

to faith to argue that man's final beatitude consists primarily in a sterile act of the intellect rather than a dynamic act of the will.

Malloy dramatically lays bare the implications of this erroneous view, including reference to Rousselot's terrifying claim that this radical defence for freedom and love 'is both extremely violent and extremely free. It is free because no reason can be found for it other than itself, independent as it is from the natural appetites. It is violent because it runs counter to these appetites and tyrannizes them' (p.237). No less striking is Aquinas's own warning that this freeing the will from the intellect would lead either to unending desire and action without terminus, or to paralysis of the will (p.238).

These problems provide a rationale for Malloy's two opening chapters on the ordering of the passions and dilection as related to choice. The first chapter offers a somewhat heavy exegesis of Thomas's writings on the ordering of the passions, specifically aimed at distinguishing between what Malloy describes as Thomas's 'immature teaching' where desire seems to precede love, and his 'mature' teaching where love is clearly identified as the primary passion preceding all others. Chapter two develops the discussion of the natural inclination to beatitude, love of beatitude, as the cause of all other desires and the free willing of the means of achieving this end.

One might argue with Malloy's interpretations of specific texts, but not as to the importance of love preceding desire, nor his analysis of Aquinas on the relationship between love, desire, and delight, and substantial union, union of affection (love), and union of possession.

Thus, he achieves his goal of defending Thomas's teaching against charges of eudaimonism by articulating on his teaching on 'the relationship between love of beatitude and love of God for His own sake, especially as this relationship comes to fruition with respect to beatific charity and the vision of God' (p.7). But I doubt the debate is over. We must justly grapple with the profundity and simplicity of Aquinas's words; 'A man truly loves himself by ordering himself to God' (*ST* 1–2.100.5, ad 1; p.127).

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**VISIONS AND FACES OF THE TRAGIC: THE MIMESIS OF TRAGEDY AND THE FOLLY OF SALVATION IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE** by Paul M. Blowers, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020, pp. 320, £65.00, hbk*

George Steiner famously declared that 'Christianity is an anti-tragic vision of the world', with its hopeful message of transcendence of earthly suffering and final resurrection (*The Death of Tragedy*, 1961). Indeed, when all

tears are wiped away (*Rev.* 21:4), it seems that Mother Julian was right that ‘all manner of thing shall be well’. Moreover, J. F. Worthen argued in this journal (March 1989) that tragic drama presents evil with three characteristics – incomprehensibility, ineluctability and irrevocability – all denied by Christianity; yet, following Donald MacKinnon, he then sought some common ground. Now, Paul Blowers has given us a masterful analysis, rich in detail, of how ancient Christian authors both appropriated and transformed classical tragedy in new forms of tragical vision and practical response.

First, some definitions: Blowers distinguishes between ‘the tragic’ as characterising the human condition, ‘tragedy proper’ as the artistic dramatisation of the tragic, and ‘tragical vision’ as the reception and interpretation of tragedy and the tragic. ‘Tragical mimesis’ is his term for the ‘poetic enterprise of dramatizing humanity’s tragic state of being’; this zooms in on the darker aspects of life while leaving open the possibility of hope, aiming to change the audience or reader through their emotional and intellectual engagement with others’ suffering. Early Christian authors, he argues, were engaged in ‘a re-presenting of the tragic itself, not a slavish imitation of the classical tragedians’ (p. 5).

In his seven chapters, Blowers engages with much recent scholarship on tragedy, classical theatre, theories of mimesis and emotional psychology. But he carefully delineates his scope from the beginning: his project is a ‘historical-theological’ excavation of tragical perspectives in early Christianity, paying attention to the art or drama of theology too, but not tackling all the questions that might be raised by a classicist, biblical scholar, literary critic or cultural historian.

The first chapter considers the value of classical tragedies according to pagan philosophers (Plato and Aristotle) and early Christian Apologists. Typically, the latter (such as Tertullian or Arnobius of Sicca) lambasted classical theatre as idolatrous, presenting it as the devil’s pomp. The high art form had admittedly degenerated into debauched spectacles, which were also increasingly overshadowed by blood sports in the arena. Later, Chrysostom would even threaten excommunication on those who persisted in attending such games and shows, the ‘satanic theatre’, instead of attending church, the ‘spiritual theatre’ (p. 29). But these criticisms were not universal, and Blowers reveals that ancient Christian authors had a complex relationship with the tragedy genre, appropriating elements favourable to moral exhortation (for example, in Prudentius, the chariot of *Sobrietas* runs down *Luxuria!*).

More importantly, there were tragical perspectives to be unearthed in Christianity’s own Scriptures. Through the classical tropes of *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune) and *anagnôrisis* (raw discovery), the stories of Adam and Eve (who started it all), Cain and Abel, Jephthah and his daughter (sacrificed because of his imprudent vow), Samson, Saul and Job, take on new tragical depth. John the Baptist’s martyrdom is a kind

of tragi-comedy, while the treachery of Judas Iscariot is variously viewed as pitiful, greedy, well-meaning, and/or a willingly diabolical possession. On Herod's massacre of the Holy Innocents, Gregory of Nyssa comments that evil had grown to its greatest extent at the coming of grace in the Incarnation, such that evil somehow exhausts itself and proves incapable of completely swallowing up the good; we might compare this with Worthen's account of the cross as the completion of tragedy in history, and therefore its definitive limit.

Throughout, Blowers shows how patristic authors were sensitive to a range of philosophical problems, such as creaturely mortality, guilt and punishment, free will and fate, innocent suffering and malicious cruelty, and the sheer scandalousness of some biblical narratives. Exegetes typically admitted the difficulties and some even escalated the problem in dramatic verse, such as the Gallican bishop Avitus of Vienne's poem *On Original Sin* which stages imaginative dialogues between Satan and Adam/Eve, pre-empting Milton by over a millennium. One of the particular joys of reading this book is that it presents a panoply of lesser-known figures of the patristic era. One memorable cameo was Abraham of Quidun, the fourth-century Syrian recluse, who dressed up as a soldier to visit his prostitute niece, to rescue her of course.

Reading both biblical and biographical narratives with patristic authors places us as *dramatis personae* within sacred history itself. So, in Chapter Four, Blowers gets us into the skulls of Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine and how they formed a 'tragic Christian self' out of their own experiences. They express their own tragedies of illness, exile, bereavement, and suchlike, within a theological awareness of human fallenness and divine grace, and so universalise the soul's cosmic predicament.

Blowers shows, in Chapter Five, that these same preachers developed a Christian 'tragical conscience' that urged their audiences to reach out to those in need. Applying the phenomenological analyses of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion on the 'face', Blowers uncovers a range of patristic sources urging us to 'see' the faces and bodies of the 'other' in need, and thence to show practical mercy. But if the destitute are presented too graphically, potential almsgivers could experience revulsion and fear and turn away – a fine line for a preacher to tread. To Chrysostom's bold assertion that the poor ought to pity the rich, not envy them, Blowers adds demurely: 'Homiletically, this was an altogether hard sell.'

A similarly thin line between tragedy and comedy is explored in the stock character of the social parasite, mocked and pitied in equal measure, and in the woes of the married or celibate life, or the situation of the 'unbelieving' Jews in the economy of salvation. As always, Blowers carefully marshals evidence from many authors to come to nuanced conclusions. He also avers that secular Western cultures, despite their laudable 'awareness-raising' campaigns and activism to relieve suffering, lack 'a sacred moral

narrative and struggle even to articulate a common *mythos* of global community or human solidarity' (p. 177).

A Christian tragical conscience is not guilt-ridden, but a deeper contemplative gaze that appropriately harnesses emotions. Starting with Martha Nussbaum on the 'moral intelligence' of the emotions and Robert Kaster on emotional 'narrative scripts' that change with time, Chapter Six unpacks how emotions are structured rationally and intentionally. The Stoic ideal state of passionlessness (*apatheia*) still allowed for some useful emotions (*eupatheiai*), but Christians went much further, analysing the classical tragic emotions of fear and pity through their cognitive content. Blowers demonstrates the vitality of these Christian transformations of a tragical perspective, without imposing any final judgments on the validity of various patristic solutions.

The section on grief (*lupê*) is particularly powerful. Many Church Fathers wrote letters of consolation, freely admitting their sorrow in the face of tragedy, without giving way to despair. Grief should be 'just and reasonable', said Gregory of Nyssa, following the Apostle Paul's injunction not to grieve 'as others who have no hope' (1 *Thess.* 4:13). Yet tears of sorrow for sin are a gift from God, and in John Climacus, compunction is arguably 'the tragical emotion par excellence' (p. 213). The female perspectives from the *Life of Macrina* were welcome. In quoting her brother Naucratus's death as a 'hunting accident' (p. 201), however, Blowers misses an interesting divergence among friends: Gregory Nazianzen elsewhere reveals that it was a *fishing* incident (*thêra* can mean hunting or fishing), with the report of tangled nets perhaps increasing the tragic pathos: 'that you might learn, O mortal, from this life's stage play' (*Epigram* 157).

The final chapter attempts a more theological analysis, resting largely on Balthasar's theo-dramatics to argue that Christian tragical vision involves both an amplification of drama (*mythos*) and an intelligible though strictly limited theodicy (*logos*). Against Steiner's nihilistic notion of 'absolute tragedy', Christian tragical mimesis aims at uncovering what Balthasar calls a 'play of freedoms' between God and humans. These are delicate and subtle matters, and readers will differ in how they appraise both the patristic and modern perspectives offered. Blowers wisely leaves a lot of room for manoeuvre. Still, I have reservations about his downplaying the *privatio boni* understanding of evil as 'a Christianized Neoplatonic view' (p. 240), when it is ultimately grounded in the biblical revelation of God as YHWH (see, for instance, Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 2004).

Like Pandora's jar, after all the ills of the world have come out, Blowers discovers at the bottom a message of hope: 'tragedy's dead-ends must ultimately be penultimate'. He even proposes hope, refined through suffering, as 'a Christian tragical emotion in its own right'. Perhaps one lesson of this book, however, is that verbal explanations, while important, will never be

enough. It is through Christian living that tragical mimesis is to be acted out, in both senses of the term.

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**SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA: MYSTIC OF FIRE, PREACHER OF FREEDOM**  
 by Paul Murray OP, *World on Fire Institute*, 2020, pp. xiii + 184, \$27.00, hbk

If ever the world needed the help and wisdom of Caterina di Giacomo di Benincasa, St Catherine of Siena, it is now. In Professor Murray's eyes, the 'mystic of fire', as he calls her, speaks as clearly and loudly now as she did 650 years ago in her beloved native Italy. 'For all her brilliance', as he writes in the Introduction to his new book on her, 'Catherine comes across to us more as an apostle than an intellectual, more as a preacher than a scholar' (p.iv). In this respect she shares her theological method with her great late-medieval sisters, Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila (proclaimed, like Catherine, a Doctor of the Church, 50 years ago in 1970 by St Pope Paul VI) - not scholastic but rather women who speak to the hearts and minds of the faithful by means of direct expression and exhortation. We will look in vain for a *Summa* from these women but rather, according to Murray, what we get from Catherine is a '*Summa* set on fire, her writings characterized not by academic speculation but rather by a passionate and anguished concern for the salvation of the world' (p.iv). It is on these dual aspects of Catherine's message - her 'mystical fire' and her 'preaching of freedom' - that Murray dwells in this attractive book.

His work has three distinctive parts. First, 'Bondage into Freedom', looks at the role of freedom in Catherine's writing. As unexpected as it is welcome, Murray wants to show how the extraordinary and passionate life of Catherine, her brave encounters with the 'powers' of her day, stem directly from a theology of freedom that pervades her writing. To this end he brings her into conversation with the first of two intriguing partners: the Renaissance Platonist and philosopher, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In the second part, 'Fire and Shadow: Catherine's Vision of the Self', Murray examines Catherine's writing on self-knowledge and, like freedom, the central role that this plays in her message. Here he introduces his second conversation partner, the 20<sup>th</sup>- Century Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. In particular, he explores here the notion of 'shadow' in Jung and Catherine. Finally, the last section, '*Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare*' is possibly the most Dominican section of the book as he emphasizes the importance of praise, blessing, and preaching in Catherine's theology. Again, Murray's exposition of Catherine's approach to prayer, the wellspring of Christian life, apostolic ministry, especially to the poor and marginalized,