, and criticises the account of friendship in C.S. Lewis' *The Four Loves* as 'sterile' in its rejection of embodiment and emotion. She turns instead to Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig for an interpretation of friendship as 'lived in dialogue', which gives it a genuine open-endedness and capacity to change the friends. The Christian life, of course, is intrinsically oriented towards change and growth and towards the future that they will make possible. The final essay relates metaphors of kinship with this dynamism towards a 'convivial'

future in which we shall have been transformed by love. 'We shall not only be loved, but 'lovely be', through the kindness of God' (p. 188).

In this gentle and imaginative volume, Dr Soskice combines analytical nuance and clarity with mature human experience, all clothed in an elegance and simplicity of expression that makes the essays eminently quotable. In doing so, she expresses the distinctive beauty of the Christian theological tradition.

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