

in charity could benefit contemporary theological discourse. The careful reading of Thomas and the sensitivity to contemporary discussions make this book an excellent contribution both to the theological study of the episcopacy and to the study of Aquinas as a commentator of Scripture.

STEFAN MANGNUS OP

**THE McCABE READER** edited and introduced by Brian Davies and Paul Kucharski, *Bloomsbury T&T Clark*, London, 2016, pp. ix + 369, £21.99, pbk

Consider this quotation:

‘But as all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine that we comprehend the attributes of this divine Being, or to suppose that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature. Wisdom, Thought, Design, Knowledge; these we justly ascribe to him; because these words are honourable among men, and we have no other language or other conceptions by which we can express our adoration of him. But let us beware, lest we think that our ideas anyway correspond to his perfections, or that his attributes have any resemblance to these qualities among men.’

It is not from Herbert McCabe OP, the author of the anthology under review, but from David Hume, or at least one of the three personas of his book, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. David Hume never identified as an atheist, but he would have thought of his agnosticism as extreme. Herbert McCabe would have thought his doubt about the nature of God to be distinctly shallow. In all of McCabe’s preaching, conversation and writing, not only is God unknowable, but it is hard to know just how little we know of God. He uses the image of a child who knows nothing of the United States, except that Kentucky Fried Chicken comes from there, yet who by knowing this, knows a great deal more than we could possibly know about God. Hume thought he knew something about God, and so could deny aspects of God as knowable, but Herbert McCabe, following his master insisted that ‘For Aquinas, only God understands what God is’, and that ‘To say that it is God who made the whole universe, and holds it continually in existence from moment to moment, (as singers hold their songs in existence from moment to moment), is not to *explain* how the universe comes to exist.’

Herbert was no mystic, but the unknowability of God is not a mystical doctrine. It is the work of anyone who thinks about God, continually to try to understand that God is not anything we can think of. Since anything we can think of is a very large category, that is enough for anyone’s lifetime to be thinking about.

The agnosticism of Herbert McCabe does not make faith uncertain. In his essay, ‘Are creeds credible?’, he bluntly says, ‘I am more certain

that Christ rose from the dead than I am that I am in Oxford.' He meant that. Faith is a gift. It is more than a gift of propositions because it is for him a sharing in divine life. This involves sharing in God's self-knowledge. This could never be natural for human beings. What sounds like a truism, that 'God is the only being which is by nature divine' as he says, is in fact the most demanding truth of any human life. This is because we are sharing in that divinity. Only God is by nature divine, but we human beings are called to be by grace, divine too. Since some of us at least have responded to that call, the divine life has already begun among human beings. Yet it is a life lived in faith, which itself is imperfect. Anything written by McCabe is written in that time of faith, indeed anything written by anyone about anything is written in that time of faith, and so is imperfect. This leaves us the option of reasoning about our faith. 'You cannot arrive at belief by human reasoning but you can get the whole way there with human reason.'

Should we recommend Herbert McCabe as a guide to the Catholic faith? This is difficult. Much of his influence was personal, as anyone who heard him preaching can testify. Yet his paradoxes can be very disturbing. Consider this: 'Aquinas quotes with ostensible approval Boethius's definition of a person, as 'an individual substance of rational nature'. But as speedily emerges, the 'persons of the Trinity are not individuals, not substances, not rational and do not *have* natures.' All of this is true, but disturbing to someone who does not wish to pursue the meaning of individual, substance, rationality and natures. Much of his writings have been published posthumously, edited by Brian Davies OP a co-editor here, partly because of Herbert's uncertainty about how to express these truths which so transcend human reason, but which human reason so needs to understand. Yet there is a deeper problem. A book is written normally by an individual, although there are collaborations of course, yet it is always read at any one time by an individual. For Herbert McCabe, this is an obstacle in itself.

When we think about God, we are thinking about the first and ultimate community. Community is the fundamental thing. This is what the Trinity is. So we if are to make any progress in understanding the community, we must understand it by our being part of a community. More than that, the community created by this fundamental community is being called ever more deeply into this fundamental community. Faith does not merely awaken our sense of belonging to each other, it demands that we make progress in belonging to each other still more. As such, no-one is brought to the truth by a book. The book is to be read together by friends and the friends are to talk to one another. Talking is not just a particular characteristic of human beings, it is fundamental to their humanity. Human beings need to explain things to each other to be human.

So it is not a criticism of this book to say that it will not be well understood by people who merely read it. The purpose of the book is to awaken the sense of ‘linguistic community’, his phrase, and to encourage us to talk to each other. To pray together. So I end with another quotation. ‘Community and individuality are not rivals. The individual who can stand over against the community, who can make a critical contribution to the tradition of the community, who can make a genuine contribution to revolution, is the product of that community and tradition.’ Herbert McCabe was not always an easy member of that community or as he would put it, a ‘good’ member of the particular community he belonged to, but I think those words apply to him.

EUAN MARLEY OP

**DIALOGUE AS MISSION: REMEMBERING CHRYS McVEY** edited by Prakash Anthony Lohale OP and Kevin Toomey OP, *New Priory Press, Chicago*, pp. xviii + 171, \$10.00, pbk

This is a collection of talks and essays by Chrys McVey, an American Dominican theologian who lived in Pakistan for forty years before moving to Rome to assist the Master in the planning of the Order’s mission. He died suddenly in New York in 2009. It is edited by two brethren who worked with him on the Order’s General Council.

The first essay is a study of the Acts of General Chapters over the last forty years. It is a wonderful surprise to discover that anyone has given so much attention to these official documents which are largely ignored, alas, but it gives little impression of McVey’s lively mind and delight in language and poetry which makes most of his essays so engaging. He confesses, ‘I am a magpie and when I see something shiny I pick it up and bring it to the nest’. His favourite quotations reoccur frequently.

The transformative experience for this American who grew up in the intimate Catholic world of a New Jersey home and parish, was immersion in a Muslim country. He lived through the difficult years in which President Zia-ul-Haq launched the Islamisation of Pakistan: separate electorates for religious minorities, the blasphemy laws which exposed Christians to instant denunciation for even invented offences, physical attacks on Christians and other minorities, including the Ahmadiyya Muslims. A less courageous person might have retreated within the Catholic ghetto or returned home. Chrys, however, embarked on the risky adventure which eventually defined his theological approach, engagement with ‘the other’ (it sounds better in French: *l’autre*). The influence of Levinas is pervasive), above all with Islam.